

# INSPIRING YOUNG HIGH LEARNING POTENTIAL CHILDREN

## Summary

Young children with high learning potential may have strong passions that naturally lead them into areas of learning, or to enjoy doing many different things. This advice sheet will help parents to nurture their children's interests and inspire them to learn something different.

## Introduction

After learning that their young child has high learning potential, many parents feel a huge sense of responsibility for making sure they are doing everything they can to support their child. The strategies presented below provide parents with a set of tools to start them on their way to nurturing and supporting their children's abilities.

## Follow the Child's Lead

What are the child's passions? What does he or she seem to be good at? Provide opportunities for children to learn about things they enjoy or are good at. For example, if a child loves outer space, go to the library and borrow books about rockets and the solar system, both fiction and non-fiction. Get games and puzzles that are space-themed. Visit the National Space Centre and other museums with relevant displays. Do crafts that are along the same lines, such as building rockets or papier-mâché planet models.

Similarly, if your child is good at music you can provide opportunities for them to make homemade musical instruments, go to young children's musical learning classes, learn an instrument or play musical games on the internet.

## Introduce the Child to New Things

While it is important to provide opportunities for children to work with their interests and strengths, it is also important to expose them to new things. Young children are only aware of the experiences they have had. They do not know about things that they have never seen or done. They need to experience new things to find out whether they like them and could excel at them.

No child should be forced to try new things, but children can be encouraged to have a go at different things in safe and supportive environments. Trying out new things may also allow children to experience failure in a positive way, learning from setbacks to problem-solve and try different approaches next time.

## Be Creative

Young children with high learning potential are often able to solve problems of greater complexity than other children of the same age, and they love the thinking process this involves. Creativity is essentially a form of problem-solving; but it is a special type of problem-solving. It involves problems for which there are no easy answers: that is, problems for which popular or conventional responses do not necessarily work. Creativity involves adaptability and flexibility of thought.

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To encourage children to be creative, parents can allow them to find their own solutions to everyday problems. For example, what should the child wear on a given day? This problem brings in several factors, including the weather forecast, what activities are planned that day and what there is available to wear. Allow children to think creatively about this by discussing all the alternatives and not judging their responses. Have fun talking together about the different possibilities. Then, decide together what the best solution would be.

## Have a Variety of Resources at Home

These resources need not be expensive or complicated. They just need to allow young high learning potential children to develop their interests or be exposed to new ones. The more open-ended activities that can be done with the resources, the better. For example, to encourage artistic talent, all you need initially are simple paint brushes and a box of paints, plain white paper, coloured pencils, and other basic supplies. Parents can create boxes of materials like this for children to use whenever they are interested. It is amazing how many hours of fun young high learning potential children can have with old clothes that the family may have thrown out!

Many young high learning potential children are very spatially aware and enjoy building things with ease. Make available building bricks such as wooden bricks and Lego Duplo. Allow your child to use blankets and cushions to create dens and imaginary scenes around the house. Household materials such as the insides of toilet rolls and yoghurt pots can be saved to use in junk modelling, so provide glue, Sellotape and sticky tape too. Why not find a big box and fill it with things that would otherwise be thrown away (but don't forget to wash them first!), or have two boxes; one for junk modelling materials and one for dressing up clothes.

## Look for Outside Activities

Visiting places of interest outside the home will mean children will be able to try new things and learn about the world around them. In addition, activities for children are often run by museums, zoos, community theatres, art galleries and craft centres, and many start at a young age. Every region of the UK has places of historical interest that parents and children could visit together. Some also have botanical gardens, planetariums, and other places of interest. To find out what is available in a local area, call or visit the nearest Tourist Information Centre or use the [Days Out With The Kids](#) website. Most local libraries also keep information about places to visit and events in the area.

Attending a class to develop a talent such as drama, dance or music will enhance young children's lives and may lead to a long term interest. Many of these offer opportunities for pre-school children. Learning a musical instrument, as long as the child is able to concentrate for the duration of a lesson and will be willing to practice, can challenge them and allow them to experience the effort needed in learning a skill, which is not often experienced by high learning potential children when they can do most things easily.

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## Activities

Below is a selection of activity ideas that parents can use with young children with high learning potential. They are activities that are open-ended and, therefore, will have a very personal outcome depending on the child's abilities.

- Scrapbooks – Help children to create a scrapbook, either of a particular time in their lives, such as a holiday, or as an ongoing project. Let them decorate the front cover of the book, perhaps including a photo. Save travel tickets, leaflets, photos and entrance tickets to add to the book, encouraging children to write, draw and arrange to their heart's content. This will be a lovely book to look back at as they get older.
- Time Capsule – Create a family time capsule by saving an old ice cream tub or shoe box. Ask children to decorate the outside, stick blank paper for them to draw, stick or write on and be sure to include the date. Decide together what to put inside. Some ideas are: a picture of each member of the family including pets, a recent front of a newspaper, a CD with pictures or music of the day on, an account of a typical day for the children involved, a card received from a family member or friend, anything else that would be appropriate. Then find somewhere to keep it where it will be forgotten about, such as the top of a wardrobe or in the loft. It doesn't have to remain hidden for years – children will enjoy looking at what is inside after as little as six months!
- Artistic Creations – Have a ready supply of art materials such as washable non-drying felt tips, coloured chalks, a large drawing pad, glue and scissors, scraps of fabric and ribbon, pipe cleaners and things to stick such as buttons, sequins and colourful scraps of paper. Parents can also save colourful card packets, bottle tops and mesh to help towards the little ones' creations. Show them how to use the glue and scissors to make colourful collages, and then let them create their own designs.
- Photograph Frenzy – Allow children the use of a digital camera whilst out and about. You may be surprised at their results! If they need a little encouragement ask them to find a colour, such as orange, and get them to take pictures of all the different kinds of orange they can see. They will be improving their colour recognition skills and you will have fun together looking at the pictures when you get back home. To take this activity further, download the photos and help children create a collage either on screen or by printing the pictures and sticking and glueing.
- Treasure Chest – Develop a treasure chest of everyday and unusual objects. Can you tell a story together using all the objects in the chest? Together you could tell a story and take it in turns pulling out the objects and weaving them into the story. Why not change the contents each time to make it more fun!
- Think Like a Scientist – The start of all scientific experiments is the question *what happens if I...?* Using the three keywords Predict, Observe, Explain, parents can get children thinking like a scientist. 'Predict' is saying what you think will happen, such as "if I knock this pen off the table it will fall on the floor". Encourage children to think of all the possibilities, such as it may bounce, it could break, it could roll, it could make a noise, etc. 'Observe' is to try out the theory (your prediction) to see what happens. Encourage children to use all of

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their senses to observe what happens and you could have fun recording this together in a variety of ways, such as in a journal, drawing what happens or recording it on a mobile phone camera. 'Explain' is the tricky part! Ask children whether they can explain what happened and add to their response through your own knowledge or by research. The pen fell off the table because gravity pulled it towards the floor; it made a noise because there are different types of energy and the movement energy converted into sound energy when it hit the floor. The explanation can provoke further discussion about what else acts in this way (in this case, a swing is also pulled towards the floor by gravity and a drum converts movement energy into sound energy).

## Further Information

PA502 Young High Learning Potential Children at Home	The home is the place where much of children's formative years are spent and parents are their first teachers. This advice sheet provides guidance to parents on giving young children with high learning potential the best start at home.
<i>The Bright Stuff: Playful Ways to Nurture Your Child's Extraordinary Mind</i> by Jane Simister	This book offers a treasure trove of imaginative, playful and above all fun activities, games and exercises that you can use to preserve nurture and enhance your child's extraordinary potential, making sure it does not remain untapped.
<i>Playing Smart: The Family Guide to Enriching, Offbeat Learning Activities for Ages 4-14</i>	Open this book to find hundreds of possibilities – from brain benders to mind-challenging physical activities, from everyday geography to celebrations of the senses, from journal journeys to experiments for budding gardeners.
<a href="http://happyhooligans.ca">http://happyhooligans.ca</a>	<b>Happy Hooligans</b> offers craft and science project suggestions for preschoolers.
<a href="http://babbledabledo.com">http://babbledabledo.com</a>	<b>Babble Dabble Do</b> is a website promoting nurturing curious kids and strong family bonds through creative projects.
<a href="http://www.activityvillage.co.uk">www.activityvillage.co.uk</a>	<b>Activity Village</b> includes lots of different activities for you to do with your child.

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