

Importance of Early Education in the First Five Years

by Dr. Gloria Julius June 1, 2015



Did you know the brain develops faster in [the first five years](#) of life than at any other point? Studies have shown that the human brain is never more receptive than it is during this time period. We hear about the importance of early education more and more in the media and from policy makers, as research consistently confirms that patterns of learning through age 5 are closely linked to achievement later in life. If we think about the skills we want from our future workforce, they are skills often associated with high-quality early education, such as teamwork, communication skills, adaptability and empathy.

Clearly the first five years present a real window of opportunity for a child's brain development and therefore early education. While many parents know early education is valuable, they are often unaware of the science and research behind brain development and learning.

Understanding the basics behind these two important areas of study can help you encourage your child's cognitive growth during a critical time in her life.

Early Brain Development

Babies are born with more than 100 billion nerve cells in their brains. Learning occurs when these nerve cells, or neurons, connect with each other through synapses. By age 5, more than 85 percent of a child's core brain structure has already developed. It's hard to wrap our heads around this, but it essentially means that a child's brain is more receptive to learning during the first five years of his life than at any other point in time. By age 6, synapses that are not frequently used begin to delete themselves. This explains why learning a second language as a child is so much easier than learning one as an adult! If you're interested in digging deeper into the science of early childhood development, Harvard University's Center on the Developing Child created a [helpful interactive web feature](#) that explores core concepts.

How Children Learn

Now that we've covered the basic science behind why early education is important, let's consider how children learn. Leading researchers in the field of early education have developed theories on how children learn – theories that are also beneficial for parents to keep in mind as they help their child learn and grow.

Most widely recognized early learning theories can be categorized into one of three major buckets: child-initiated, teacher-guided and social-emotional.

- *Child-initiated* learning theories are influenced by experts such as Montessori, Gesell and Piaget. They are constructed around the belief that a child's physical and cognitive development occurs over time in predictable, sequential stages or milestones. As your child plays and interacts with her environment, she constructs meaning about how the world works. In essence, she takes charge of her own learning.
- *Teacher-guided* theories originate from experts like Vygotsky, who believe that children learn best by interacting with people and will reach their full potential through guidance and modeling by the adults in their lives, such as parents and teachers.
- *Social-emotional* theories consider the research of experts like Erik Erikson and take into consideration the impact of social and emotional factors on a child's development. Research behind these theories implies that learning is enhanced when children feel safe and emotionally secure.

When it comes to early learning, Primrose shares the same goal as parents – we aim to maximize a child's learning during a very important time in his life. We believe, and our outcomes show, that the most effective way to help each child reach his full potential is to ensure he is exposed to information in different ways using a balance of learning theories. That's the foundation of the Primrose Schools *Balanced Learning*[®] system, which we'll talk specifically about next month.

You can check out the video below for more information on the first five years of a child's life and Primrose Schools' approach to early education.

- See more at: <http://www.primroseschools.com/online-community/360-parenting/importance-early-education-first-five-years#sthash.mGmKM3fR.dpuf>