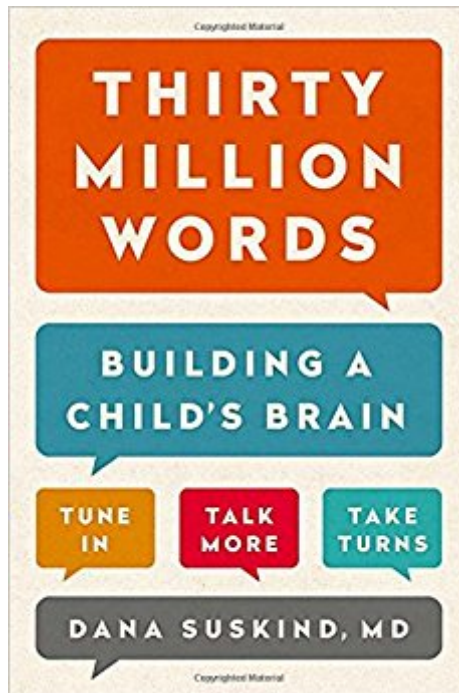




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# Thirty Million Words: Building A Child's Brain



## Synopsis

**\*Nominated for the Books for a Better Life Award\***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.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

“[Suskind has] written a book that gives parents the tools they need to maximize their children’s potential, one word at a time.” —Pregnancy and Newborn —“Parents, other caregivers, and early childhood educators will be moved and inspired by this work.” —Library Journal, starred review —“Suskind’s vision is empowering, her methods are surprisingly simple to execute, and the results have been proven to nurture children toward becoming stable, empathetic adults. Informative, exciting new data that confirms the significant benefits gained by talking to your child.” —Kirkus Reviews —“Dr. Dana Suskind has written a passionate, engaging and informed account of the importance of early exposure to language in child development. It is a valuable ‘call to words’ for parents, educators, and anyone invested in the success and well-being of children.” —James Heckman, University of Chicago, Nobel Laureate —“Dr. Dana Suskind is a one-person change agent. In this beautifully written book, she infuses the wisdom of a physician with the heart of a mother. Parents, policy makers and educators, this book is for you. It is informative, compassionate and a call to action designed to enrich our greatest natural resource, our children.” —Kathy Hirsh-Pasek, Temple University, author of *Einstein Never Used Flashcards* Can a surgeon help solve poverty and improve equality of opportunity? —Dr. Dana Suskind has a simple but effective strategy: more talking, with more complex words directed at children from zero to three mainly by parents. Her lucid book will persuade you that talk and more talk directed at the developing brains of infants and toddlers can drastically improve our country. Read it and try it.” —Ezekiel Emanuel, author of *Healthcare, Guaranteed* —“Dr. Suskind weaves science and her journey from surgeon to champion for children showing the profound power of words spoken to infants. Anyone who cares about children will benefit from learning how much language shapes our very existence from the earliest age.” —Patricia K. Kuhl, University of Washington, co-author of *The Scientist*

in the Crib

“Thirty Million Words” tells the story of a remarkable woman, Dana Suskind, whose unrelenting mission to give every child the chance to thrive. Dana Suskind, whose work as a pediatric surgeon with the deaf helped her to understand the amazing power that words have on a child’s development. She offers a simple but profound understanding of how language affects the brain and provides insights into how to create a rich language environment so your child can soar. Every page overflows with warmth and intelligence—share it and become part of something amazing.

—Steven D. Levitt, University of Chicago, coauthor of *Freakonomics*

“This is a page-turner tale of birth and transformation—the birth of a medical miracle and the transformation of a compassionate surgeon. Dr. Suskind recounts her journey with humor and humility. Her remarkably intimate voice opens up a fresh path alongside those of physician writers Oliver Sacks, Atul Gawande, and Paul Farmer. It will enthrall any reader who is exhilarated by human possibility and inspire the next generation of physicians.”

—Dr. Joshua Sparrow, Harvard Medical School, Children’s Hospital Boston

“How empowering, the realization that each of us can be our children’s personal neuro-developer, that the sheer quality of our interactions can impact the attitude of inquiry and health of our kids. The practical application of Dr. Suskind’s work is limitless; as a dad, and as (a gritty) someone invested in early child development, I’m excited to see how far it takes us.”

—Steve Nash, President, the Steve Nash Foundation and two-time National Basketball Association MVP

As a pediatrician, I want everyone to read this wonderful book—to understand how health and learning fit seamlessly together as young children develop, and to appreciate the neurological wonder and the social urgency of using language and love to nourish the brains of babies and children everywhere.

—Perri Klass, author of *Quirky Kids* and National Medical Director of Reach Out and Read

“I thank Dana Suskind for opening doors to solutions and hope. The answer to the growing problem of social inequalities in our country is to make use of America’s top two resources: its children and their parents. If we care about this country, and the children who will live in it as adults, we have to make Dr. Suskind’s advice become reality.”

—Sandra Gutierrez, Founder and National Director of Abriendo Puertas / Opening Doors

“Grounded upon experience as a cochlear implant surgeon, informed by compelling social science research, and inspired by a profound commitment to children and families, this book helps all of us understand the importance of communicating abundantly, pleasantly, and responsively with infants and toddlers. Tell everyone you know to read it! Together, we can enrich language environments for generations to come, in all types of homes and communities. The book

is a gem!

• Ronald F. Ferguson, Faculty Director, the Achievement Gap Initiative, Harvard University

“Straight from the front lines Dr. Dana Suskind tells the story of the power of talk in helping children learn. Easy to read and with striking insights on every page, this book will not only make you think differently about how you parent, but will give you the tools to help your child be at his or her best.”

• Sian Beilock, University of Chicago, author of *Choke* and *How the Body Knows its Mind*

“Suskind writes with clarity and authority to explain why parents need to talk to their infant children, and why some forms of communication are better than others. *Thirty Million Words* belongs on the shortlist of books that every parent, teacher, and education policymaker should read.”

• Adam Alter, New York University, author of *Drunk Tank Pink*

“Anyone who cares about children, anyone who cares about the future of this country, should read this book.”

• Barbara Bowman, Irving B. Harris Professor, Erikson Institute

“A passionate, personal account of the power all parents have to raise thriving, successful children.”

• Diana Mendley Rauner, President, Ounce of Prevention Fund

“Prepare for a revolution. This book will make you cry, laugh, and deeply reflect on what we should be doing to give everyone a chance to succeed in life. As a scholar I was in awe, as a teacher I was dazzled, and as a father I was thankful to the authors of this book. When you pick it up, have a few hours to spare because you will not put it down. Unequivocal 5 star.”

• John A. List, University of Chicago, author of *The Why Axis*

“Dana Suskind hails others as heroes but she is the true hero! She stepped out of the safe harbor of her role as a pediatric cochlear implant surgeon when she realized that helping deaf children hear was not enough to help them learn language. She takes us on her compelling and page-turning journey, navigating the best research on children’s early learning, always sharing sound and extremely helpful examples of what we all must do to help children learn language and much more, always in joyful and loving ways.”

• Ellen Galinsky, President, Families and Work Institute, author of *Mind in the Making*

“Dr. Suskind’s work reveals that the greatest gift we can give our children is free. How empowering to understand that it doesn’t take money to give our children advantages in the world, it takes words. Her research is vital, and it is our responsibility to make sure Suskind’s message reaches the masses.”

• Chris Nee, Creator and Executive Producer, *Doc McStuffins*

“Dr. Suskind’s work is empowering--illuminating that every parent already has what it takes to give their child the best start in life: their words. This account tells the amazing impact of language development on the young child’s developing brain, and provides valuable insight on how we, as parents, educators, and caregivers

can create a profound difference in our children's lives through the simple act of talking with them. Chicago Children's Museum has long created rich environments that naturally inspire talk and we are thrilled that Dr. Suskind's research provides new evidence of the deep importance and positive effects of these early interactions." Jennifer Farrington, President and CEO of Chicago Children's Museum and Board President of the Association of Children's Museums "Three cheers for the promise of parents, prevention and neuroplasticity!" Dr. T. Berry Brazelton, Harvard Medical School "Captivating! Great examples and an easy read but full of scientific information. Can we make this required reading for couples prior to conception?" Roberta Golinkoff, University of Delaware, author of How Babies Talk

Professor Dana Suskind, MD, is both founder and director of the Thirty Million Words Initiative, which is based on scientific research that demonstrates the critical importance of early language exposure on the developing child. Dr. Suskind received the University of Chicago Medical Faculty Award as "Distinguished Leader in Program Innovation." She is an advisor on The Clinton Foundation's Too Small to Fail Initiative and part of the White House initiative on creating a pathway to ending the achievement gap. She lives in Chicago, Illinois. Beth Suskind is codirector of the Thirty Million Words Initiative and is integral to translating the complexities of the science behind their research into a curriculum. She lives in Chicago, Illinois. Leslie Lewinter-Suskind, BS, MSS, MFA, former Director of International Program, Psychiatry and Pediatrics, LSU Medical School in New Orleans, provided invaluable assistance in the writing of Thirty Million Words. She lives in southern California.

As an obstetrician, it has always struck me that while expecting parents spend an inordinate amount of time "preparing" for birth, they spend relatively little time once the baby has arrived learning how they can help their child achieve his or her full potential. So for every parent who has a dog eared copy of What to Expect I say, forget What to Expect (It never goes as planned anyway) and instead focus on What to do once the baby arrives. And there is no more important book than Dr. Suskind's book which is a true "how to" have a child that can reach his or her full potential. Not only is this book brilliant, but also it is simply fascinating to read. The style is academic yet approachable, deep yet conversational, and there is an "Ah ha" moment on virtually every

page. This is a book that every parent, every grandparent, every childcare provider, every pediatrician, every educator and yes, every obstetrician should read.

A lot of data narrated into a compelling story. this was an excellent primer on Early Childhood brain development and used it as a launch pad to describe how we nudge positive language, learning and social emotional for our greatest assets.

The information was very enlightening to me and helped motivate me to action. But if you are busy and want just practical advice, skip to chapter 5. Otherwise, the whole book is pretty amazing. A summary should be distributed free of charge to all new parents

I love this book. Insightful and explains a lot about our children's brains. It's given me newer ideas on how to help my son learn and I absolutely recommend it to anyone with kids or planning to have kids soon!

This book is a quick read and has a lot of valuable information for interacting with your child in the first three years--prime years, according to the author--for building your child's brain. I purchased for my son and daughter-in-law since they are giving me my first grandchild! I couldn't help but read the book first and found a lot of helpful/interesting ideas for interacting with children--as young as newborn I would recommend this to all and the subject material is something that should be taught to all expectant parents.

This book is a MUST READ for all parents & grandparents raising young children. I learned that some of the things I was already doing right (or according to the book), and also learned many new things that I can add to daily routines for a better learning experience for my granddaughter. So many take away's from this book and it progresses with the age of the child and what we can do differently in all of the stages of their lives.

Valuable information about child language development. I think this book should be required reading for individuals who work with the birth through three population.

A great read for parents and school boards who really want to make progress in maximizing the potential of young children. It provides research data to support and examples to implement. This

could greatly reduce our national achievement gap and reduce the need for remedial education .  
Parenting and caregivers guidance extraordinaire .

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