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Psychologist Dr. Stanley Greenspan, author of "The Growth of the Mind," explains that a child's brain needs emotional interaction, in addition to cognitive stimulation, for healthy intelligence development.

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**Transcript**

The Development of Children's Emotional Intelligence

**KATIE COURIC,** co-host:

It's commonly thought that a child's intelligence develops from cognitive stimulation, things like exercises with puzzles, flash cards, numbers and so on. But research now shows that intelligence is in fact built upon emotional exchanges during the first three years of life. The new book "The Growth of the Mind" explains this relationship between intelligence and emotion. Its author is psychiatrist Stanley Greenspan, and he's here this morning with some advice for developing the minds of young children.

**Dr. GREENSPAN:** Good morning.

**COURIC:** I'm intensely interested in this since I have a five-and-a-half-year-old and a one-year-old at home.

**Dr. GREENSPAN:** So, you're--you're a pro at this.

**COURIC:** Well, I don't know if I'm a pro. That's why I'm anxious to talk to you. What's wrong with cognitive exercises?

**Dr. GREENSPAN:** Well, there's nothing wrong with them, except they're very limiting. For example, it was first thought that children learned to be logical by pulling a string to ring a bell. So at eight months, in the family's experiment, Jean Piaget demonstrated that children could do that. But know we know that way before that, children can pull their mother's heartstrings or their daddy's heartstrings with little smiles and little smirks. And if mommy and daddy respond back, the lessons in logic are learned much earlier and in an emotional way rather than in a purely cognitive way.

**COURIC:** Why is this emotional response or this emotional interaction between parent and child so vitally important to the--to the pure brain growth of the child?

**Dr. GREENSPAN:** Well, we're finding that not all experiences are the same, and that pure impersonal cognitive stimulation, like puzzles or flash cards, are not nearly as good for the growing brain or the
growing mind as emotional interactions. So back and forth debates, for example, and pretend play is far more effective in building reasoning skills and thinking skills than doing puzzles, for example, though they're all helpful.

COURIC: We've got some examples of interactions between a baby and a caregiver. And--and let's talk about why they're important. You just mentioned some of them. You say learn to read baby signals and engage in give and take.

Dr. GREENSPAN: For example, at eight months of age, rather than a rattle, or rather than showing a baby pictures, inspire that baby to tweak your nose and go, `Oh, boy,' and give a big smile. And that baby now is learning how to communicate, how to be purposeful, how to have impact on the world.

COURIC: Engage in floor play and help create--child create pretend dramas.

Dr. GREENSPAN: At two years of age, the best thing you can do with a child, far better even than looking at pictures, which are very helpful, is get down on the floor, be that make-believe bear or the make-believe cat in a drama of the child's choosing, and ham it up. Interact.

COURIC: What does that do for the child?

Dr. GREENSPAN: The child is learning to be creative, is learning to use ideas and beginning to learn to think.

COURIC: Get the child's opinion and enjoy the debate.

Dr. GREENSPAN: By three to four years of age, children learn to debate, learn to think. So if we ask their opinions, they're learning to be reflective, they're learning to be abstract. So you want to teach a child colors. Don't say, `Is this blue?' or `Is this green'; say, `Which color do you like and why? Which is the better one? Which food do you like and why?' Get their opinions. Let them be an opinion-giver.

COURIC: You actually suggest leading them to the refrigerator and saying, `Show me what you'd like to eat.'

Dr. GREENSPAN: Yeah, and why? Have a debate. What would I like to...

COURIC: `What would you like to do today?'

Dr. GREENSPAN: Exactly.

COURIC: I mean, opening up possibilities for children.

Dr. GREENSPAN: Sure.

COURIC: At least, even if they don't answer you?

Dr. GREENSPAN: Child says, `I want to go outside.' `Great, terrific. Oh, by the way, what are you going to do out there?' Get them to reflect on, to give an opinion about what's going to happen next.

COURIC: Are most parents doing this naturally?

Dr. GREENSPAN: About a third of the parents I find do it intuitively and naturally. And we learn from those parents. Because those children were doing terrific. They were not only bright, they were moral, they were empathetic, they were developing in all the ways we want them to. But another third of parents are misguided by too much information in the wrong direction, trying to do too much with the wrong things. Too many puzzles, too many educational toys as opposed to this emotional interaction.

COURIC: But in fairness, doesn't it really have to be a combination of the two, ideally?

Dr. GREENSPAN: Well, if the emotions lead the way. If you use your games and use your reading. For
example, you're reading to a child, debate the story. Which picture does the child like better? Which part of the story? Which character. Start reading interpretation at age three and four. Don't wait until age eight or nine or 10.

COURIC: You know, this emphasis on emotional interaction seems at first blush to fly in the face of some of the new research that's come out about how a child's brain develops. I'm sure you've read it, talking about a window of opportunity to really capitalize on a child's ability to absorb say music or spatial reasoning, things like that.

Dr. GREENSPAN: Right. Actually, it's a misinterpretation of that research to think you should just stimulate children. You need to interact with children around the particular areas that their brain is going to be experiencing. So, for example, if we want to help children to learn language, interact with language, debate with language, have discussions. Don't just let the children hear language.

COURIC: You're talking about developing not only intelligence but a sense of morality.

Dr. GREENSPAN: Right. We find that the same experiences that develop our cognitive and intellectual abilities also stir our morality and our empathy and our compassion for others. For example, warmth and loving. Valentine's Day is coming up soon. The ability to be loved and feel love for others is the cornerstone of morality. And that same set of experiences we're talking about, back and forth reading of signals stirs that, as well as your intelligence.

COURIC: And you would like a new definition of intelligence. How so?

Dr. GREENSPAN: Well, we would like intelligence to have to do with two components, the ability to generate new ideas and to--the ability to reflect on and analyze those same ideas.

COURIC: Not the ability to regurgitate facts and figures?

Dr. GREENSPAN: Exactly.

COURIC: All right. Well, it's a really interesting book. Obviously, I'm very into it. It's called "The Growth of the Mind and the Endangered Origins of Intelligence." Dr. Stanley Greenspan, thanks so much for talking with us.

Dr. GREENSPAN: Thanks

COURIC: We appreciate it.

Dr. GREENSPAN: Thanks for having me.