



## Helping Children Learn

Many researchers have studied how young children learn and how adults help them learn. When a child is given a task that is too easy, there is not much for him to learn and he will quickly get bored. If he is given a task that is too hard, he will get frustrated and lose interest.

It can be your caring, responsive, and positive interactions that will help keep a child interested, engaged, and excited about learning. Be aware of any cues the child displays, so you can “scaffold” or support learning and provide just the right level of difficulty and enough help for him to be able to succeed.

- **Tune into a child’s emotions and respond accordingly.** Tune into whether a child is playing around or working hard to accomplish a task. Respond in a way that is appropriate to her feelings. For example, join in her fun, admire her effort, sympathize with her frustration, or share her pride.
- **Follow a child’s lead.** Describe what a child is doing in a way that shows her you value her efforts and discoveries: *You shook that rattle really hard! It made a really loud noise.* Think about how you might enhance her play or help her achieve her goal.
- **Encourage persistence—and flexible thinking.** If a child is struggling, don’t solve the problem for her. Give clear feedback. Encourage her to try again or to try another way.
- **Make tasks easier.** You might adjust an object so it is easier to use, give fewer choices, provide physical or emotional support, start a task for a child, or offer a hint. Gradually pull back supports as children learn to do things all by themselves.
- **Talk with children about their ideas.** Extend conversations so you really understand children’s thinking. As you talk, introduce some new words, information, or concepts that build on their interests and ideas.
- **Use language that is just above a child’s level.** As toddlers begin to put words together, respond in short but full sentences. Use some interesting, impressive words that toddlers can repeat. Share books and stories with richer vocabulary and more complex sentences.
- **Model problem-solving techniques.** Think out loud as you plan, define a problem, imagine possible solutions, work step-by-step, or seek help.
- **Use questions to help children solve problems.** Encourage critical and creative thinking by asking questions such as *Why do you think that might be? How do you know? What might happen if . . .? What else could we try?*
- **Help children learn from more adept playmates.** Use your relationship with each child to help children connect. Then step back, but stay nearby in case children need more help.