



## Wee Experts (5 - 6 years): How Children Learn

There are many ways of learning. Children learn by watching, by listening and especially by doing. All children go through several stages but there are differences between children within each stage. There are also differences in the length of time it takes for children to move from stage to stage.

Children do best in an environment which is interesting and where they feel loved and safe.

### Important areas of learning

The following areas of development are very important to young children's ability to learn and make the most of educational opportunities from birth onwards. They are all different parts of what children need to learn.

#### Self-esteem

This is very important – it is learning about who you are as a person and feeling good about yourself. Feeling valued, wanted and respected leads to feeling good about yourself and being confident.

Once children have this confidence they can try new things, explore their world, cope when things go a bit wrong and feel that they have a chance to do well. Build self-esteem by:

- Showing them that they are lovable and loved
- Supporting them in trying new things
- Showing them that you enjoy being with them and want to spend time with them
- Helping them learn new skills and praise them when they try these out

#### Social development

Young children are beginning to learn about feelings and how to get on with other people long before they can do this very well.

- Learn about feelings by giving feelings names, e.g. Saying "That makes you sad.... or happy..."
- Learn about feelings by explaining to them how others may feel, e.g. "It hurts my ears when you shout"
- Care for your own child's feelings by talking to them and telling them what you are doing and why and by letting them begin to help at home and be part of caring for the home

#### Cultural understanding

Children need to learn that being different is OK - we are all different in one way or another. Your children will learn from you to value all the different things they can learn from others. Your attitude to different cultures will make a big difference to the way your children treat people from a different culture

- By telling stories about your own family history and background and showing them, you are proud of it
- Talk about the differences and what we can learn from them
- Give your children opportunities to see and take part in cultural events - festivals, puppet shows, different foods and music



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### Communication

Communication is one of the most important parts of our daily life. It means understanding what we see, hear and read, and being able to give messages to others in ways they can understand. Children need words for thinking and learning.

- Have fun with words - say or sing rhymes, songs and jingles
- Read and tell stories from when they are very young. Even babies get value from listening to your voice.

One of the most important things you can do for your children is to talk with them and listen to them as they talk to you.

### Creativity

Creativity is a child's own special way of expressing ideas, thoughts and feelings. Young children are curious and full of ideas. Once they can move about they like to explore and do things in different ways. By accepting their ideas and the things they make, you are encouraging them to explore, take risks and have a go.

- Take them to entertainment for children - movies, face painting at the market, children's concerts
- Encourage them to sing and dance
- Provide boxes and dress-ups for pretend play
- Provide paper, paints and playdough

### Thinking

Thinking involves looking and listening, questioning, trying things out and making decisions. Children need time to be able to try things over and over until they can work things out.

- Talking about things as you do them, e.g. "It's a long way so we'll go on the bus" or "I'm taking my sweater off because it is hot"
- Giving them things to sort and match, e.g. coloured pegs or socks
- Doing puzzles
- Providing building toys so they can build things

### The environment

Children enjoy playing in and exploring their natural world - backyard, park and beach. At the same time, they are learning about their built world around them - roads, houses, shops, schools. They will learn from you if you tell them why you do things when you recycle, mow, weed or paint the house.

- Lots of this learning is messy play with sand, dirt and water. Making a mess can be an important part of learning
- Talk to them about trees, weather, birds, fish and animals
- Look for tiny insects that live in the garden - but don't encourage touching!
- Plant seeds and watch them grow
- Explore new places together like trying a new park or walking around a different block in your suburb

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