



## Sensational Beginnings for Infants and Toddlers

**KidBuilders** is a comprehensive, year-long motor skills program written by Marilyn Bitsis and Margaret Schafer. It is designed to meet the needs of the motor skills teacher of young children. Sensational Beginnings for Infants and Toddlers is just a sampling of some of our sequential skills, activities, and suggested music. This session was prepared for those in the Baptist Weekday Conference 2017. For more information call Marilyn Bitsis at 713-306-9875 or go online to [www.houstonkidbuilders.com](http://www.houstonkidbuilders.com).

### Early Brain Development

- Knowledge about a young child's mind has grown exponentially and is now known from concrete evidence.
- A child's brain has about 1000 trillion connections- twice as many as an adult- all are not meant to stay.
- Dr. Garland O'Quinn tells us that play is critical to a child's development.
- Dr. Jill Stamm tells us that repetition of experiences, especially sensory ones, is critical a baby's brain development.

### Early Emotional Development

Consistent, loving care is the best example of how a parent can help their child's brain make this connection that is so vitally important to a baby. Jill Stamm tells us in *Bright from the Start*, "The earliest attachments are typically formed within the first seven months of life," and are traditionally established by the baby's parents, grandparents and child care providers. The window of opportunity for optimal attachment and bonding occurs from birth through the first three years. It turns out that the attachment or bonding is perhaps the most critical factor in future development. When a caregiver responds to a baby's practical and emotional needs in a consistent way, a baby starts to form a sense of trust. Bonding refers to the ongoing relationship of attachment between child and caregiver. Attachment grows out of thousands of interactions between a child and her primary caregivers. It builds across time. Emotion affects attention (the ability to focus and attend) and attention, in turn, affects learning. The foundation for later motor development is laid in very early sensory motor experiences that include **auditory, visual, olfactory, tactile, and muscle and movement** modalities. The following traces the development of those experiences through the infant and toddler months.

**Birth to 3 months:** The gentler the stimulation you give an infant, the greater the number of brain synapses and connections are formed.

#### Visual Activities:

- The first colors the infant will recognize are black and white, the contrast. This helps develop visual perception.
- Draw a pattern for baby to see. Use checkerboards, spirals, snowflakes or make up one of your own. Place these around the room or propped up around the edges of a blanket on the floor so that designs continue to sharpen his focus. To make a simple pattern, try covering a piece of cardboard with patterned wrapping paper, creating new ones for different seasons or holidays

#### Auditory Activities:

- Move from side to side of the crib and call out her name; go to the foot of the crib and do the same; gently massage her body as you smile into her eyes and say her name. Babies love to hear their name.
- When you speak "parentese" to infants, you are communicating with them and encouraging vocal responses which develop language skills. Create a special voice that your baby responds to and use it often. "Parentese" spoken by parents and caregivers helps your baby build a bond and learn by listening to one who is trusted and familiar. This is a comfort to infants and has a calming effect. Yes, baby talk is OK for infants! Talk, talk, and more talk is great for infants.

#### Olfactory Activities:

- Use pleasantly scented soaps and lotions, making a point of holding it under his nose.
- Make an exaggerated smelling noise and motion to indicate you smell something nice. Talk to him about the smell and smile. Repeat with all pleasant smells he encounters.

#### Tactile Activities:

- Use soft fabrics and proceed to rougher ones when touching the infant. Talk about the differences of the fabrics and how they feel. You are giving him positive sensory experiences as well as social interaction.
- Expose them to many different safe objects. Gently rub a soft brush or comb on their feet. Use their feet also to touch objects like a rattle or a ball.

### Muscle and Movement Activities:

- From the age of about 6 weeks, place your baby on her tummy and talk above her head to encourage her to lift her head and work on neck strength. When she can lift her head slightly, put a brightly colored object in front of her to encourage strengthening her neck and abdominal muscles.
- Turning your infant in different directions will help her develop an *awareness of space* and a sense of *balance*, which are prerequisites for *crawling and walking*. When you put her in the bed have her face different directions and even sideways. When you place her on the floor have her face different areas of the room.

### **Three to 6 months**

#### Visual Activities:

- Sit the baby in front of a mirror and ask who that baby is. Name the different body parts as you touch them. Use a soft paintbrush, cotton ball or a makeup brush to touch each body part. Touch noses.
- Make family rollovers by gluing family pictures on an empty oatmeal container. Talk about the people in the pictures and what they are doing.
- When you play peek-a-boo, thousands of connections among brain cells are formed and/or strengthened. You can play with your hands, his hands, puppets or scarves.

#### Auditory Activities:

- A neuron is assigned to every sound they hear between the 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> month of life. The more we read to them, talk to them and sing to them, the more exact their language maps will be.
- Walk around her chair or crib with a bright squeaky toy and encourage her to look for the noise. She is learning spatial awareness and increasing her auditory acuity.

#### Olfactory Activities:

- Notice the smell of foods as he begins eating more and more. Always give him the name of what he smells to help with language development.
- Olfactory sense makes permanent connections in the baby's brain.

#### Tactile Activities:

- Play patty cake with the baby's hands and feet. Foot-on-foot play is important for a baby's proprioceptive development and helps them understand where his feet are in relation to the rest of this body. This promotes good *motor planning*.

### Muscle and Movement Activities:

- Please don't forget belly play, or "Tummy Time". This is critical for development of their posture and core strength needed in childhood for desk tasks and athleticism and as an adult.
- To develop *trunk strength needed later for stability*, help your baby use their trunk to roll from front to back. Put a teddy bear on the floor in front of him and have him see the bear do it. Be sure to support his head while he is learning to roll over. *Early trunk strength promotes better balance.* .

### **6 to 12 months**

#### Visual activities:

- Take the baby's hands and have them touch different parts of their body and identify where they are touching.
- An infant can follow a slowly moving object at a very young age, called visual tracking.
- Put objects in a paper sack and have them find the object visually.

Auditory activities: *Talk, Talk, Talk! The more words a baby hears the more the brain will develop. Babies need a language-rich environment, so talk about everything you are doing. Name everything you present (keys, door, diaper, spoon). Music engages the areas of the brain involved with paying attention and making predictions. Sing about your surroundings as you move about.*

- Crunch different kinds of paper. Cellophane and tissue paper make interesting sounds.
- Make shakers out of a metal container. Tape the top carefully so it cannot be opened. Put buttons in them. You can also put objects in a plastic bottle.

#### Olfactory activities:

- Place a familiar smell under her nose and watch her response. Help her with the proper language for that smell and encourage her to say it.

#### Tactile activities:

- Make textured bottle wraps or make feely cylinders (an empty pill bottle or plastic water bottle wrapped with interesting fabric glued or secured with Velcro™.) Allow the baby to explore it or experience it while holding his bottle. This gives great tactile input even during feeding time. After it goes into his mouth, be sure to wash it.
- Glue different types of textures in the cups of an egg carton. Encourage baby to feel them and talk to him about what he is feeling. Use soft fabrics, rough ones, even stiff fabric such as faux leather or vinyl.

Five parts of the baby's body are especially sensitive to touch: face, palms, backbone, genital area and soles of his feet. Skip the genital area.

#### Muscle and Movement activities:

- Learning to squeeze and release is important to develop fine motor strength. The rubbery kinds of squeeze toys are the easiest to use. This exercises babies' small muscles, which are eventually necessary for feeding themselves, using the pincer grasp to pick up small objects, and handwriting. Babies can squeeze bath toys that will squirt water (reinforcing cause-and-effect), sock balls, or stuffed animals.
- If she hasn't been already, introduce her to the feeling of being upside-down. Using a large ball or by sitting on your lap facing you, slowly lean the baby back first to a flat position on her back, then to a slightly inverted position.
- Sew scarves together and put them in an oatmeal box with one part sticking out. Have your baby pull out the scarf.
- At lunchtime arrange cups for older babies so that reaching for the cup requires reaching across their midlines. This helps develop the cells between the hemispheres of the brain.

### **12 to 18 months**

#### Visual activities:

- Start sign language and use American Sign Language. Communication enables the children to be more self-regulated.
- Show your toddler the eyes, nose and mouth on a doll. Then touch the same part on yourself and on the toddler. Take the toddler's hand and have her touch the eyes, nose, and mouth of the doll, you and herself.

#### Auditory activities:

- Provide a variety of sound-makers. Use maracas, jingle bells, clappers, drums, rattles, shakers, tambourines, triangles, wood blocks or a music box. Let the toddler explore the different sound each makes. Show him what creates each sound. This teaches him that he can create different kinds of sounds using different objects.
- Accentuate the positive "Look how hard you are working."

#### Olfactory activities:

- Put a variety of fragrant things in small bowls or in cylinders and have the child guess the smell. Make sure you do not create a choking hazard.

#### Tactile activities:

- Place familiar objects in a bag and have the toddler reach in without looking and name the object by the way it feels (example: brush, cotton ball, toothbrush, comb, etc.)
- Make a ball of masking tape sticky side out. Using a ping pong ball will make the sticky ball larger. Place it onto toddler's hand or clothes. See if she can pull it off or move it.

#### Muscle and Movement Activities:

- Cut a 1 ½" inch slot in the plastic lid of an empty can. Replace the lid. Put poker chips or very large buttons for the children to push through the slot, dropping them into the can. This is a great practice for buttoning. Make sure the objects are NOT choking hazards.
- Use lots of creative manipulatives, such as stretch fabric in large and small pieces, for her to pull to develop her hand and arm strength. You can do this individually with small pieces or as a play group with one large piece.

### **18 to 24 months**

#### Visual activities:

- Vision is the only window that closes at age two. If babies don't have appropriate visual experiences during the first two years of life, their visual wiring will be impaired. Allow toddlers to play with three dimensional toys such as geometric shaped blocks or farm animals.

- With a masking tape design large lines on the floor (one long straight line, one large curved line and one large zigzag line), teach your toddler the language of the design. Make sure each line is wide enough for your toddler to walk on. Can he say what type each line is? Have him draw the line in the air with his finger.

**Auditory activities:** Body parts awareness is important to a toddler's language development and overall sense of where the body is in space. It is also a prerequisite to kindergarten readiness. What better way to learn body parts than through songs like "Head & Shoulders, Knees & Toes"?

**Olfactory activities:**

- Put oranges in a plastic container and have him take the lid off and see if he can identify the smell without seeing the oranges. You can use other food items (Bananas and some cheeses).

**Tactile activities:** *"Many researchers have validated the positive effect of tactile stimulation (touching textured material). In fact, researchers tell us we need to manipulate our fingers as we grow older if we want to stay mentally alert. There has never been a concert pianist who had problems with senility. The brain activates our hand and feet and it appears that the reverse is also true."*  
*Pam Schiller*

- Have your toddler roll up with different types of fabric. Put fabric on the floor and demonstrate how to roll up in it and then unroll to activate both sides of the brain. Have him lie sideways on the fabric.

### Muscle and Movement

- Ask your toddler to try balance on one foot, then the other on a mini board. See if she can jump on and off of the board.
- Toss scarfs in the air and see if he can catch the scarf. Then bounce and catch his or her own ball.
- Have your toddler help you hold up the wall (It just might be falling!). This is a great way to work the joints in the arms, wrists and hands without actually pushing anything over! Pushing and pulling activities help develop the proprioceptive sense that governs our spatial awareness.

### MUSIC

Here are some of our favorite music sources and websites.

[www.edact.com](http://www.edact.com) - Educational music has Hap Palmer, Ella Jenkins and more. They also have a wide selection of music with activities for infants and toddlers.

[www.gregandsteve.com](http://www.gregandsteve.com) They have the cd "Kid in Action" that we use frequently.

Fisher Price has a great cd "Baby Boogie" that is available on [www.amazon.com/music](http://www.amazon.com/music)

[www.raffinews.com](http://www.raffinews.com) The great song of "Wheels on the Bus" and other Raffi favorites can be found on this website.

Kimbo Educational is the source for Georgiana Stewart's cd "Toes Up, Toes Down"

Mozart's "A Little Night Music" is excellent for active movement.. This can be ordered from [www.amazon.com/music](http://www.amazon.com/music)

Rimsky Korsakov "Flight of the Bumblebee" is a good one for "busy bee" moving during active movement times. [www.Amazon.com/music](http://www.Amazon.com/music) has a varied selection of this piece.

## ***If you liked the workshop, you'll LOVE the book!***



### ***Sensational Beginnings Sensory and Motor Activities For Infants and Toddlers***

**ONLY \$19.95 + tax, S&H**

Order yours TODAY at  
[www.houstonkidbuilders.com](http://www.houstonkidbuilders.com)

or  
Amazon.com

## **Sensational Beginnings**

- ◆ A ***"must have"*** for all teachers of Infants and Toddlers
- ◆ A terrific baby shower gift
- ◆ A great resource for parents and grandparents
- ◆ An invaluable tool for new moms and dads

***With over 76 helpful photos of infants and toddlers engaged in the activities.***

***User-friendly format divided by age group from birth to Two-years-old.***

***Skills checklists at the end of each chapter help you keep track of your baby's progress.***

The activities are presented along the five learning modalities: Visual, Auditory, Tactile, Olfactory, Muscle & Movement

***...because what you do with your baby really does matter!***