

BRAVE MAGAZINE

ENCOURAGE | EMPOWER | EQUIP



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EDITOR'S LETTER



Dear Reader,

My name is Chantelle Vischer and I am the beating heart behind Brave Magazine. I'm an occupational therapist by day and a super mom and wife by night, or so I try to convince myself. I have it all figured out and have finally found the perfect balance between being a wife, running a business and household and of course raising kids. Just kidding! If anyone understands the never-ending juggle that is life, it's me! Yet, I'm a firm believer that we were never meant to do any of it alone. I truly believe that 'it takes a village' and so my hope is that you would find just that in these pages. I have asked colleagues and friends to help fill these pages with stories, ideas, insights and so much more. My hope is that one day this would become a magazine written by professionals and parents for parents and professionals. See what I did there?

Love,
Chans



Here at Brave Development we believe that every person has a degree of potential yet to be unlocked within them, which we are eager to help reveal.

WE ARE BRAVE

OUR MISSION

To invest in the next generation of South Africa by better **encouraging, empowering and equipping** not only the nation's children, but also parents and other professionals working in the field of education / paediatrics.

OUR VALUES

We partner with parents and other professionals to best serve the children that we have been entrusted with.

We play with purpose, as we believe that play is a critical tool required for quality connection and optimal investment in our children.

We **honour the process** by acknowledging that anything of real value takes time, patience, and perseverance.

We love people, because people matter most.

BIG SCHOOL READY. SET. GO!

A very subjective view from a first time Grade 1 mom and occupational therapist.

By: Chantelle Vischer (Occupational Therapist, Mother of 2, owner of Brave Development)

It's that time of year again—the Grade 1 readiness assessments are looming closer. For reasons unbeknownst to me, it's also the time when most occupational therapy practices receive frantic calls from parents and teachers alike, seeking clarity, compassion, and assistance.

Well! It just so happens that I, myself, have become a first-time Grade 1 mommy this year. Although this phase of entering 'big school' has been a blessing and an honour, it has also been a shock to both my system and that of my beautifully busy boy. Let's just say it's been humbling, to say the least. So, this article is written—very intentionally—from a subjective point of view.

To be frank, looking back, in my 10 years of practicing as a paediatric occupational therapist, the advice and guidance I've offered to parents during this daunting yet exciting time of school readiness has mainly been based on an objective and informative perspective.

But oh, how the tides have changed! It's a completely different experience going through these milestones as a mother rather than as a professional. And to be honest, I wish someone had shared these insights with me leading up to this big transitional period in our family's life.

Firstly, and probably most importantly—Dearest Brave Parent, you can do hard things! And so can your children. Our children are far more resilient than we often give them credit for—especially when they have parents who back them wholeheartedly. Don't let doubt and uncertainty steal the joy and excitement of this season you're in.

Secondly, arm yourself with the facts—which I'm happy to share with you here—instead of relying on hearsay or the opinions and gossip that can easily circulate in the school parking lot.

A school readiness assessment is a tool or guide—not a test. It's designed to benefit and support our children, not to create a long list of their shortcomings. Its purpose is to highlight any areas of development that may need further refinement before starting Grade 1. This allows us to send our little learners to 'big school' with a firm foundation for learning, growing, and flourishing.

Although different schools may use different measures or standardized assessments, your child can usually be retested within 3 to 6 months of the initial evaluation. These assessments typically cover a wide range of sensory-motor, language and communication, and socio-emotional developmental milestones.

Thirdly, we encourage parents to take the pressure off. Unnecessary pressure often does more harm than good. No child, parent, or teacher can “cram” for a school readiness assessment. In fact, the assessment is specifically designed to view the child holistically—not just developmentally. I always remind parents that children develop in stages, and that ages are merely guidelines.

So, instead of falling into an unnecessary “freak-out” or placing unrealistic and frantic pressure on yourself or your child, rather consider embracing the 5 P’s of Purposeful Parenting. These can help ease your child into the idea of the school readiness assessment and the transition to Grade 1.

Preparation - Take your child to the space where they’ll be assessed once or twice, about 1–2 weeks prior to the assessment. Talk them through what to expect. Use language like:

“This is where you’re going to practice big school.”

“It’s going to be a fun day where you and some friends will do some big school work.”

Prepare them by explaining that a teacher will fetch them and bring them back to you—you won’t be going into the class with them. Reassure them that it’s a safe space for learning and, most importantly, fun.

Positive & Realistic Reinforcement -

More than anything, your child needs to believe in themselves and their abilities. Positive reinforcement builds confidence, which in turn fosters curiosity, exploration, and a healthy sense of pride. Celebrate their effort rather than perfection. Affirm their strengths and help them view this experience as a new adventure, not a test of worth.

Realistic feedback helps keep our children grounded. Use affirming language like:

- “You are kind.”
- “You’re a hard worker.”
- “You always try your very best.”
- “You can be proud of yourself.”
- “You are brave.”

Children who develop a realistic self-esteem are more likely to challenge themselves and persevere through new or difficult experiences.



Presence – Did you know that the number one predictor of socio-emotional school readiness is a healthy attachment to a child’s primary caregiver (i.e., their parents)? This isn’t just important now, but always. Make time for undivided, uninterrupted, child-led play. Look your child in the eyes. Hug them as often as you can. Let them know they are loved, wanted, and celebrated. Your presence is the foundation of their security and confidence.

Patience – Remember to breathe—especially on the day of the assessment. Stick to your usual school morning routine and allow enough time to start the day slow and unhurried, for both yourself and your child. Calm energy is contagious.

And one more ‘P’ we hold dear... Pray. Here at Brave Development, we believe deeply in the power of prayer. We pray for every child and every family who walks through our doors. Prayer is how we center ourselves, gather strength, and surround our children with love and protection.

If you feel overwhelmed or uncertain, please reach out to an occupational therapist near you. Occupational therapists are experts in child development. They can offer practical, task-oriented input and serve as a point of reference—or referral—if further support is needed.





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It's time to ditch the shoes!

The importance of being barefoot.

By: Zongile Sibiya (Occupational Therapist at Brave Development)

“Did you know that children today spend 50% less time outdoors compared to previous generations? This decline in outdoor play is affecting their sensory development, posture, and motor skills. But the solution could be as simple as taking off their shoes!”

As an occupational therapist, I recognize the value of helping kids progress through developmental phases. Play is a child's primary activity. Allowing them to discover themselves and the world around them.

However, with the rise of the internet, children are spending a lot less time playing outside. Notable developmental delays have resulted from this change, especially in the development of motor and sensory skills.

On the flip side, here are some of the benefits: Through their senses, infants and toddlers explore and discover the world and themselves. During these formative years their vestibular and proprioceptive systems are developing. Barefoot play, which exposes kids to various textures and temperatures, enhance their sensory systems and provides essential feedback to the brain. This input helps to improve subsequent encounters.



A rich sensory experience that benefits both brain development and general physical health is offered by playing outside barefoot. Playing barefoot not only provides a sensory experience but also helps with postural alignment, balance, arch development and foot muscle strength. Because restrictive footwear reduced sensory feedback, which may affect foot mechanics, joint alignment and flexibility. Research indicated that “children who regularly play barefoot exhibit better motor control and posture than those who play in shoes”.

Children who don't play outside frequently exhibit diminished strength, weak muscle tone, and poor coordination, all of which have adverse effect on their ability to perform gross motor tasks. Playing outside, barefoot, from a young age is therefore essential for the best possible physical and neurological development.

Even though playing barefoot has many advantages, there are some situations where it is crucial to make sure kids' feet are protected. Flexible, non-slip shoes can offer the required protection during the winter or an uneven terrain while preserving natural foot movement. Shoes that are too tight can prevent muscles from growing and raise the risk of foot abnormalities.

Engaging Barefoot Play Activities
Incorporate these fun activities to promote sensory-rich experiences:

- Shaving cream play – Let children jump and slide in shaving cream for a slippery sensory adventure.
- Mud and sand exploration – Encourage kids to bury their feet in sand, run, jump, and squish through mud.
- Foot painting – Place blobs of paint on a large sheet of paper and let children paint with their feet.
(Warning: This one can get messy!)



Water play – Add marbles, toy fish, or other small objects to a tub of water and challenge children to “fish” them out using only their feet.

Tips for safe barefoot play

- Choose a clean and safe environment for your child to play
- Always supervise your child during barefoot play.
- Begin slowly and gradually increase the duration and variety of options until your child becomes comfortable
- Let your child lead the way and explore at their own pace
- Always make it fun.

Encouraging barefoot play allows children to connect with their environment in a natural and developmentally beneficial way. By providing opportunities for sensory-rich experiences, we support their overall physical and neurological growth while making playtime both educational and enjoyable.

“Let’s challenge ourselves to allow children more opportunities for natural movement. Whether at home, in schools, or on playgrounds, every child deserves the sensory-rich benefits of going barefoot!”



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Pondering on the pandemic...

What the Pandemic Taught Us About Children's Vocabulary Growth.

By: Xandri Bach (Speech and Language Therapist)

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted our lives in countless ways, but it also offered an unexpected lesson: the crucial role of parent-child interactions in language development. With lockdowns keeping families at home, researchers had a unique opportunity to study how parents influence their children's vocabulary growth. Two key studies from this period provide valuable insights for parents today.

The Power of Sensitive Interactions

One study from the UK examined how parents' interactions with their young children (aged 8-36 months) affected vocabulary growth. The findings were clear: children whose parents engaged in "sensitive interactions" developed larger vocabularies and showed greater language growth over time.

What Are Sensitive Interactions?

Sensitive interactions occur when a parent notices their child's signals (such as gestures, sounds, or words), understands their meaning, and responds in a way that matches the child's focus. A responsive parent carefully observes their child's cues, engages in meaningful conversations, and naturally introduces new words.

For example, if a toddler is playing with blocks and says, "Big tower!" a parent might respond warmly, "Yes! You built a big tower! It's so tall! What should we add next?" By following the child's interest, expanding on their words, and encouraging further conversation, the parent helps enrich vocabulary development.

Conversely, a less sensitive interaction might look like this: the child says, "Big tower!" but the parent, distracted, simply responds with a short "Uh-huh" without engaging further. Without an opportunity to build on their language, the child's learning moment is lost.

Encouraging Sensitive Interactions at Home

To promote meaningful conversations, parents can use the OWL™ strategy:

- **Observe:** Pay close attention to your child's body language, gestures, and facial expressions to understand what interests them. Notice what they are looking at, reaching for, or pointing to. If they make a sound or attempt a word, acknowledge it with enthusiasm and build on their communication.

- **Wait:** Give your child time to start an interaction or respond. This means pausing, leaning forward, and looking expectantly rather than jumping in immediately. Allowing time for your child to process and formulate a response encourages them to participate more actively in conversations.
- **Listen:** Focus on your child's words and sounds without interrupting, even if you already know what they're trying to say. Show that you value their efforts by nodding, smiling, or repeating what they say before expanding on it. This reassures them that their voice is important and encourages further communication.

By following these steps, parents create richer, more meaningful interactions that support language development.

The Role of Everyday Activities

A second study, involving over 1,700 children from 13 countries, explored how various activities during lockdown influenced vocabulary growth. The results reinforced what many experts have long suspected:

- Children who spent less time passively watching screens showed stronger expressive vocabulary growth (words they could say).

- Children who engaged in more shared reading with parents demonstrated larger receptive vocabulary growth (words they could understand).

Encouraging Vocabulary Growth Through Reading

Reading is one of the most effective ways to support language development, but simply reading words off the page isn't enough. Engaging in interactive conversations while reading makes a significant difference. Here's how parents can make book time more impactful:



- Let your child lead – Notice what catches their attention in the book and follow their curiosity.
- Use the OWL™ strategy – Observe, wait, and listen before responding to their comments.
- Respond with interest – Expand on what your child notices. For example, if they point to a picture of a truck and say, "Truck!" you can reply, "Yes, that's a big red truck! It looks so fast! Where do you think it's going?"

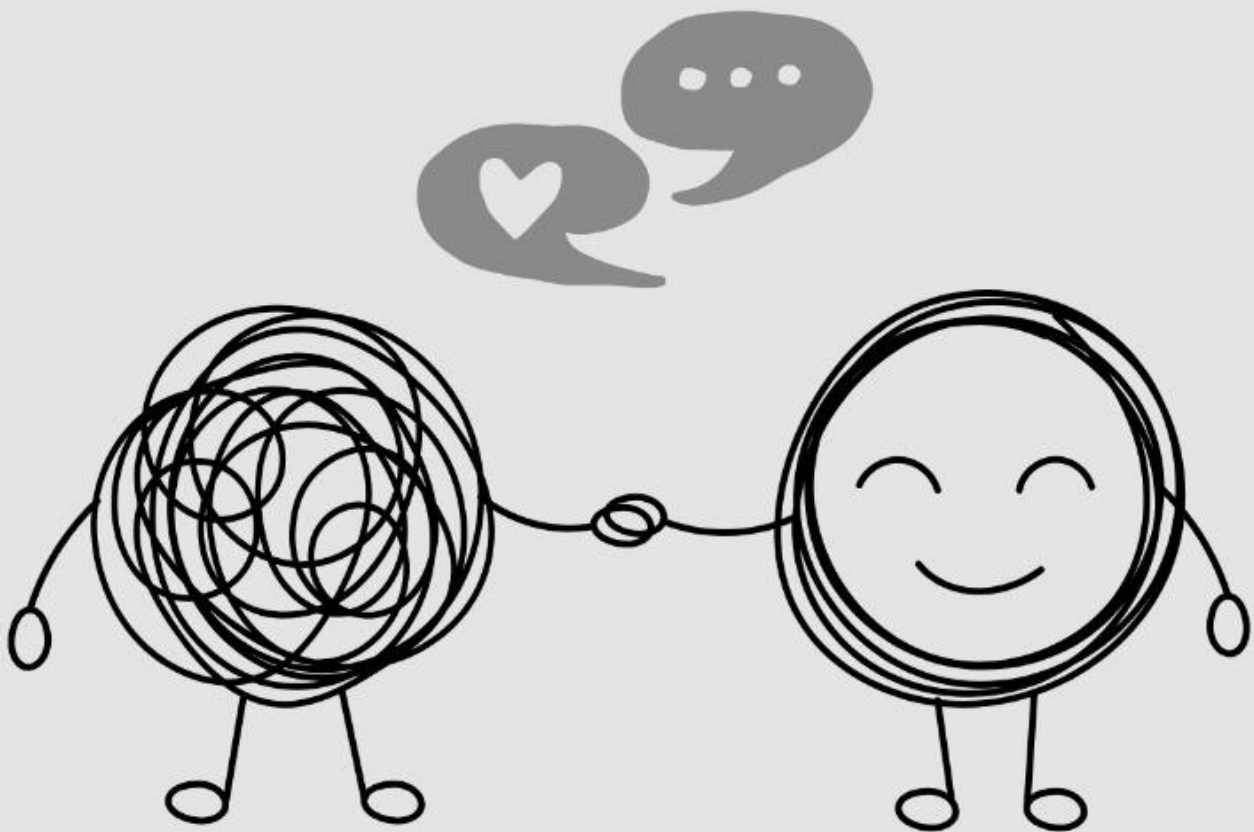
The Takeaway

Both studies highlight the importance of parent-child interactions, whether through responsive conversations or language-rich activities like reading. Even in challenging times, simple daily moments can have a lasting impact on a child's vocabulary growth. So, the next time your child points at something, babbles, or shares a book with you, take the opportunity to engage. You're not just bonding—you're helping their language skills flourish.

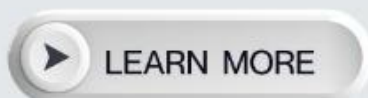


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Let's talk about tax!

The ins-and-outs of tax relief for those with disabilities.

By: Angie Booysen (CA(SA), Owner of Booysen Consulting, mom of 2)

Did you know that SARS has specific tax relief for those with disabilities or those who support disabled dependents?

Who qualifies?

Firstly, let's chat about what SARS defines as a disability/physical impairment:

Disability: moderate to severe limitation of their ability to function or perform daily activities as a result of a physical, sensory, communication, intellectual or mental impairment that lasts for more than a year and has been diagnosed by a duly registered medical practitioner.

Physical impairment: SARS does not provide a definition, however, it is "less restrained" than a disability. The restriction could include bad eye sight, hyperactivity, dyslexia, hearing problems that are not moderate or severe due to specialised devices/medication used to correct the restriction.

Conditions such as ADD/ADHD, anxiety disorders, auto-immune diseases, bipolar, depression, epilepsy, dementia and eating disorders are included when referring to the above.

How do I tell SARS that I have a disability?

You will need to complete the ITR-DD form for SARS ([Confirmation of Diagnosis of Disability](#)). Part A is completed by you and Part B, C and D by a duly registered medical practitioner who is qualified to express an opinion on the disability. This is not submitted with your income tax return but rather completed before the submission date and provided to SARS when asked for it.

Medical tax credit:

Now let's get to the tax relief! SARS offers two types of medical tax credits:

1) Medical scheme tax credit: Fixed rebate for those who contribute to a registered medical scheme. It escalates based on your dependents. Currently, if you are under 65, the monthly rebate is R364 for the first 2 dependents and R246 for any additional dependents. Annually, this means a family of 3 paying for medical aid for a year could reduce their tax bill by R11 688!



A big win is that whoever pays the contributions can claim even if they themselves do not have medical aid. For example, if the husband is not on medical aid but his wife and child are – and he pays for their contributions – he can still claim the credit for 2 dependents.

2) Additional medical expenses tax credit: Rebate calculated using qualifying medical expenses and contributions to a registered medical scheme in excess of certain thresholds.

Qualifying medical expenses is usually an easy one – medical schemes provide a tax certificate confirming the value of claims not paid by them. These are purely medical expenses that you paid but were not refunded to you (by medical aid or gap cover). This is why you should always claim your medical expenses, even if you know your medical aid is depleted!

Now for the drum roll of tax relief for those with disabilities or physical impairments – qualifying medical expenses are ANY expenses that are paid during the year as a result of the physical

impairment or disability. This includes medical and NON-medical expenses! For disabilities, these expenses are also claimed at a higher rate – 33% instead of 25%.

Types of non-medical expenses that qualify (just a few noted, see exhaustive list on SARS website):

- Transport costs to and from pharmacies to get medicine related to the disability;
- Personal carers (cannot be dual role with housekeeping). If the carer lives in, you can claim all live-in expenses related to the carer (pro-rata electricity/rates, subject to limitations);
- Additional training/first aid courses for the personal carers;
- Cost of a school assistant at special education school;
- Special education school fees exceeding closest fee-paying public school fees;
- Services/interventions to assist in coping with the disability and transport costs involved;
- Rehabilitative therapy;
- Service animals;
- Prescription glasses/contact lenses;
- Insurance costs/repairs on any specialised equipment (must be specified in insurance policy);
- Cost of prosthetics, aids, and other necessary devices subject to conditions noted by SARS.



How do I claim the tax credit?

When submitting your annual tax return on e-filing:

- enter your total contributions paid to a registered medical scheme
- list your number of dependents on the scheme
- enter your qualifying medical expenses (inclusive of VAT) which include non-medical expenses if you have a disability/physical impairment

and SARS will do the calculation for you! Just be sure to have all slips/invoices/proof of payments to provide to SARS, as well as your ITR-DD form if you have a disability.

The fine print...

Both medical tax credits are non-refundable rebates that reduce your tax payable (not your taxable income) in the current year. This means if you are liable to pay R10 000 tax and you have a R12 000 medical tax credit available, your tax payable would be Nil and not that SARS owes you R2 000!

For those parents kicking themselves for not knowing the above and feeling like you have missed out – some more good news! SARS will let you re-open your tax assessments for the last 3 years to go back and claim this credit.

SARS will need all the supporting documentation and evidence to prove the tax credit so as always, it will require a little bit of admin on your side but it is SO worth it!

Disclaimer: I am not a registered financial advisor or a tax specialist – this article is merely to provide information at a general level, and should not be seen as financial or tax advice. For professional advice, please consult with a tax practitioner.



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Fostering Resilience in Children.

How do I make my child mentally tough?

By: Micaela Coker (Occupational Therapist)

No parent wants their child to struggle or experience hardship in life. But how else do we prepare and equip children for bouncing back from the challenges that are bound to come along later in life? Let's face it, life is tough. At the end of the day, we want our little ones to be able to cope, adapt and overcome when faced with adversity.

The concept of resilience is originally derived from the Latin word "resilire" which literally means to rebound, recoil or spring back. The scientific study of resilience in children began in the 1970s, and with the past five decades of research, it is clear that early childhood is an essential time period for fostering resilience.

The theory of resilience has many different definitions and is complex. Essentially, resilience is the process of adapting and coping well when faced with adversity, trauma or stress. With this being said, resilience is not being immune to negative emotions. Possessing resilience will not make life's problems go away. But it can better equip you to work through these difficulties and see the light at the end of tunnel. Resilience is not a personality trait or quality that one individual is born with over another.

It is something that emerges and develops in children through their interactions with others in their different environments. Therefore, connections with our little ones are key to developing their resilience. Here are a few helpful things to keep in mind when aiming to foster resilience:

Build Strong Connections - The African Proverb "it takes a village to raise a child" cannot be truer when it comes to making our children mentally tough. It is evident in all research on resilience theory in children, that high-quality and supportive relationships with others are essential to fostering their resilience. Meaningful connections within the family unit, and with those individuals that your child encounters on a daily basis, are of the utmost importance.

Prioritizing quality family time, engaging in open communication, being present and active listening are ways that you can build the connection with your child. When your child feels safe and supported, they feel that the world is their oyster with what they can achieve.

Encourage Problem-Solving Skills - It is often easier (and less time-consuming) to rush in to solve a problem for your child, than to engage with your little one on how to solve the problem that they are faced with.

The reality is that you will not always be there to problem solve for your child. Problem solving skills are best taught in the present, so use those everyday moments to develop this skill.

Whether it is taking the time to talk through the steps of tying shoelaces or letting your child pick out their clothes to match the weather, problem solving does not have to involve math sums or sudoku puzzles. Your little one may surprise with the solutions they come with for everyday problems!

Model resilient behaviour - Take this moment to think about how you process and work through difficulties in your own life. How do you respond when you get stuck in traffic and someone cuts you off? Or when you are working from home and have an unexpected work deadline? Children are observant beings and are constantly watching and interpreting how their caregivers respond to different situations.

Try to avoid using overly negative reactions such as “This was done terribly!”, instead focusing on personal development and growth.

Rather use encouraging language such as “It was a mistake, but we can learn from it,” and “I see how difficult that puzzle was for you, but you kept on trying.” Staying calm under pressure shows your children that challenges are manageable. Praise progress and persistence rather than the results.

Resilience is not solely about overcoming challenges, it's about thriving in the face of them. By fostering resilience in children, you as parents and caregivers are investing in their ability to grow into confident, capable adults who can face an unpredictable future with strength and optimism. In an ever-changing world, resilience enables children to adapt to new technologies, evolving job markets, and societal shifts.

For our brave parents, if there is one thing I want you to take away from this article it's this: seek connection and stay connected with your support network. When going through difficult times, draw strength from those that are emotionally available to you. Ask for help and support when you need it. Humans are social beings and we can not thrive without some sort of bonding with one another.

In conclusion, I leave you with some food for thought: In a world of algorithms, hashtags and followers, know the true importance of human connection.



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As parents and educators, we all want to see our children thrive — not just academically, but socially, emotionally, and in everyday life. That's where occupational therapy (OT) comes in — and it might just be one of the most valuable resources to support your child's growth.



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