

How important are early childhood experiences?

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To find out what role experiences in the first months and years of life play in the development of the brain, we studied people who were born blind and regained their sight through surgery. Even after many years of blindness, these people were able to acquire some visual functions, but only very incompletely. Measurements of brain activity and brain structure still showed traces of blindness many years after sight restoring surgery. This research provides evidence for so-called sensitive phases of learning in humans, i.e. in these phases adequate learning environments are necessary for complete functional acquisition.