



Thirty Million Words: Building a Child's Brain

Dana Suskind

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The founder and director of the Thirty Million Words Initiative, Professor Dana Suskind, explains why the most important—and astoundingly simple—thing you can do for your child’s future success in life is to talk to him or her, reveals the recent science behind this truth, and outlines precisely how parents can best put it into practice.

The research is in: Academic achievement begins on the first day of life with the first word said by a cooing mother just after delivery.

A study by researchers Betty Hart and Todd Risley in 1995 found that some children heard thirty million fewer words by their fourth birthdays than others. The children who heard more words were better prepared when they entered school. These same kids, when followed into third grade, had bigger vocabularies, were stronger readers, and got higher test scores. This disparity in learning is referred to as the achievement gap.

Professor Dana Suskind, MD, learned of this thirty million word gap in the course of her work as a cochlear implant surgeon at University of Chicago Medical School and began a new research program along with her sister-in-law, Beth Suskind, to find the best ways to bridge that gap. The Thirty Million Word Initiative has developed programs for parents to show the kind of parent-child communication that enables optimal neural development and has tested the programs in and around Chicago across demographic groups. They boil down to getting parents to follow the three Ts: Tune in to what your child is doing; Talk more to your child using lots of descriptive words; and Take turns with your child as you engage in conversation. Parents are shown how to make the words they serve up more enriching. For example, instead of telling a child, “Put your shoes on,” one might say instead, “It is time to go out. What do we have to do?” The lab's new five-year longitudinal research program has just received funding so they can further corroborate their results.

The neuroscience of brain plasticity is some of the most valuable and revolutionary medical science being done today. It enables us to think and do better. It is making a difference in the lives of both the old and young. If you care for children, this landmark book is essential reading.

From the Hardcover edition.

Thirty Million Words: Building a Child's Brain Details

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From Reader Review *Thirty Million Words: Building a Child's Brain* for online ebook

Ryan says

As a parent of young children and a believer that public policy can improve people's lives, this book hit me very hard. I work in education and focus on reading and writing for a living, but I still learned important tips about supporting my children's brain and language development. What is so great about this book is that the recommendations don't cost money; it only takes building awareness that talking and reading to one's children—a lot—from the moment they come into the world is one of the most important choices a parent can make. The concept is really straightforward.

The 4 Ts:

1. Tune in
 2. Talk more
 3. Take Turns
 4. Turn it off (cell phones, TVs, iPads, etc.)
-

Michael says

This book is beyond compelling, a must read for every new parent, or parent to be. Truly it will change the way you think, talk, and interact with your child. Dana's very personal story of how she came to this insight as a surgeon performing cochlear implants on young children is convincing in her deep understanding of neural plasticity and why early brain formation is foundational for future achievement.

Our educational systems are focused on ages 5-25, but the foundation of all we have to work with rests on the brains that are rapidly firing, wiring, and developing before age 5, most critically from ages 0-3.

With small changes (and big insights) parents can easily give their own children more focused communication and a few million more firings, that in turn help myelinate deeper wirings of the neural networks we all rely upon for the rest of our lives.

This book is foundational. If you are a fan of Carol Dweck, if you have read much in brain science, Dana's insights are the logical science based conclusion of where we all should focus and invest—upfront and early, not too late and down the road. Our brains wire on a use-it or lose-it basis. Developing brains effeciently prune back the neural nets they don't use, which is why it is so critical to use what we have in proven ways.

If you are thinking of a baby shower gift for somebody, give them this book and impact a parent and a child for a lifetime.

Erika says

I picked up this book to supplement my growing education as a caregiver/teacher in the early childhood field. While reading studies and statistics aren't usually my cup of tea, this book provides lots of great information and practical advice into how a child's brain develops best. I felt very inspired as well as equipped for how I interact with children. For anyone that plans to care for kids on any level, whether one is planning to become a parent or working in the EC field or simply just babysitting for your friend's kids, I strongly recommend this book. It gets into the nitty gritty of what type of language we use and its effect on a child's brain and emotional development. For example, the difference between business talk (i.e. "get down" "put your shoes on" "finish your dinner") and extra talk (i.e. "what a big tree!" "This ice cream is yummy" "who's mommy's big boy"). Spontaneous chit chat and banter seems to have an extraordinarily rich effect on the whole development of a child versus the short, dry, colorless speech of commands and expected statements about routine. The author also goes in-depth about the Thirty Million Words program and what it means to Tune In, Talk More, and Take Turns in parent/caregiver-child interactions. All in all, this book is a really great and insightful read! It definitely gives one much to ruminate on and put into practice.

"The essential wiring of the human brain, the foundation for all thinking and learning, occurs largely during our first three years of life. We now know, thanks to careful science, that optimum brain development is language dependent. The words we hear, how many we hear, and how they are said are determining factors in its development." // Dana Suskind //

Bam says

"Children aren't born smart; they're made smart by parents." Chicagoan Dana Suskind, MD believes that the difference between those children who do well in school and those who do not is caused by a gap of thirty million words heard spoken by parents and caregivers from the time a child is born until the age of three, the period for optimum brain development.

She has developed a three-step program for parents and caregivers that she calls the 3Ts: Tune In, Talk More and Take Turns. In simplified form, 'Tune In' means observing what your child is involved in doing, then getting down on the floor to join in; 'Talk More' means the more you talk and describe the world around you, the richer your child's vocabulary will become; and 'Take Turns' means encouraging your child to respond to open-ended questions. This starts a thinking process that may lead to the skill of problem solving in later years.

Also important: allow very little or better yet NO exposure to tv, iPhones, computers, iPads etc for the first three years.

And spread the word to other parents and caregivers about this early learning system. I would recommend giving this book as a baby gift to all new parents. As a first-time grandmother, I am truly sorry that it took me more than a year to get around to reading this book after hearing an interview with the author on NPR.

Since our first grandson was born last year, we have been fortunate enough to spend two or three days a week with him while his mother returns to school for a second degree. Those hours spent with him have been

the best, a grandparent's dream--we can play with him to our heart's content and not have to worry about studying, cooking, cleaning, laundry and such that clutter up his mommy's day. Our biggest joy is making him laugh and connecting with him through play and reading.

I am happy to say we have already been doing much of what Suskind recommends but did find a few suggestions that we plan to put into practice. We still have a year and a half to go until age three!

Leslie Lindsay says

As a mother and someone who is very interested in childhood speech and language (I'm the author of *SPEAKING OF APRAXIA*, 2012), Dr. Suskind's book *THIRTY MILLION WORDS* is right up my alley. Not to mention the fact that I currently live in Chicagoland (where she practices/teaches at the University of Chicago), and we both seem to have ties to St. Louis. I should be clear though: we do not know each other, professionally or personally; our connection is merely serendipitous.

Her initiative, *THIRTY MILLION WORDS* is important--yet astoundingly simple--talk with your child.

I'm smiling because doesn't that sound like a no-brainer? Of course, we talk with our children, but **how** we do that matters. Suskind takes us behind the Ivory Tower and delves into the research behind the science. In her review of the literature (and there is a good deal of that in *THIRTY MILLION WORDS*), we're introduced (or re-introduced as the case may be), to many acclaimed social and educational researchers, suggesting that parent-child communication bridges the gap between SES (socioeconomic status), increasing children's academic achievement through what Dr. Suskind had called the 3 T's (tune in, talk more, take turns).

This is what I feel is the crux of *THIRTY MILLION WORDS*.

While I am someone who appreciates research, I felt the book was a **little** heavy-handed on it, when in fact a simple chart or bullet points might have provided the best dissemination, at least for busy parents. Ambitious readers will probably relish the research, though and be motivated to search out primary sources.

Overall, I really enjoyed *THIRTY MILLION WORDS* and will most definitely recommend to friends raising young children.

For all my reviews, including author interviews, see: www.leslielindsay.com

Vidya Balakrishnan says

I have already recommended this book to a few people. Before I started reading this book I was skeptical of it because I knew it was about early child development and I was not sure how much I would enjoy it since it's not really relevant to me. Nevertheless I decided to give it a shot and I don't regret it one bit. Dr. Suskind starts by narrating her experience with cochlear implants for children and how she stumbled across a very vital area of child development which apparently has not received its due diligence. Suskind talks about how the first 3 years of a child are vital in brain development and what parents can do to provide for the the most

effective and optimal learning environment. The book revolves around the 3 T's - Tune In, Talk More and Take Turns. The book makes you question all the accepted ways of bringing up a child and there is also a small part on how fixed vs growth mindset affects a child. The techniques and methods mentioned in this book require only time from the parent and it can go a long way in shaping the child's personality once he/she becomes an adult.

Mukesh Emes says

I really enjoyed this book, it is a must read for a new parent or someone who is going to be parent. As per the author Dana Suskind, the best way to develop your children's brain is simply talk to them. A good parent talk does play a crucial role in a child's development.

It is proven that this will make the child smarter, confident when facing a challenge and better behaved. The idea of three T's (Talking More, Tuning In, and Taking Turns with your child.) is really amazing. Dana gives a lot of tips in this book, learn it but more importantly, put into practice the lessons learned.

Stephanie says

When this book stayed on the topic of research about early child development, it was incredibly insightful. Towards the end, though, it became more of a visionary manifesto / fundraising speech, which was less interesting.

I was also a little wary of how the author portrayed positive, interactive early language exposure as a sort of silver bullet for all kinds of social problems, but she does have science on her side. So, overall, I'd recommend it as a necessary read for parents and anyone else who works with babies & toddlers.

Dlmrose says

3.5

mg says

This is a life-changing book for anyone who works with, has, or cares about small children (especially aged 0-3.) Seriously, I want to be an avalanche of words on every baby I see now (which is a LOT since I'm a children's librarian). I want to shove it in the hands of every parent and caregiver I see, too. (In a non-affronting, strictly helpful manner, of course.)

Read it. I dare you not to be fired-up to change the life of every infant and parent you see afterward...

Vernon Area Public Library KIDS says

Tune in.
Talk more.
Take turns.

Suskind discusses the importance of speech for brain development in preschool aged children, and how important preemptive measures are for addressing our educational crises. As opposed to a jargon-heavy, scientific summary of test subjects and experiments, Suskind offers an accessible approach that is perfect for parents, educators, and politicians. Past research has identified that households with a higher word count lead to better school performance. Suskind provides an avenue for getting more words into kids' homes through parental involvement. Just like recycling is best done in conjunction with reducing and reusing, parents can talk more but must also tune in to the interests of their children and give their children a turn to talk back.

Reviewed by: Miss Kelsey, Youth Services, Vernon Area Public Library

Surya Kumar says

Path breaking and absolute key to set foundation of your child's brain. Must recommended for parents in enriching your child's vocabulary. We always thought children's brain and knowledge focuses only on school education in between 5 to 12 but Dana explained how effectively can set strong foundation at the age of 2. Would you believe child at age of 3 can able to learn 30 million words?

Now seriously thinking about how much talk and interaction we have with our children. She also says technology is not going far away and we need to figure outta way how to make it to our friend. Giving your child most technology devices to learn not going to help, a fair conversation you do with them will make a difference. so Talk more, Turn in and Take turns.

Talk more - Every word you speak is like investing a word in her vocabulary bank.

Tune in - Show interest and focus really in what are they speaking.

Take turns - Help them in getting their action and make into a conversation.

These are the 3 T's we should take it from this book and put everything into practise will definitely bring out a change in your child's brain.

Julia says

Of all the parenting books I've read, this is by far my favorite. Probably because I'm a speech-language pathologist and I intuitively understand the importance of speaking with babies until your ears ring. Maybe I liked it so much because it felt doable for me. Whatever the reason, everyone with a baby or who knows a baby should read this!!

The research was astounding. And the 30 million word gap is irreversible. Got that?!

I gotta start working in early intervention. All the kids I see for language have experienced this gap and nothing I do will catch them up. Nothing.

It starts with the mothers at the birth of their baby. I've found a new crusade. Be warned.

Den says

It was OK, but nothing groundbreaking. Very many shallow discussions about Dana's organization. The gist of this 320 pages book could be simply expressed in 10-15 pages brochure (maybe even less).

The main idea about this book, that it is very important to speak with your child from the birth to 3-year-old age as much as you can, use various words (numbers, shapes and so on). Don't forget to build simple dialogue with your child using his/her current actions and stuff in her/his hands.

I read many books about children education and almost in every one of them this gist was expressed using different terms.

Jewel Miller says

I really enjoyed this book. It is intuitive that children who are spoken to more, speak more. Hearing the science behind why and seeing how the effect continues into later childhood is fascinating.
