

11 Fun Learning Activities for Kids

TODDLER

ARTICLE

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Nurture a lifelong interest for learning in children by reading, role-playing, interacting, and engaging with them. Encourage them to make decisions, think critically, and value their opinions.

“Intellectual growth should commence at birth and cease only at death.”—Albert Einstein

Children possess innate curiosity, which fuels their need to ask questions, explore, and learn...and continue learning. Yes, our little ones display the characteristics of a lifelong learner, or “learning ... [that] occurs at all times in all places,” very early on. It is this skill that urges them to walk, talk, sing, read, run, and more.

Yet somewhere down the track, usually during their school years, children often lose this desire to constantly learn. They might be discouraged by tough challenges, or simply overwhelmed by the sheer volume of learning opportunities out there. Perhaps they feel restricted by the emphasis we place on grades and passing exams. Little do they know that there’s a whole new world of amazing lifetime learning outside the pages of their textbooks, too.

Ideally, this thirst for learning that you can see in children as young as one should continue forever, well beyond the school years, and definitely outside of the classroom. This is because lifelong learning offers immense advantages to your children, now, and in the future as grownups facing a new world on their own.

The benefits of lifelong learning

According to Professor John Field of the Centre for Research in Lifelong Learning (U.K.), and also as highlighted by research, raising children to be lifelong learners has the following benefits:

- It enables them to cope with the fast-changing demands of the world and the future new world by empowering them with cognitive flexibility.
- It gives them the proficiency to efficiently handle all sorts of challenges, now and in the future
- It boosts cognitive health, keeping brain cells working at optimum levels.
- It improves confidence.
- It imparts practical life-skills, such as good communication and other social skills.
- It helps improve physical health. For example, learning about nutrition basics will encourage a healthy lifestyle.

The advantages of a life of pursuing knowledge are clear. However, the “theories” behind learning these skills are not always found in textbooks, presenting themselves instead as opportunities in our daily lives.

So how do we nurture a child’s infinite ability to learn, the characteristics of which we see in them so early on?

11 ways to nurture a lifelong passion for learning in your children



Don't let your little ones turn off that learning switch as they grow up. Parents can play a direct role in encouraging children to remain diligent students of life, for life, by following a few simple routines daily.

Keep in mind that your kids are particularly receptive to learning new things between the ages of one and seven years. We've grouped these ideas by different ages so you can adapt your teaching strategies accordingly.

Toddlers (Ages 1-3 Years)

1. Read, read, read!



Reading to your children is a well-documented way of helping them learn multiple abilities. It develops verbal, auditory, and critical thinking skills, and piques their imagination and curiosity like nothing else can.

When you start reading to and with your child when he/she is as young as one year old, you're helping your little one take those first "mind steps" into a world of constant learning. After all, books are the gatekeepers to knowledge, and knowledge is the ultimate goal of lifelong learning.

What to Do:

- Set aside time each day to read to your children. Even if it's for only 20 minutes, your children will benefit from being read to.
- For younger toddlers, select vibrantly visual and richly textured sensory books. Older children will benefit from books that introduce new vocabulary and ideas.
- Interact with your little one while you read and once the story is finished. By asking open-ended questions about the story and characters, you're honing your child's short-term memory and critical thinking skills.

2. Play!



“Child’s play” is so much more than what it implies! Your active toddler’s love for play is how he/she learns about the world. So keep your child’s curious mind and body busy and stimulated with plenty of play—alone, with you, with toys, with friends, with imaginary friends, in the playground, and more! Introduce STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, Maths) toys to spark that love for learning in your little one. Don’t forget to nourish this activity with a balanced diet

What to Do:

- Bring your toddler to the playground often. Running around or swinging on monkey bars has obvious physical benefits. But toddlers also learn important life-skills in the playground, like patience and self-control, that they will retain (and develop) for life. Executive function skills like self-control (e.g. waiting in line for their turn) are also practised and honed.
- Get your toddler plenty of STEAM toys. These include blocks, puzzles, games, and art projects. Playing with these present mini-challenges to your toddler (“Why doesn’t this puzzle-piece fit?”) and encourages them to learn how to problem-solve (“I’ll try this piece instead”). The need to constantly look for new solutions to challenges is a strong trait of a lifelong learner. Refrain from providing the solution for your child.
- Give your little one plenty of opportunities to engage in different play scenarios, alone, with friends, with you. Each type of play introduces your child to a different skill-set that enhances learning. For example, solo play works your little one’s imagination like nothing else; social play is great for teaching children how to get on with others; and parent-child play is a great opportunity for you to teach your child many important “lessons,” including strengthening his/her executive function skills like working memory and cognitive flexibility.

Plus, it's a wonderful way to bond with each other!

3. Show your own passion for learning

Toddlers mimic what they see and hear. It's why they pick up our habits, both good and bad.

What to Do:

- Try to avoid being glued to electronic devices when your toddler is with you. Being connected to the world is useful, but be mindful of distractions and remember your little one will follow your example. If you have a book in hand instead, without a doubt, so will your little one!
- Join a public library with your toddler. There, aside from the obvious benefit of developing a lifelong love for books and reading, you can teach your toddler many other valuable life lessons. These include knowing how to behave in a public place, the importance of deadlines (returning books on time), and how to look after public property.
- Why not enrol in a course to learn a new skill yourself? We know it can be challenging to find time for this, but some thoughtful planning can result in life-changing benefits. Try a class you can do with your child together. Remember, you are your child's biggest role model when it comes to lifelong learning!

4. Encourage discussions

As your toddler grows older, his/her command of language grows, too. Your little one is learning how to express him/herself and describe the surrounding world.

However, we often have the habit of not engaging with our toddlers when they talk and ask questions. We nod and smile at their cute queries, we give them "yes/no" answers, or we lecture them. When we do these, we crush that intrinsic love of learning which is expressed by toddlers through questions and detailed descriptions

What to Do:

- Instead of giving your child a short answer to a question or saying, "Ask your mum/dad," "Yes," or "No," expand conversations by asking open-ended questions, thereby encouraging the ability for independent problem-solving.
- If you honestly do not know the answer to your tot's question, instead of inventing an answer or saying, "I don't know," bring your toddler to the library, or just do a quick Google search together, and show him/her how to find the answer to a question through research and query.

Preschoolers (Ages 4-5 Years)

5. Let your children make decisions



Preschoolers are self-declared adventurers. But as parents, we often limit what we let them do alone to reduce mess and accidents, and increase efficiency.

However, we inhibit our children's confidence from growing when we discourage them from making their own choices, and exploring within safe limits. Confidence in their own abilities is a key character trait of exceptional children who will never stop learning.

What to Do:

- Offer your preschooler options so he/she learns how to make an informed choice. Instead of insisting that your child must eat all the veggies on his/her plate, before making a meal, ask your child to select what he/she likes from two options: broccoli or beans? Spinach or cauliflower?
- Let your child go off to explore but set safe limits. If you are with your child in a park, show him/her the boundary of where it's safe to go alone. Explain what your child can and cannot do.
- Try not to hover over your child in everything he/she does. If your little one has a preschool project to complete, don't do it for him/her. Instead, guide your child through it, offering help when really needed.

6. Value your child's input and opinion

Preschoolers are able to understand a lot more at this age. And they become better at expressing how they feel about matters.

For children to develop confidence and also maintain the thirst to learn, they need to feel validated. They should be able to express their preferences, concerns or dislikes without feeling judged or not taken seriously. By creating an open and safe atmosphere for children to talk with us openly, we empower them by conveying the idea that their opinion is also important.

If children don't feel like their input matters, they may disengage from learning altogether. Effective communication of ideas and opinions is a key characteristic of a leader and a lifelong learner.

What to Do:

- When discussing family matters, such as planning a holiday or the weekend, involve your preschooler, too. Ask what he/she would like to do and why, and consider including at least one of these activities in your plans.
- When asking your preschooler about how his/her day was, don't stop at a "good/bad" answer. Encourage your little one to elaborate on why the day was good or bad. Ask your child to discuss his/her feelings, too: "What made you happy?" "Did anything make you sad? Why?"

7. Make learning enjoyable



When you make learning fun, your children are more likely to become lifelong learners. They will look forward to picking up fresh skills and gaining knowledge about new topics. Older teaching methods in schools relied on rote repetition and memorising information. But as we recollect from our school days, the classes we remember most fondly are the ones where we had the most fun. When you inject excitement into learning, your child will look forward to facing new challenges and

trying new things.

What to Do:

- Involve your preschooler in day-to-day activities like preparing meals, keeping safety in mind, of course. Cook a healthy meal together and ensure you talk to your child about the different nutrients in various ingredients. Encourage your child to think about how these help his/her body and brain.
- Match an activity like reading or writing with an actual experience. So, ask your child to read sign-boards when out and about. Or write his/her name on the beach!
- Bring your child to the museum or zoo, but make sure you interact with him/her and make the most of the many learning opportunities in such places. You can be sure your preschooler will eagerly look forward to the next visit to another similar place, to keep learning!

Primary schoolers (Ages 6-7 Years)

8. Focus on the learning, not on the results

When our children start school, they encounter many challenges, including assessments. Our reactions to the results of these have a significant impact on whether our children will become lifelong learners or not. If we focus too much on the results instead of the learning process, children become anxious about their performance, instead of enjoying what they learnt and thinking critically about how to apply it in real-world situations.

Ultimately, you want to communicate to your child that learning is more important than grades. As your child's innate curiosity is nourished, and he/she grows older, top grades will automatically follow as he/she develops into a lifelong learner and an exceptional child.

What to Do:

- Always ask your child what he/she learnt that day. By doing so, you help to solidify his/her knowledge and also show that you care more about your child than his/her performance.
- Never berate your children about poor grades. Instead, ask your child what he/she can do to improve. Then empower your child to do so. Remember to keep the encouragement flowing and you're bound to see an improvement.

9. Pay attention to your children's strengths



When children enter primary school, they are gradually exposed to a more intensive academic schedule. While we want our kids to become amazing in everything, they may struggle with certain subjects. Paying attention to our children's strengths motivates them to keep learning about something they are interested in.

It might seem natural to try to work on their weaknesses immediately to make up for lost ground. However, this can produce the opposite results and actually discourage your child from learning.

What to Do:

- Get your child's input by asking him/her about what he/she wants to learn. You might have your own ideas on which extracurricular activities your child should do. But when he/she is directly involved in his/her own learning, your child also eventually takes responsibility for his/her own education and ultimately becomes motivated to become a lifelong learner.
- Help address your child's weaknesses in a positive, pro-active way. You could do this by either breaking down the task and making it simpler and less intimidating for your child. Or, do the activities yourself and show your child that it is possible. This could be as simple as showing your child that broccoli isn't "yucky" by eating it yourself!
- Talk about your own struggles as a child, and tell your child about how you overcame these. There's nothing more motivating to a child than knowing that you—his/her role model—also faced challenges and successfully tackled them.

10. Reverse roles and get your child to teach

Your children learn so many new things at school. By encouraging them to “teach” you what they’ve learnt, you’re helping them reinforce and express their knowledge.

After all, teaching is integral to learning. If you are able to teach someone else a concept, you understand it fully and you gain the curiosity to know even more. Furthermore, your child will be able to understand any gaps in his/her knowledge in the process of explaining.

What to Do:

- Help your child become exceptional as a learner by asking him/her meaningful questions about what he/she is “teaching” you. If your child doesn’t know the answer, encourage him/her to research more on the topic and come to you with one.
- Ask your child how you can apply this knowledge in the real world. For example, “Wow, you learned about what plants need to grow at school today! Can you tell me how I can help my favourite plant in the garden to become healthier?”

11. Emphasise that learning never ends



Although you may have been applying all of the above in encouraging your child to become a lifelong learner, there’s nothing wrong with being direct and communicating with them the importance of learning...for life.

The greatest minds and thinkers of this world never stopped learning when the school

bell rang to mark the end of the day. And by reminding your children there is always a chance to learn, they will be encouraged to do more than what's expected of them—not to meet anyone else's expectations, but because they enjoy it.

What to Do:

- Talk to your children about the greatest lifelong learners in history, like Florence Nightingale and Walt Disney. Together with your little ones, read and research about such inspirational figures. Then, ask your kids to tell you about the similarities they see between themselves and these role models for lifelong learning. This way, you are inspiring your children to follow in the footsteps of these greats.
- Join classes in something you enjoy or want to learn more about. Tell your little one why you're doing so: "Mummy stopped school so long ago, but this doesn't mean I stop learning. I'm taking cooking classes because I love cooking, and also so I can learn how to make better meals for all of us!" You could even join a class with your child so that he/she observes first-hand how you—the most important role model in his/her life—continue to love learning even as an adult.

By showing your little ones the value of continuous learning, you are nurturing the exceptional in your child.

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