

## Frequently Asked Questions

### **What is A Chance To Grow?**

A Chance To Grow (ACTG) is a nonprofit organization committed to the natural development of the whole child through innovative, individualized, and comprehensive brain-centered programs and services. Founded by Bob and Kathy DeBoer in 1982, ACTG was originally established as a parent self-help group for families who refused to accept the limitations of their brain-injured children. It found that simple interventions designed to stimulate the brain through movement make an extraordinary improvement in learning. Today, ACTG is a professionally staffed health care and educational agency that has expanded its programs and services to help children raised in poverty—where the highest risk factors that affect learning exist. The agency’s programs are educational, rehabilitative, and therapeutic in nature. Unlike any other organization, ACTG offers a great variety of high-quality services and resources that maximize the development of disadvantaged young people and allow them to achieve their highest potential.

### **Where is ACTG and whom does it serve?**

ACTG serves all children, across the state and nation, who wish to succeed in school and reach their full potential. While most of the agency’s programs are primarily recognized for making a difference with disadvantaged children aged pre-kindergarten through third grade, these services are available to every child and are proven to benefit all students—from those who struggle, to those already at, or beyond, grade level.

### **Why do children need ACTG?**

For decades, it has been falsely assumed that all children are physiologically and neurologically prepared for education the moment they step foot into a kindergarten classroom. No thoughtful consideration has been given to each child’s unique individual development, which is determined by genetic makeup, quality of life, and exposure to stimuli—not necessarily chronological age. This is a fundamental problem with our early educational philosophy. The future of too many young students is jeopardized because they are expected to learn prior to being physiologically and neurologically ready; not all young minds and bodies are prepared for the stress of school at age five. Sadly, more often than not, these struggling students become frustrated and develop behavioral or motivational issues. Many get labeled a “bad kid” for reasons they cannot control.

### **How does ACTG develop the “whole” child?**

While the main focus of the agency is brain development and learning growth, ACTG recognizes the multi-faceted nature of learning achievement gaps and the interconnectedness of problems. These “outside” factors that contribute to the overall well being of a child include family stability, history of illness, allergies, visual and auditory deficits, and many more. ACTG allows young students to progress at their own rate. It stresses the importance of prevention and natural development. Unlike prescription medication, ACTG’s interventions are inexpensive and do not leave the

body; they provide neurological and physiological stimulation that allow the child to learn automatic functions that are vital to success in the classroom. The programs and services were developed by ACTG's professional therapists to treat the whole child and strengthen the many dimensions of education.

### **How does ACTG close the achievement gap?**

ACTG understands that the problems children from disadvantaged backgrounds face are complex and interconnected. They consistently score lower on reading, and other academic assessments, than their white and middle-class peers for reasons that are tied to low income. Many of them lack adequate health care, parental guidance and supervision, reliable transportation, and suffer from malnutrition, which slows development of the brain and limits its capacity to learn. This is a troubling reality that places unimaginable stress on children and forces them to live in a mode of survival.

The best way to help disadvantaged children is to give them tools to be successful. Upon entering school, most disadvantaged students lack the readiness skills that allow them to focus on learning in the classroom, which causes feelings of frustration and anger that ultimately lead to apathy. ACTG's programs and services are specifically designed to help children in this situation. In addition, the agency understands that, of all academic skills, reading is paramount. Illiterate individuals can no longer find employment in today's world. Experienced ACTG professionals know how to identify readiness issues in young children and correct them before the brain reaches maturity.

### **Why do some children learn more slowly than others?**

We believe that the primary reason some children learn more slowly than others is a lack of brain stimulation. Proper physiological and neurological development depends on visual, auditory, and tactile exposures. Young minds that do not function quickly have not received enough exercise. It usually means that the brain cortex, which controls conscious motor activity, is working overtime to process material that the brain stem, which regulates unconscious motor activity, has not been trained to handle yet. Basic functions that are conducted by the vestibular and proprioceptive systems, which are responsible for balance and movement, must become involuntary for the child to learn.

If the cortex is engaged in unconscious tasks, it is unable to perform its normal duties. For instance, most infants and toddlers receive sufficient brain stimulation to automatically move their eyes from left to right across a page for reading; however, when a child's cortex is required to do that seemingly simple task, a function that the brain stem should administer, it cannot simultaneously direct those eye movements and comprehend the material. ACTG understands this problem. It has established an array of programs designed specifically to determine the cause of a child's struggles and train his or her brain stem to perform its normal tasks without involving the cortex.

### **Why is brain stimulation important and how does it work?**

Today's increasingly strict child safety and liability laws have resulted in less brain stimulation and more academic struggles for young students. Heightened restrictions on car seats, the rising popularity of stationary swings, and the declining use

of playground equipment are all current trends that inhibit movement and contribute to the growing number of infants and toddlers who do not receive enough exposure to stimuli that activate the brain's neurons—the messengers of the mind. Concerns of injury to young children have actually caused more harm than good. Minds are suffering from a lack of exercise and students enter school out of shape and unprepared. Research has demonstrated that children who receive less brain stimulation, many of whom come from disadvantaged backgrounds, experience more academic struggles than their peers.

Brain stimulation works to increase neurological activity and train the brain stem to perform automatic tasks. In the stimulation process, the brain produces a sheath of myelin around the axon of neurons to strengthen electrical impulses and speed up the transmission of messages to other neurons. Increased stimulation results in additional layers of myelin and an improved ability to process information quickly. Heightened neurological activity allows a young student's mind to be more deeply engaged in academic material and learn with greater ease.

### **Why do parents and teachers need to understand development and the importance of multi-sensory brain stimulation in young children?**

Parents and teachers need to understand brain development in order to prevent learning disabilities in young children and raise them to their highest potential. In a world dominated by television, computers, and video games, infants and toddlers are receiving less brain stimulation and developing more learning disorders. During these passive activities, children are indoors, sitting down, and staring at a stationary object; they are not outside being exposed to natural elements and receiving the multi-sensory brain stimulation that they need for healthy development. A renewed emphasis must be placed on physical movement. While visual, auditory, and tactile exercises are crucial, activities that stimulate the vestibular and proprioceptive systems, which control balance and movement, like creeping, crawling, and spinning, are equally important.

Repetition of movement exercises is healthy for the brain because it increases the production of myelin, which enhances brain activity, and allows the mind to learn and establish automatic functions. For instance, when reading, the brain stem must have the ability to perform unconscious tasks, such as eye movement and word recognition, so that the brain cortex may comprehend the material. If a child's mind has not been trained to perform these foundational skills, he or she has a significantly higher risk of developing a learning disability. ACTG understands the significance of physical movement to brain stimulation and incorporates multi-sensory activities into all of its programs and services.

### **How is ACTG funded?**

ACTG receives funding through fee-for-service, regional and local foundations, and private individuals.

### **What do ACTG programs and services cost?**

For information regarding cost, please call (612) 789-1236, email [actg@actg.org](mailto:actg@actg.org), or visit <http://www.actg.org/>

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