

# Welcome Baby Introduction

## A Lesson on Your Baby's Brain

### Playgroup #1

#### Materials Needed

- Community vision handouts
  - 1 on *children matter*
  - 1 on *community matters*
  - 1 on *family matters*
- Parents should bring their favorite children's book, song, toy, or game.

#### Handouts

- Welcome Baby pamphlet
- Normal Development 0 – 3 Years

### Introduction

Choose three parents and give them each a different area on community vision to read aloud to the group. Discuss as a group how each area applies to you as families in an active community.

Welcome Baby is the United Way community partnership program here in Utah County. It is also a Utah County branch of the national United Way Success by Six program. Success by Six was created to ensure the physical, mental, and emotional health of all children, in preparation to enter school by age six.

United Way of Utah County is doing what matters and has a vision for the community. That vision includes the following **three areas**:

#### **children matter.**

We imagine a community where every child is ready for school and has a real chance to succeed.

#### **community matters.**

We imagine a community where people are independent and self-sufficient and find opportunities to give back to the community.

#### **family matters.**

We imagine a community where every family is financially self-sufficient and plans for its future.

By participating in the *Welcome Baby program*, you are promoting and encouraging the community vision shared by many with the aims of creating and sustaining success among children, positive community interaction and support, and secure families.

### Lesson Plan

#### Lesson Objectives

- Understand how your baby's brain works and develops
- Review the four areas of development
- Understand the importance of repetition in your baby's development
- Understand the basic components of a neuron

## The Basics of Baby Neuroscience and Development

**Tell parents, ahead of time, to bring their favorite book, song, game or toy to share with the other families. This will be somewhat like a show and tell. Parents will talk about the different areas of development being used with each song, game, or toy.**

Understanding how your baby's brain works and grows helps make sense out of the games and the interaction you have with him. Every little interaction, touch, and sound stimulates brain development and promotes learning. This is why so many early childhood programs have coined phrases such as "born learning" or "born to learn."

At six months old, a baby's brain is half the size of an adult brain. By the time they reach age 3, a child's brain is 80% the size of an adult brain. A baby's brain in this time period grows much faster than the rest of their body. That is why it is so important to enhance the learning experience for your baby that is appropriate for them.

Review the four areas of development outlined in the "Getting Started" section of the playgroup introduction. (The four areas of development are: **Intellectual, Social/Emotional, Language** and **Motor Skills**.) Go around the circle and have each parent share the favorite book, song, game, or toy he or she has brought to share with the group. Have the parents discuss how this particular object or activity helps a child learn. Discuss: *Of the four developmental areas, intellectual, social/emotional, language and motor skills, which are being stimulated? What could be done to stimulate other developmental areas using the same toy, game, or song?*

### Activity

#### Creating Pathways

The Creating Pathways activity is a "hands-on" way of better understanding how connections become organized into efficient pathways.

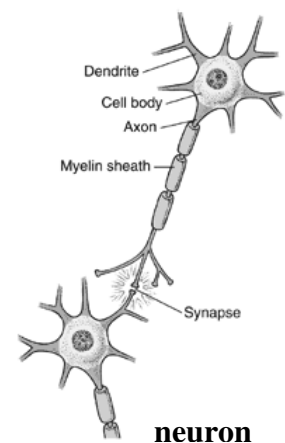
**Key Point:** Repetition makes these connections stronger.

*For this activity:*

**You will use your hand and arm to represent a neuron in the brain. A neuron is a message sender that connects with other neurons to develop intellect, language, motor, and social/emotional skills.**

**Cell body** will be the palm of the hand. The cell body regulates all the functions of the cell (like a motor) and is important in passing along the signals it receives from other neurons.

**Axon** will be the arm coming down from the palm. The axon is like a long cable that extends from the cell body and sends out signals to other neurons.



**Dendrites** will be the fingers going up from the palm or cell body. Dendrites are fibers that receive signals from other neurons. They form a complex, branching structure that is similar to a telephone network.

- Tell the parents that they are going to “make like a brain” and make new pathways for sending information.
- Demonstrate with the first person in one line/row. Tell her: “You are a neuron. Here comes a message. Maybe it is the image of your mommy’s face. Maybe it’s the interesting sounds of your spoon banging on your highchair.”
- Hold up your hand, ready to do the dendrite to axon to cell body demonstration. Touch your other elbow and with your free hand reach out and touch the elbow of another parent, saying, “In through the dendrites, out through the axon, synapse!” Tell them to do the same to another parent. Have someone time how long it takes to get through all the parents.
- Point out that they didn’t complete their “relay” very quickly or efficiently. Ask them to try again. Did it go better? Try again. Can they see the importance of practice and repetition in creating efficient pathways?
- Make the connection again to their children’s need to repeat behaviors and have repeated experiences.

### **Suggested Reading**

**Touchpoints: Your Child's Emotional and Behavioral Development (Hardcover)**  
by T. Berry Brazelton

**Your Baby and Child: From Birth to Age Five (Revised Edition) (Paperback)**  
by Penelope Leach

**The Baby Book: Everything You Need to Know About Your Baby from Birth to Age Two**  
by William Sears, Martha Sears, Robert Sears, & James Sears

### **Partnering Agencies**

Born Learning: [www.bornlearning.org](http://www.bornlearning.org)

Ready to Learn: <http://www.pbs.org/readytolearn/>

Parents of Infants and Children: <http://www.zerotothree.org/site/PageServer>

Utah County Health Department: <http://www.co.utah.ut.us/>

### **References**

Kotulak, R. (1996). Inside the brain: Revolutionary discoveries of how the mind works. Kansas City, KA: Andrew McMeel Publishing

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