

Early Childhood

All young children are curious and ready learners. But, some young children have advanced strengths and talents beyond their chronological-aged peers.

Children may show advanced academic skills in literacy or math, for example, but not have the fine motor skills to write stories they can tell, or the social skills to problem solve without tantrums. Parents need to be able to nurture growth in strength areas and support skill development in others.

To nurture your children's abilities, seek environments and communities where they can engage in creative and critical thinking and advanced-level academic work, both inside and outside of school.

At home, if your child is attracted to music, set up a space in your house where she can explore instruments, listen to music, or create a "band."

At school, if your kindergartner is an avid reader but the teacher is focusing on the "letter of the week," share with your child's teacher what types of books she reads at home. Seek a kindergarten environment where books are leveled according to difficulty and children are encouraged to work at their level of mastery.

If your child is advanced mathematically and knows how to calculate beyond his age mates, talk to the teacher about ways your child might solve more complex and applied mathematical problems in class (e.g., drawing to scale an architect's rendition of a building).

Beyond academics, young children also need opportunities to express themselves, interact with a diverse group of learners, and develop social skills through play as part of their learning. Just because they're ahead of other children their age in reading or writing does not mean that they don't share similar interests with children their age.



FOOD FOR THOUGHT

» Try to avoid focusing on labels.

» Ask yourself, "How can I help my child grow?" Ask your child's teachers, "How are you (in what areas) challenging my child?"

» Indulge in your child's interests, and expose her to new ones.

» Find parent groups or online support where you will find other parents to support you and your child's growth and development.

» Praise the processes of learning and the effort of taking on new challenges, rather than focusing on what the child can do or produce.



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QUESTIONS PARENTS OFTEN ASK

How do I know if my young child is gifted?

The term “gifted” includes a range of definitions: Some experts refer to giftedness as advanced cognitive ability; others broaden the concept to include strengths in a number of multiple domains or “intelligences;” others view giftedness as a social construct.

Definitions of gifted also vary across states and school districts; a child labeled “gifted” in one district may not meet the criteria in another. Rather than trying to determine whether or not your young child is gifted, experts suggest that it’s better to know your child’s advanced abilities and focus on how his learning needs can be met.

Parents must be careful not to “bestow” the giftedness label on their children inferring that intelligence is fixed. Parents should praise the processes of learning—the effort of taking on new challenges and the discovery of what is new and uncomfortable—not what the child can do or produce.

How should my child’s learning needs be assessed?

As your child’s first teacher, you have valuable information about your child’s interests, strengths, talents, and challenges. Be open, honest, and share what you know about your child with her teacher:

- Provide work samples of your child’s writings or drawings.
- Share stories of when your child finds solutions to problems at home.
- Be alert for special needs in the social and emotional domains.

If you suspect a learning or behavioral problem—or a mismatch between what you know your child can do and what he produces in school—ask the school district to assess your child.

What can I do to nurture the strengths of my children?

Most importantly, listen to and observe your children. Nurture their strengths by:

- Taking note of their interests and engaging in conversation.
- Being a good role model for problem solving, exploring interests, and developing positive relationships with friends and family.
- Exposing your children to the arts, and offering them multiple ways of expressing their ideas.
- Allowing them to dabble in their interest areas, helping them find answers to their questions and providing opportunities to master new skills.
- Exploring community resources, including libraries, community centers, after school programs, museums, ecology and nature centers, art and dance studios, local businesses, and cultural festivals/groups.

The greater a young child’s exposure, the more he can discover new talents in a variety of domains.

FOR MORE INFO

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