

# Nurturing Children's Talents

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Adults can nurture children's positive self-esteem by helping them discover what they are good at doing. Part of a child's self esteem comes from feeling competent and skilled at something she or he enjoys. You can play a big role in helping children to be successful and feel good about themselves.

A place to start is by creating opportunities for children to explore different objects, activities, and people. Early in life, children show personality traits and preferences for what they like and dislike. By planning learning opportunities with children's unique personality styles in mind, you nurture their positive feelings about themselves.

## The many ways of learning

Children learn about the world in many different ways. One educator, Howard Gardner, believes that children's ways of learning can be grouped into eight categories. To help children discover their personal abilities and learning preferences, you can provide opportunities that cover the eight differ-

ent types of learning. Some children have many interests and want to learn about a variety of things; other children are satisfied with one or two kinds of learning and want to focus mostly on them. All children are unique; what is important is that you help them to learn what they are good at, what they enjoy and what makes them feel good about themselves.

**1. Learning about logic and mathematics.** This category of learning emphasizes understanding and

organizing the world of objects and includes math, sorting objects by size and/or color and seeing patterns.

**2. Learning about language.** Language-based learning is about understanding and using spoken and written language. This category includes how children learn to explain themselves, to persuade others and to tell and write stories.

**3. Learning about music.** Learning about music centers on principles of music, such as rhythm, pitch, melody and tone quality. This might include how children learn the words and melody to a new song and how they play musical instruments.

**4. Learning about spatial relations.** This learning centers on seeing objects in the environment and recreating what was seen later in our minds. For example, teaching children about spatial relations may help them to find their classroom at school, to remember the location of a favorite spot in the woods, or to read and follow a road map.



## 5. Learning about physical control.

This type of learning helps children to control the movement of their bodies. Learning how to string beads, hold a crayon, kick a soccer ball, perform gymnastics or ride a bicycle are all examples of physical control.

## 6. Learning about others.

Learning about others helps children understand how to get along with others one-on-one, how to recognize the needs, thoughts and feelings of others, and how to get along in groups of children.

## 7. Learning about self.

Children also need to learn about themselves and to understand their own needs, thoughts, feelings and personal likes and dislikes.

## 8. Learning about nature.

Learning about nature helps children to recognize and understand characteristics of the natural world, such as animals, plants and the environment.

You can work with children to discover and nurture their personal learning strengths and abilities. Encourage them to practice and exercise their talents so that skills grow and improve. If you provide opportunities that touch on the different kinds of learning, children will recognize which activities come naturally, feel right and are satisfying.

## Children's personalities and the ways of learning

Recognizing children's unique personality styles can help adults to better understand children and to plan activities that children can learn from and enjoy. Research shows that a child's emotional style, activity level and social nature are present during the first few months of life and are unlikely to change much over time.

Consider these questions when

learning about a child's personality  
(*adapted from Buss and Plomin, 1984*):

### Emotional style

- Does the child tend to be somewhat emotional, whether positive and/or negative?
- Does the child get upset easily?
- Does the child react intensely when happy or upset?

When determining how well a child enjoys, or does not enjoy, a new learning experience, watch the child's emotional reaction. For example, a child who does not react strongly one way or the other after a new experience may need to be asked directly about whether or not she or he liked the activity. A child who is negatively reactive during new learning opportunities may require a few chances with the experience to see how well she or he likes something.

### Activity level

- Does the child move and run about quickly or slowly?
- Is the child immediately off and running in the morning?
- Does the child prefer quiet, inactive games instead of busy, active ones?

When planning learning experiences, keep in mind that activity levels vary among children. Some children are highly active and may favor trying new things that require large muscle movement and physical agility. Others may prefer object-oriented activities that require concentration and coordination of the small muscles in the hand.

### Social nature

- Does the child prefer to play with others rather than alone?
- Does the child make friends easily?
- Does the child find people more stimulating than anything else?

Some children enjoy learning through talking and sharing with others. Other children prefer to learn on their own through a process of trial and error. Some children favor a combination of both. Regardless of a child's preferred level of social interaction, with the help of caring adults, most children can learn to understand themselves and understand the needs, thoughts and feelings of others. Learning about others and about the self helps children to feel positive about themselves and their abilities to understand and get along with others.

All children are unique. You can recognize this by planning activities that take a child's personality into consideration. The traits described above are unlikely to change much with time, so you are best advised to work with a child's personality style rather than work to make changes in it.

## The importance of observing children

To nurture children's talents effectively, carefully watch how they react to learning opportunities.

"Children communicate with us through their eyes, the quality of their voices, their body postures, their gestures, their mannerisms, their smiles, their jumping up and down, their listlessness" (p. 5, Cohen, Stern and Balaban, 1983).

By observing children's behavior, you can learn what children prefer and what yields positive feelings. A child who can't stay on task during piano lessons and who gets angry when asked to practice may not be the best candidate for music lessons. ***Keeping a child involved in an unsatisfying activity may keep the child from discovering something more satisfying.*** A child who enthusiastically gets dressed and ready for soccer practice 15 minutes early and who talks  
(*continued on page 4*)

# The eight intelligences and activity ideas for children (birth to 12 years)

Activity ideas are listed below for each kind of learning. Try different activities on the basis of the child's age and the child's personality style. Record thoughts and ideas about new experiences, games and activities to try with children.

	Infants and toddlers	Preschool children	School-age children
<b>Logical and math-based</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Show black and white patterns</li> <li>Simple counting</li> <li>Sort small and large objects</li> <li>Provide structure in daily routines</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dominoes</li> <li>Go Fish card game</li> <li>Matching games</li> <li>Objects for sorting by size and color</li> <li>Point out patterns in daily routine (wake up, get ready for school, etc.)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sorry board game</li> <li>Checkers</li> <li>Card games (Go Fish, War)</li> <li>Talk about patterns in everyday life (school and work schedules)</li> </ul>
<b>Language-oriented</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Take turns in conversation</li> <li>Play in a face-to-face position</li> <li>Label the world and the child's experiences</li> <li>Elaborate on child's simple sentences ("Yes, the pizza is hot, blow on it before you eat it.")</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Read books</li> <li>Encourage storytelling</li> <li>Engage in early literacy activities (let child "write" thank-you letters, use wordless story books, encourage child to read street signs and food boxes)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Read and write books</li> <li>Ask for verbal explanations of child's thoughts and behaviors</li> <li>Provide joke and riddle books</li> <li>Create opportunities for child to write</li> <li>Visit the library</li> </ul>
<b>Musical</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Play music</li> <li>Sing songs</li> <li>Change tone of voice when talking; use "motherese"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide musical instruments</li> <li>Have parades with groups of children</li> <li>Sing songs</li> <li>Write songs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Music lessons</li> <li>Sing in groups</li> <li>Attend musical performances</li> <li>Provide child with own radio and/or tape player</li> </ul>
<b>Spatial</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hang mobiles within child's sight, yet out of child's reach</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Build, build, build</li> <li>Play hide and seek with toys, provide verbal clues</li> <li>Puzzles</li> <li>Memory games</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Draw maps</li> <li>Read maps</li> <li>Talk about different places you have visited</li> <li>Write stories about places you have visited</li> </ul>
<b>Body and physical control</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rattles and other toys for baby to grasp</li> <li>Encourage reaching and self-produced locomotion (crawling, pulling self up, walking)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tricycles</li> <li>Dancing</li> <li>Play with balls</li> <li>Jump ropes</li> <li>Crafts, such as simple sewing and easel painting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Gymnastics</li> <li>Soccer</li> <li>Dance</li> <li>Crafts</li> <li>Baseball</li> <li>Jump ropes</li> </ul>
<b>About others</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Label other people and narrate what they are doing</li> <li>Make opportunities for small group play with age-mates</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Encourage peer play</li> <li>Talk about feelings and thoughts of others</li> <li>Provide clothes and props for role play and fantasy play</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Encourage conflict resolution and peer problem solving</li> <li>Talk about needs, thoughts and feelings of others</li> <li>Participate in organized group activities (e.g., Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts and 4-H)</li> </ul>
<b>About self</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tell child what you like about him or her</li> <li>Label child's feelings and experiences</li> <li>Provide consistent direction and guidance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide consistent guidance and direction</li> <li>Talk with child about likes and dislikes</li> <li>Discuss child's feelings and the reasons for them</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Help and encourage child to pursue hobbies and interests</li> <li>Encourage child to talk about feelings and reasons for them</li> </ul>
<b>Nature</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Carefully acquaint child with the outdoors</li> <li>Slowly introduce pets</li> <li>Talk about the earth, plants and animals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Plan outdoor adventures (short hikes and bike rides)</li> <li>Plant seeds</li> <li>Encourage recycling</li> <li>Can assist with pet care</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>More outdoor adventures</li> <li>Visit nature centers</li> <li>Plant a small garden</li> <li>Encourage recycling</li> <li>Can take more responsibility for pet care</li> </ul>

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endlessly about the most recent game may have found a wonderful place to nurture his or her skills and interests.

## Conclusion

You can nurture children's learning and talents by creating opportunities for children to explore different objects, activities, and people. When children participate in different learning experiences, keep track of their behavior and ask them about their thoughts and feelings. Helping children to discover what they are good at promotes healthy self esteem and is essential to their future success.

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