



## Humans and the Human Family are Special!



## MODULE 1



## 4. Our ability to be aware of ourselves and make choices

As human beings we have a conscious awareness of our own existence. We are able to reflect on our actions and consider whether the outcome of our behavior was what we intended. Because we remember so much of our past in great detail, we can think about new ways of doing things and we can correct our mistakes. We can also make good predictions about what will happen when we do things. Because we have self-control, we don't have to act on our impulses. **We don't need instincts as much because we can make choices.**

The course of our lives is affected by the choices we make. Some of these choices are about the developmental challenges we face that were discussed in Section 2. We choose whether or not to practice skills or to work hard in school. We choose a profession and pick our friends and mates. Although our personalities are influenced by genetics and our early experiences, our personalities are also shaped by the choices we make. Starting today, you can choose to try to notice other people's feelings more and behave in a more caring way. If you practice caring, your personality will become more caring or *agreeable*. The opposite is also true. If you hang out with bullies and practice bullying, your personality will become more aggressive.

IT IS IMPORTANT TO REMEMBER YOU HAVE A CHOICE ABOUT WHAT YOU DO  
and WHAT YOU DO SHAPES WHO YOU BECOME!

But how do genetics, early environment and choice balance in a person? If we have choices why are genetics and early environment important? The answer is that genetics and a good early environment can make it easier for people to make healthy choices. But always in the end a human life is about making choices.

## 5. Our other special abilities

Our discussion of human development and special abilities would not be complete without a discussion of language and intelligence.

### **How do speech and language develop?<sup>1</sup>**

The first 3 years of life, when the brain is developing and maturing, is the time for acquiring speech and language skills. These skills develop best in a world that is rich with sounds, sights, and consistent exposure to the speech and language of others. There appear to be "sensitive periods" for speech and language development in infants and young children when the brain is best able to absorb language. If these sensitive periods are allowed to pass without exposure to language, it will be more difficult to learn. The child may not be able to reach his/her full potential.

Consider that language development happens together with development of attachment to others. Babies and toddlers need to be interacted with, loved and spoken

to. The first signs of communication occur when an infant learns that a cry will bring food, comfort, and companionship. Newborns also begin to recognize important sounds in their environment, such as the voice of their mother and father. As they grow, babies begin to sort out the speech sounds that compose the words of their language. By 6 months of age, most babies recognize the basic sounds of their parent's language.

For a full discussion of speech and language development and related childhood disorders visit [The National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders](#)

## **Can parents do anything to make their children smarter?**

Throughout this module you have learned about the importance of parents to the development of their children. Parents can also help their children reach their full intellectual potential. Children who are loved and spoken to are stimulated in ways that make them smarter. Parents can also make sure children get the right kind of food for their growing brains. It is also important that children not be exposed to chemicals like lead that will damage the brain. In later modules we will explore what children in different stages of development need in order to reach their full intellectual potential.

### **Is intelligence a fixed trait?<sup>2</sup>**

*Many people assume that superior intelligence or ability is a key to success. But more than three decades of research shows that an overemphasis on intellect or talent—and the implication that such traits are innate and fixed—leaves people vulnerable to failure, fearful of challenges and unmotivated to learn.*

*Teaching people to have a “growth mind-set,” which encourages a focus on effort rather than on intelligence or talent, produces high achievers in school and in life.*

*Parents and teachers can engender a growth mind-set in children by praising them for their effort or persistence (rather than for their intelligence), by telling success stories that emphasize hard work and love of learning, and by teaching them about the brain as a learning machine.*

For more on the connection between a loving family and intelligence see:

[A loving family can boost children's intelligence](#)



## ACTIVITIES FOR THIS MODULE

### SECTION 1

Visit the Utah Education Network and select an activity to learn about life histories. <http://www.uen.org/themepark/cycles/animal.shtml> Write a report about what you find.

### SECTION 2

Visit the National Wildlife Federation to learn about the top 10 animal fathers. <http://www.nwf.org/News-and-Magazines/National-Wildlife/Animals/Archives/1996/A-Fathers-Day-Top-Ten-Animal-Fathers.aspx>

Make a picture collage or write a report about your favorite animal father. Better still, visit a zoo and go see your favorite animal father. Take pictures and make a report.

Look to see if your local zoo has any baby animals that are with their mothers. If so go and see them, take pictures and make a Powerpoint presentation.

### SECTION 3

Write an essay or poem about what it means to be able to love. Visit the recommended website and take the Big 5 test. What did you learn about your own personality? Write a paper about yourself describing your personality in terms of the Big 5.

### SECTION 4

Write a story about a teen making choices. Include in your story the effect of your character's choices on his or her relationships or later opportunities.

Look up your favorite celebrity and write an essay about the life choices the person has made. How did these choices change your celebrity's life?

### SECTION 5

Make a Powerpoint presentation about how language develops.

Research and write about the differences and similarities between human and animal language.

## RESOURCES

[Life Cycles](#)- Sheppard Software

[Cycles of Life](#) Click and drag the pictures into the correct order of the life cycles of Butterflies, Frogs, Plants and Apple Trees

[Life Cycles](#) (BBC)

Effects of stress on development: [Speaking of Science Series - Robert Sapolsky: Stress and the Animal Kingdom](#)

Mental health and children: [Dr. Kathleen Merikangas: A Revealing Study Into the Mental Health of Americas Children](#)

Learn about the Roots of Empathy <http://www.rootsofempathy.org/en/multimedia/videos.html>

### Notes

- 1 Adapted from <http://www.nidcd.nih.gov/health/voice/speechandlanguage.html>
- 2 From <http://www.scientificamerican.com/article.cfm?id=the-secret-to-raising-smart-kids>