



# stimulation & early learning

## Nurturing Care Framework

Sikunye seeks to equip and support churches to care for families in the First Thousand Days (FTD). This reflection is part of a range of Lunchtime Conversations hosted by Sikunye, aimed at equipping churches to understand the nurturing care framework.

Listen to audio recording [here](#)  
Watch the video recording [here](#)

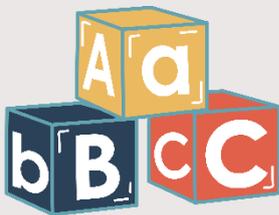


(WHO, 2018)

### what is nurturing care?

Nurturing care is what all children need to thrive. It is defined as a stable environment that is sensitive to children's health and nutritional needs, and that provides protection from harm, opportunities for early learning, and interactions that are responsive, emotionally supportive, and developmentally stimulating. These environments offer acceptance and a sense of belonging and connection demonstrated through an active and constant relationship with the child or adolescent (Berry & Malek, p52. 2017).i

### what are opportunities for early learning (stimulation)?



#### STIMULATION

**Opportunities for early learning** refer to any opportunity for the baby, toddler or child to interact with a person, place, or object in their environment. This recognizes that every interaction (positive or negative, or absence of an interaction) is contributing to the child's brain development and laying the foundation for later learning.<sup>ii</sup>

A child is learning all the time: they are constantly absorbing from their environment and their interactions. Even if those interactions are negative, they are still taking that in, and it is impacting their brain development. Caregivers therefore need to be conscious of both the positive and negative interactions their child is exposed to and encourage learning through

positive relationships and engagements. Children are in fact asking the questions “Am I safe?” or “am I secure with you?” and the response they receive impacts their development.

Watch [Building babies' brains through play](#) to see how important two-way interactions and positive engagements are for our babies' brain development. In this video we see:

- Parents are their child's first teacher.
- Learning begins at home.
- Learning begins at conception, and as soon as babies are born, they begin to acquire skills socially, from other people – through smiling and eye contact, talking and singing, modelling and imitation, and simple games like “wave bye-bye”. Playing with everyday things like cups and pots helps children learn about objects and what to do with them. Reading books allows children to name things, as well as building curiosity, imagination, and knowledge.<sup>iii</sup>

We might assume that when baby is born, we just need to feed, change nappies, and put them to sleep. We are not thinking about them as little people who are absorbing all that is happening around them – and so might not use simple activities such as playing, reading, and singing with children are core components of early childhood stimulation. These activities improve young children's ability to think, communicate, and connect with others.

We need to focus on encouraging caregivers to play with children. And this is as early as from pregnancy and birth. Even a busy caregiver is able to talk with their baby during feeding, bathing, and other routine household tasks – play can happen throughout the day and it does not have to be with fancy or expensive toys. Every day activities can be turned into playtime – and it is these interactions that teach children about other people develops them into socially competent adults.



## age-appropriate early learning

Early learning and stimulation can start in pregnancy – it is never too early to start stimulating a baby's brain. Visit [Vroom](#) or download their app for age-specific activities that mom and dad can do with their baby (even in the womb!) to stimulate baby.

Children are learning through all five of their senses and by looking at activities that can stimulate the five senses will help stimulate their brains – this can be done through everyday moments, such as:

## touch

- Baby massage, cuddles, affection
- Stimulate motor skills (e.g. crawling on the floor with baby)
- Feel textures (e.g. different objects, fabrics, rough, smooth, cold, warm)

## sight

- Eye contact; peek-a-boo; pointing to objects and naming them; follow their gaze and talk about what they are looking at
- Exploring colours, items (e.g. go for a walk in a garden or park)

## smell

- The smell of mom and dad, mom's breastmilk, food – and naming them

## taste

- Even through breastmilk baby can taste different foods that mom eats
- Putting things in their mouth is natural to explore textures and tastes

## sound

- Talking through nappy changing, singing; tell stories (including by elders); explore books together and read stories – all of which forms language rich environments.
- Hearing mom's heartbeat makes baby feel safe.

**Watch here:** Brain building basics for some great ideas to share with parents on how they can use what they are already doing to build their baby's brain.

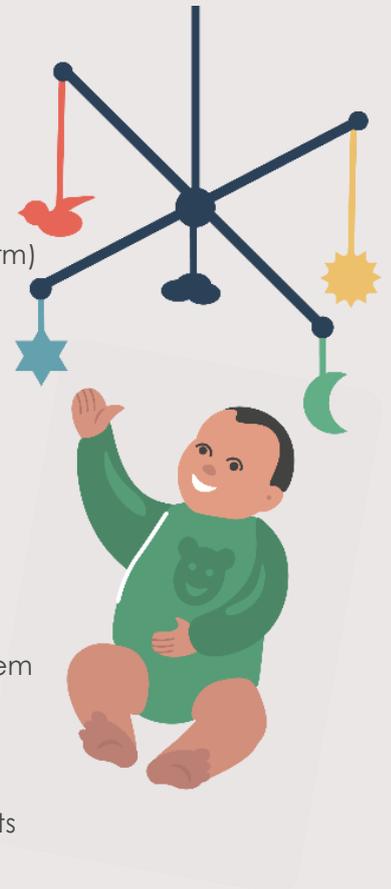
## what can the church do to support parents in stimulating their babies?

### Informal or formal opportunities in church

Mom's groups or parent groups – Peer learning and support:

- Can talk and share ideas,
- Get a guest to speak to parents,
- Watch the videos resources together,
- Make toys together from household items,
- Find what groups are in the area for parents to engage with.

What else is freely available in your area that parents can make use of – library, parks?



## If you cannot meet, use WhatsApp to share ideas and information especially online free resources for reading!

Foster the spiritual growth of babies by encouraging parents to look in awe and wonder of their children and the world around them as they explore, and:

- How do we relate to God in everyday stuff to foster spiritual growth in our children? Are we talking about God throughout the day?
- Teach children to pray early by praying with them.

The best place for a baby to learn is at home but many parents are working and need to find alternative childcare / creche / ECD centre. For many parents there is a real struggle in finding good quality care and this can be very stressful and hard for parents.

- Support mom / dad to look for quality ECD centres that provide safe care that is developmentally stimulating and providing nurturing care
- When mom / dad are home encourage them to play even if for 10min with baby. Every bit of play or stimulation is a form of responsive caregiving and ultimately has a positive impact on baby's brain development.
- Take the burden and guilt off parents if they are not able to play with baby – it is not about spending hours stimulating baby, it is about those everyday interactions and how we use them to engage and play with baby

## useful resources

Watch [Building babies' brains through play](#)

Watch here: [Brain building basics](#)

Watch [Tips for the First 1000 Days](#)

Watch [Mini Parenting Class in Baby Talk](#)

Look at your baby's [developmental milestones](#) and get some ideas for play

Visit [Vroom](#) or download their [App](#) for age specific opportunities for learning and play

Visit [book dash](#) for free books to read

### ZEPHANIAH 3:17

*“The LORD your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing.”*

<sup>i</sup> World Health Organization, United Nations Children's Fund, World Bank Group (2018) *Nurturing care for early childhood development: a framework for helping children survive and thrive to transform health and human potential*. Geneva: World Health Organisation. Retrieved from: [97892241514064-eng.pdf \(who.int\)](https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/nurturing-care-for-early-childhood-development)

<sup>ii</sup> [https://10.wp.com/nurturing-care.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/en\\_opel.jpg?ssl=1](https://10.wp.com/nurturing-care.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/en_opel.jpg?ssl=1)

<sup>iii</sup> [https://nurturing-care.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/The-five-components-of-nurturing-care\\_handbook-excerpt.pdf](https://nurturing-care.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/The-five-components-of-nurturing-care_handbook-excerpt.pdf)