



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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*ATTENTION EDITORS & NEWS DIRECTORS: During National Week of the Young Child (April 19-25, 2009), South Carolina First Steps is highlighting early childhood brain development. Cutting-edge research in this field is empowering parents and policymakers alike in creating the brightest of futures for young children.*

## **ABCs of Emotional Health and Dangers of Toxic Stress**

The emotional atmosphere surrounding young children has a direct impact on their brain development. For example, research released the first week of April 2009 connects a family life of chronic stress with brain impairments in young children. A child's holistic development hinges not just on cognitive and social development, but emotional development, as well.

Fortunately, this cautionary brain research can help parents know the importance of staying aware of the emotional atmosphere in the home environment. Because supportive relationships and positive learning experiences begin at home, parents should strive for a balanced approach to emotional, social and cognitive language development.

### **TIPS FOR BRANIACS**

**TIP:** During stressful times, parents need to be extra aware of their stress levels and notice when they need to give themselves a "time out" to soothe rattled nerves.

**WHY IT MATTERS:** Children are extremely sensitive to stress in adults, and chronic amounts of it can impair their brains from being able to take in new information during these peak brain development periods.

**TIP:** A child's brain development thrives in a stable, predictable environment.

**WHY IT MATTERS:** A stable environment is key to a healthy emotional atmosphere, which allows the child to be open to the experiences that feed cognitive and social development. For example, in a child care setting, the continuity of teachers and staff in a child's life are key ingredients to stability.

**TIP:** The most precious gift you can give your child is your time and your attention.

**WHY IT MATTERS:** According to Harvard University early childhood expert Jack Shonkoff, "The nature of children's relationships with the important adults in their lives is the active ingredient in realizing their genetic potential."

SOURCES: "From Neurons to Neighborhoods," Jack P. Shonkoff and Deborah A. Phillips; WestEd: The Program for Infant/Toddler Care, Ronald J. Lally; Gary W. Evans, Cornell University South Carolina First Steps staff.

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***About National Week of the Young Child:** The Week of the Young Child is an annual celebration sponsored by the National Association for the Education of Young Children. The purpose of the Week of the Young Child is to focus public attention on the needs of young children and their families and to recognize the early childhood programs and services that meet those needs.*

***Week of the Young Child in South Carolina:** To read Gov. Mark Sanford's South Carolina Week of the Young Child Proclamation – and to learn more about early brain development and the work of First Steps and our partners – go to [www.scfirststeps.org](http://www.scfirststeps.org).*

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*South Carolina First Steps to School Readiness is a comprehensive, results-oriented statewide education initiative to help prepare children to reach school healthy and ready to succeed. Public and private support are combined through county partnerships to enable individual communities to address the unmet needs of young children and their families.*