



Little Scientists

Like little scientists, babies and toddlers try to figure out how the world works. When they make something interesting happen, they try to do it over and over again. Join in, marvel at, and encourage children's exploratory play so they can build the confidence they need to continue exploring and learning information about their world. Boost their learning through your words, actions, and responses to their questions—and have fun!

- **Provide safe and interesting places, objects, and materials** for children to explore with their hands, feet, mouths, whole bodies, and all of their senses. An uncluttered environment helps children focus on what interests them.
- **Set up materials that children can explore on their own.** Watch what captivates or puzzles a child. Give her words for the things she notices and the questions she seems to be asking. Ask yourself, "What can I do or say to understand what she might be thinking?"
- **Connect with a baby or young toddler by playing with similar objects.** Imitate the child's actions (roll a ball); then offer something new for the child to imitate (drop/bounce the ball).
- **Go outside.** Bring one or two toddlers outside and find a safe, clean spot on the ground. Lay on your backs and look at the sky and talk about what you see. Together name and describe things such as clouds, airplanes, and birds. Talk about their sounds, motions, and changes.
- **Explore natural materials.** With children no longer mouthing objects, explore rocks, leaves, seedpods, shells, wood, bark, moss, or other materials. Notice colors, textures, sounds, smells, and shapes as children investigate, arrange, and build with these materials.
- **Give children a chance to discover what's under the ground.** Be sure to look at what may be hiding in sidewalk cracks or under leaves and rocks.
- **Do texture rubbings with children.** Tape a sheet of paper to tree bark, leaves, concrete, etc. Show toddlers how to rub the texture with peeled chunky crayons or sidewalk chalk.
- **Help children make connections as you model self-talk while using interesting words.** For example, *My hands are all grimy and sticky. I am going to wash them before I read the book. I don't want to ruin the pages by making them all sticky and smudged with tree sap.*
- **Talk with toddlers about how things work.** Name the parts of an object and talk about how it's used it and what it does.
- **Help toddlers see how objects and events relate in space and time.** Use words like *between, before, because, heavier, inside, and on.*
- **Read nonfiction books with children to show them pictures of real things,** for example, *Global Babies* by The Global Fund for Children or *Animal Babies Around the House* by Vicki Weber. As you talk about a book, help children make connections to real-life experiences.