



brain rules for baby

how to raise a smart and happy child
from zero to five

by John Medina

chapter summaries

Chapter 2 ~ Pregnancy

“What can my baby learn while she is still in my womb?”

This chapter is going to save you a lot of money. You don't need to buy any fancy equipment to aid a baby's brain development in utero. You just need a rocking chair and a quiet, comfortable place to relax. Indeed, one factor in a child's temperament and IQ is how stressed the mother felt while pregnant. Guys, listen up: Pregnant women should be treated like queens. It's hard for parents not to want to *do* something right away to give their baby's brain every advantage. But babies, it turns out, mostly want to be left alone in the earliest stages of pregnancy. That's when their brains are creating an astonishing 8,000 neurons *per second*. You'd want peace and quiet, too. That all begins to change in the second half of pregnancy, as the senses come online. Here, a baby's brain begins wiring thousands of connections together—a job that's not finished for another couple of decades. From touch to sight to sound, a baby has an incredibly active mental life in the womb. But only four things have been proven to aid it.

Chapter 3 ~ Relationship

“What's going to happen to my marriage after we bring our baby home?”

More than 80 percent of marriages suffer when baby comes home, with increasingly hostile interactions causing marital satisfaction to plummet. That's a surprise to many rookie parents, perhaps because it's rarely discussed. You know things will change, but not how very much. There are four chief culprits, and if you know about them in advance, you can prepare for the storm—preserving not only your relationship but your child's nervous system. Children are highly attuned to whether their environment is safe; even infants younger than 6 months can detect and respond to hostility between parents. But if you develop an “empathy reflex” with your spouse, your marriage is nearly divorce-proof. I'll talk about how to do it.

Chapters 4 & 5 ~ Smart baby

“How do I get my kid into Harvard?”

By “smart,” most parents mean they want their kids to do well in school. But true intelligence looks different in every kid. And it is composed of important factors not measured by the pencil and paper of an IQ test. I think it's time to redefine what we mean by “smart.” The ingredients I propose include self-control, inquisitiveness, creativity, and verbal and nonverbal communication. All of these are, to some extent, controlled by genetics. (The DNA you give your kids controls about 50 percent of their intellectual horsepower.) And many of them are characteristics common among the country's most successful entrepreneurs.

But great accomplishments often take effort more than smarts. There's a way to encourage such intellectual elbow grease. Praise your child's effort (“I'm proud of you. You really worked hard on that”) rather than innate ability (“You're so smart!”). What doesn't work? Hyper-parenting, for one. Viewing a child's development like a competitive race creates the kind of stress that actually damages the brain. TV before age 2 doesn't work, either. Every hour of TV creates a greater likelihood of attention problems and bullying once your child starts school. One of the best things you can do

for your baby's brain power is devote lots of time to playing, in a certain way. Surprisingly, it builds that self-control we just mentioned.

Chapters 6 & 7 ~ Happy baby

“How can I make sure my little one is going to be happy?”

Every baby is born with a temperament, and you'll be able to see it in your baby's first few minutes of life. In fact, babies may be born with a happiness thermostat. Your chances of getting an anxious baby are 1 in 5. If you get one, take heart. Anxious babies tend to comply with parental wishes more frequently, even if they're fighting every step of the way. What else do we know about happiness? After decades of research burning through millions of dollars, studies have uncovered two shocking facts: a) money, above poverty levels, does not equate to happiness and b) having lots of friends does. We are most likely to maintain deep, long-term relationships with people who are nice. In the brain-science world, that means emotionally stable. We'll look at the ingredients of such stability. As with intelligence, nature accounts for about 50 percent here, and nurture the rest.

Research has uncovered four distinct parenting styles. Only one parenting style produces the happiest, most emotionally stable children. Which category you fall into depends on your comfort level with emotions, especially your own. (You'll need to get comfortable real fast.) How you deal with your child's emotions—the intense, inappropriate ones—fundamentally affects your child's happiness. Actually, it affects everything from their self-calming ability to rates of violence to parental loyalty to infectious diseases. One trick: teaching your child to label emotions. It helps connect the nonverbal and verbal pathways in the brain. Another is empathizing, which calms the nervous system. Imagine you're in line at the post office, and your daughter wants a

drink of water. Her request is soon a whine, threatening to escalate into a tantrum. What should you say? We'll walk through plenty of examples.

Chapter 8 ~ Moral baby

“How do I raise a morally aware child?”

Babies are born with moral sensibilities. These are remarkably similar around the world. Evolutionary anthropologists think that's because having rules of social conduct allowed our ancestors to work in teams, necessary for outsmarting stronger predators. Still, kids don't just do the right thing. Your discipline helps shape your baby's moral sensibilities. Brain science has some things to say about discipline, and I can't help but illustrate them with a few horrifying cases from recent nanny reality shows. In a recurring theme, we'll talk about the importance of emotions and the role they play in moral (or any) decision-making. Indeed, the areas of the brain that process emotions and logic are so intertwined, one cannot happen without the other. I'll reveal the simple phrase that helps your child internalize moral behavior. And no discussion of discipline would be complete without a study or two on spanking.