



WORKING FOR KIDS: BUILDING SKILLS™

www.workingforkids.com

**WORKING FOR KIDS:
BUILDING SKILLS™**

program description

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program descriptions

support from:



University of
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The Bales Family
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What are the Working for Kids: Building Skills™ Training Programs?

The **Working for Kids: Building Skills™** training programs seek to build strong communities by focusing on the development of a community's most precious asset—its children. **Working For Kids: Building Skills™** is a novel, community-based initiative. Its goal is to embed young children in communities where the process of *how experiences shape brain development* and methods for helping young children develop social-emotional, language, and problem-solving skills are well understood by adults and the resources are available to help promote this skill development. These skills predict success in the early years of school and later in life. The training programs are designed for parents, child care workers, teachers, grandparents, neighbors, and all community members, so they can help support healthy brain development in a community's children.

In early childhood, the brain is developing at a fast pace. It is a period of constant change and growth. The changes to the brain begin before birth and continue throughout life, but are most dramatic in the early years. While the brain is developing, a child's environment and experiences play an important role in shaping brain development. In our training programs, we share what brain scientists have learned from more than 30 years of brain research.

Community training is achieved through four educational and interactive sessions, each of which has specific learning tools and group participatory activities that illustrate concepts. These neuroscience concepts have been translated into language that is accessible to people of

different cultural and educational backgrounds. By the end of the program, participants will become Working For Kids Coaches who will know:

- how a child's environment shapes brain development;
- what the critical components of the environment that promote healthy brain development are;
- how different areas of the brain develop at different times, from the prenatal period until about age 25;
- how engaging in activities strengthens the development of specific brain circuits that are used by each activity;
- how adversity weakens brain development; and how caring adults can buffer the negative impacts of adversity on children's brain development.

A Comprehensive Training Program in Four Sessions

The **Working for Kids: Building Skills™** cornerstone training program for community members is divided in four sessions which can be administered in one day or on four separate occasions. Each training session has a number of interactive group exercises that allow participants to put into practice all that is being learned.

Session 1

**How experiences shape
brain development**

Session 2

**Supportive environments
are the key to healthy brain
development**

Session 3

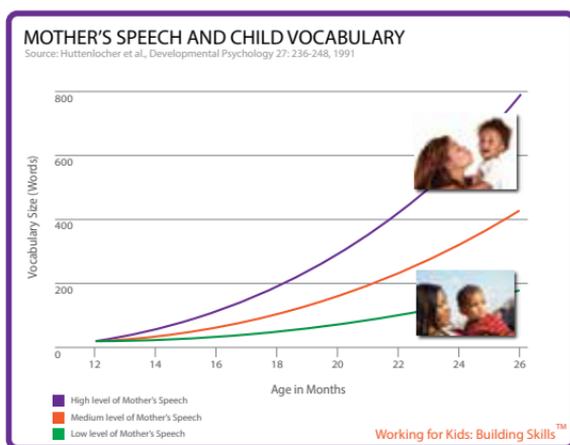
**Experiences build brain
architecture**

Session 4

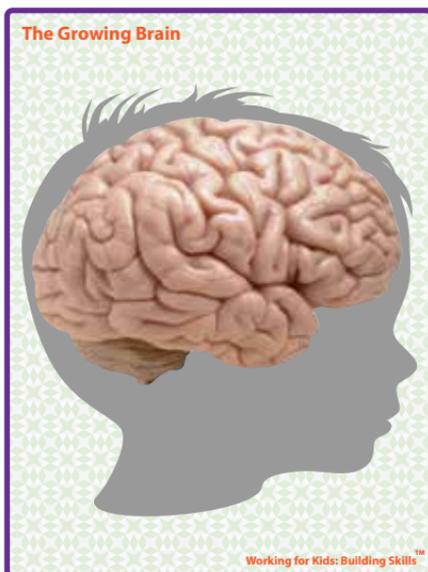
**Knowledge in action:
Ways to interact with kids**

Training Session 1: How experiences shape brain development

Using fun learning tools and participatory activities Training Session 1 starts by teaching that children's experiences shape their development from the very beginning of life. For example, using the poster "Mother's Speech and Child Vocabulary," participants learn that right from the start of life the number of words a child learns and the rate that they learn are strongly influenced by how many words they hear on a regular basis.

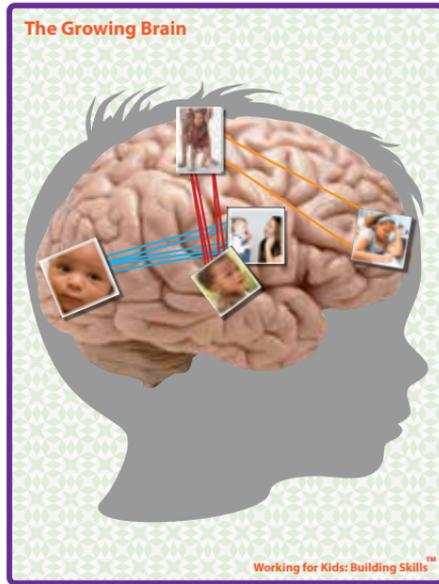


Participants then learn how the brain is built, step by step, using "The Growing Brain" poster. Brain areas that control basic senses, like seeing and hearing, are the first to be built. These brain areas are developing in the prenatal period before a child is born. These act like a foundation for other abilities to be built upon. Children then learn to recognize expressions of emotion, then how to walk and talk, and eventually how to do more complex things like arithmetic and planning and reasoning. Each process is controlled by a specific brain region and develops on its own time course, with the most complex areas finishing development around 25 years of age.



The basic process of brain development is similar throughout the brain. Brain cells are the building blocks of the developing brain. Brain cells are genetically programmed to reach out and connect to other nearby brain cells, forming groups of cells. Groups of related brain cells that act together are called circuits, just like electrical circuits.

Initially, circuits are weak, but the more a brain circuit is used, the stronger it becomes. So, activities that are repeated over and over again form very strong circuits for the tasks that the brain does for each activity. Activities that use these strong circuits will become a person's strongest skills. And once these strong circuits are formed, they stay throughout life. A hands-on activity that allows participants to understand how experiences strengthen circuits in the brain involves using yarn to connect brain areas as a child has various experiences.



Training Session 2: Supportive environments are the key to healthy brain development

Environments where children have care and support are essential for healthy brain development. Experiencing adversity leads to weaker brain circuits. In Training Session 2, participants think about the qualities of a supportive environment that help children build strong brain circuits. They also put various adversities into the environment and talk about how these change the ability of a child to participate in the cycle of learning that is necessary for gaining new skills—becoming interested in learning a new skill, engaging in activities to learn the skill, and eventually developing self confidence in that skill.

Session 2 also teaches how supportive environments help to buffer children from the negative repercussions of stress exposure and can help children to develop resilience.



Training Session 3: Experiences build brain architecture

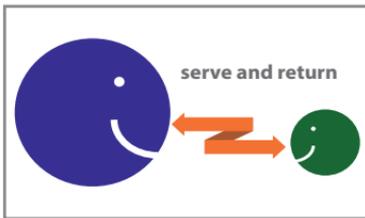
During Session 3, participants play the Brain Architecture Game, a tabletop group participation game that has been developed to teach people how childhood experiences and environmental supports act together to shape the developing brain. In this game, groups build a brain from pipe-cleaners and straws, which represent social supports. Life experiences occur as participants draw life experience cards, and the history of the developing child is recorded in a life journal. The group that is able to build the tallest brain that can withstand the weight of life stresses wins the game.





Training Session 4: Knowledge in action: Ways of interacting with kids

Session 4 teaches about four ways to connect with children through simple interactions. The Simple Interactions concepts (www.simpleinteractions.com) were developed by Dr. Junlei Li, the codirector of the Fred Rogers Center, who is a collaborator on the Working For Kids: Building Skills™ program. For example, to encourage learning it is important that the child be allowed to serve and show what they are interested in, then the adult returns the serve recognizing the child's interest.



Session 4 also allows participants to design activities for children of various ages, using simple toys (books, blocks, paper, and crayons), to help to build social-emotional, language, and problem-solving skills.

OUR TRAINING PROGRAMS

Working for Kids: Building Skills™ Coach Training Program

Working For Kids: Building Skills™ offers **Working For Kids: Building Skills™** coach training sessions to many different kinds of community groups. These sessions are offered regularly in Pittsburgh, but can be scheduled on site, wherever your program is located. As discussed in the section above, coach training can be offered as an all-day training program or the four sessions can be given on four separate occasions so participants have time to think about what they are learning in between training sessions.

Working for Kids: Building Skills™ Master Coach Training Program

Working For Kids: Building Skills™ also offers a train-the-trainer program so that communities can train their own **Working For Kids: Building Skills™** coaches.

This is our Master Coach Training Program. The Master Coach Training Program is an intensive 2.5-day training program that allows master coaches to get experience leading the training program. The Master Coach Training Program is offered regularly in Pittsburgh, but also can be scheduled on site at your location.

Executive Training Sessions: Strategies for Communities to Facilitate Strong Brain Development in Children

A one-session training program (usually one to two hours long) has been developed to teach community members, business leaders, health care workers, and legislators who

want to learn about how the brain develops and what types of activities, programs, and interactions best facilitate the development of strong brain pathways in children's brains. This is the **Working For Kids: Building Skills™** Executive Training Program.

Working for Kids: Building Skills™ Health Care Training Program

Working For Kids: Building Skills™ offers a health care training program for health care workers including doctors, physician's assistants, nurses, and medical office staff. This is a one-session training program that teaches health care workers how to use the **Working For Kids: Building Skills™** educational tools, such as the retractable posters, to teach their patients and clients about the effects of environment on brain development and how they can facilitate strong brain development of children they interact with. Health care training programs are regularly offered in Pittsburgh, but can be scheduled on site at health care facilities.

Training Workshops

Training workshops are designed to allow those who have taken **Working For Kids: Building Skills™** Master Coach training sessions to use the information they have learned to design programs for use in their own community (e.g., parents at home, in-home child care, a preschool, an after school program) to help children to build strong brain skills. These are day-long sessions where participants work in groups, using a series of activities to guide them in developing strategies that will work well in their own setting, for helping children stay engaged and have fun learning skills.

Training workshops are generally scheduled on site by small groups of Master Coaches.

Working for Kids: Building Skills™ Educational Materials

All of the **Working For Kids: Building Skills™** programs use the custom designed **Working For Kids: Building Skills™ Educational Materials**. These include the “**Mother’s Speech and Child Vocabulary**,” “**The Growing Brain**,” and “**Supportive Environments for Brain Development**” retractable posters. These posters roll into a neat silver stand that takes little floor space when not in use, but expand into six-foot tall posters. The posters have interactive pieces to give users hands-on experience with the concepts that are taught in the **Working For Kids: Building Skills™** programs. Educational materials also include laminated activity cards and developmental charts that help guide **Working For Kids: Building Skills™** program participants in hands-on activities that are part of the **Working For Kids: Building Skills™** training programs.

Information on How to Register for Training Programs, Prices, Training Materials and Much More!

This is all available at our website:

www.workingforkids.com.

Also contact us directly to arrange training programs in your community by e-mailing:

workingforkids@pitt.edu