

## How the brain develops during the early years

Between birth and age five, the brain grows faster than at any other time. It is most adaptable and open to change during this period.

A child's early experiences shape brain structure. Genes provide the blueprint for brain development, but early experiences determine how this potential is fulfilled as the brain grows and develops.

Positive interactions between children and their environment are essential for healthy development.

Emotional, physical, social and intellectual development are interdependent and cannot be separated. All are essential for positive development.

Children's experiences during the early years shape the brain in ways that impact learning, mental and physical health, behaviour and overall quality of life.

Google: **"How Brains are Built: The Core Story of Brain Development"** to watch a short animated video from **Alberta Family Wellness Initiative – Norlien Foundation**.



## The Power of Play

Play is integral to every aspect of development and lays the foundation for formal learning and success in school. It underlies everything from motor development to social competence, emotional self-control, confidence, creativity, scientific reasoning and abstract thinking.

Experts define play as: controlled by the child, actively engaging, voluntary and intrinsically motivated. "Free" play is directed and controlled by children.

Provide children with uninterrupted time (at least 45-60 minutes at a time) and rich, nurturing environments that stimulate exploration and discovery.

Slow down and stay in the present moment. Adults tend to live in the future. Play takes place in the present. Children live in the present. That's one of their gifts to adults.

(Adapted from: Let the Children Play: Nature's Answer to Early Learning by Dr. Jane Hewes, 2006)

***The Bow Valley Early Childhood Development Coalition welcomes participation and input from people who are interested in supporting the lives of children aged 0 to 6 in our community.***

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**Bow Valley Early Childhood  
Development Coalition**

# Bow Valley Early Childhood Development Coalition



### Our Mission:

The Bow Valley Coalition consists of service providers, community partners, parents and businesses committed to the creation of a child and family friendly community. By investing in the critical years, 0 to 6, the health of the whole community is strengthened.

### Why Early Childhood Development:

Current research shows that the early years of child development are considered to be the most critical time in a person's life. Supporting young children and their families from pre-conception, through birth, infancy and through the age of six will create the best chance for children to be successful in our community.

*"Childhood development is a foundation for community and economic development; capable children build a healthy, prosperous and sustainable society,"* National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2010.

### Our Vision

**Thriving families, invested  
communities.**



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**Key Areas of Early Childhood Development**

**Some Ideas to Support Healthy Development**

**By Kindergarten Age:**

**Physical Health and Wellbeing**

- Help me to eat healthy and get lots of rest
- Older children: play jumping and running games, Younger children: rolling and crawling
- Play creatively with paper, crayons, etc.

Child is well-rested, well-nourished and can sustain energy levels during kindergarten activities; is physically independent (can look after basic needs), has gross motor skills (can catch a ball), and fine motor skills (able to handle crayons and pencils).

**Social Competence**

- Help me to get along with others
- Let me explore new things
- Give your child two things to choose between to practice decision making
- Play games like "Simon Says" to practice following directions and listening to others

Child plays and gets along with others, is curious and likes to explore, respects adult authority and is able to control own behaviour.

**Emotional Maturity**

- Teach me to be kind and to share
- Help me to listen and play with others
- Encourage expressing and recognizing feelings, for e.g.; "your friend looks sad today, he isn't smiling"
- Praise your child when they help others and include others in their play

Child is able to express emotions at an age-appropriate level and empathize with others.

**Language and Thinking Skills**

- Read to me
- Teach me my letters and help me to count
- Tell stories to each other and have lots of conversations
- Talk about and compare the shapes, sizes and colours of different objects

Child is interested in reading and writing, and can count and recognize some shapes and colours.

**Communication Skills and General Knowledge**

- Talk to me about the world
- Take me to new places
- Play pretend and imagination games
- Encourage your child to express themselves and to ask questions

Child is able to communicate needs and wants in socially appropriate ways, can tell stories and has a general knowledge about the outside world that is age appropriate.