



What adults can do to support learning

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Adult learning behaviours: what can we do?

Babies come into this world ready to learn from the adults around them. Watch this video to see how a child reacts when the adult interacts and when they stop interacting with them: [Still face experiment](#)

The video shows that children are looking for us to tell them that everything is ok, that they are doing it right, that you are happy with them. Research indicates that children’s readiness to learn in the future is as much affected by **how** we interact with them, as it is by **what** we do. For example,

- ◆ The presence of quality adult teaching behaviours are a better predictor of children’s cognitive functioning at age 4 years than children’s own cognitive test scores from earlier in their childhood, or their mother’s own education level.
- ◆ Studies show that it is possible to enhance adults’ teaching behaviours through training, which affects the mental development of children.

Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs

Abraham Maslow described a hierarchy of needs common to all human beings. The hierarchy demonstrates that these basic needs must be met before children are able to focus on learning. These needs can be seen in the diagram and include:

Physiological needs—These are things like food, sleep, warmth and shelter. We all know how difficult it can be to focus when we are hungry or over tired, so it important to ensure these basic needs are met to set children up for learning.

Safety needs—When children know they are protected and that no harm will come to them, they are more able to explore ideas without worrying about getting it wrong. They are also more willing to ask for help or willing to give something new a go.

Belongingness—Connectedness and experiencing a feeling of belonging promotes learning. Here we want to foster a sense of being comfortable and connected to others, being accepted, respected and loved.

Esteem—is about having respect for yourself and for others. This happens when children have the opportunity to see themselves as competent and capable learners. The environment you should be aiming for is one where children are offered new tasks that they can master, where their efforts are recognised and they can see themselves as capable individuals.

Self-actualisation— is the final stage and focusses on reaching the stage where you feel purpose-driven and fulfilled.



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Model being a thinker, showing that you don’t always know, are curious and sometimes puzzled, and can use your thinking skills to find out the answer.



What are these teaching behaviours?



One of the simplest ways to nurture a growth mindset is through the language we use. A few choice phrases can have big impact on how children view their learning



Focusing

This involves directing a child's attention.

It helps children to learn skills which are needed throughout life, e.g. working in a busy office, talking on the phone in the supermarket, identifying the key parts of a story when comparing two pieces of literature in an exam.

Examples include: bringing objects closer, covering distractions, repeating, sequencing, grouping, helping the child focus, see, hear and feel clearly.

Questions to ask a child:

"Can you point to the part of the picture we are talking about?" – identifying most important elements of a task

"Which bricks might we use first to build the tower?" - sequencing

"Which are the toys that float in the water tray?" - grouping

"If we cover the other bits, does that help us to see the bit we are talking about?" – covering up distractions

Exciting

Expressing verbal or non-verbal excitement in order to spark a child's interest and engagement.

We all engage better with something when we have an emotional response and a natural curiosity/interest.

Verbal Excitement:

"Oh wow, let's look and see what we have here!"

"Oh what does that sound like? What do you think it could be?"

Non-verbal Excitement:

Smiling

Opening eyes wider in surprise

Clapping hands

Remember what happens to babies when the adult stops communicating positive emotion in the still face experiment?

Expanding

Extending a child's knowledge or understanding beyond what is immediately necessary.

This helps to enhance thinking and language development and empowers children to examine evidence and come to their own conclusions. It also gives the chance to hear different viewpoints and sources of evidence and allow the adult to check out thinking.

Expanding helps children to understand that there can be more than one answer – a key skill for life.

Examples include: explaining, elaborating, highlighting the thinking skills being used, linking to past or future experiences, requesting an expansion of ideas.

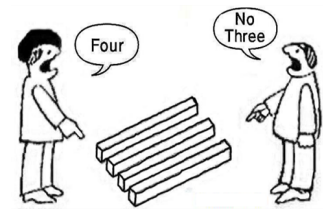
Questions to ask a child:

"Does it remind you of anything?"

"What makes you say that?"

"What do you see that makes you say that?"

"What do you know that makes you say that?"



Encouraging

Expressing verbal or non-verbal satisfaction with a specific aspect of the child's behaviour which has or will contribute to success.

Examples include: praising in a way that is meaningful for the child; specifying what the child has done that has led to success; providing immediate feedback to the child.

Our mindset impacts our learning and all children start life with a growth mindset. The type of encouragement we give can influence whether they retain this growth mindset.

Click on this link to watch a video about the impact of praise on mindset [Mindset & Praise \(Dweck\)](#)



The Language of adult-child interactions: Change Your Words, and Change Your Mindset

<p>"I can't do this!"</p> <p><i>You can't do this <u>yet</u></i></p>	<p>"I'm really good at this"</p> <p><i>You're on the right path</i></p>	<p>"This is too hard"</p> <p><i>Let's chat about the things that will help you</i></p>
<p>"I got everything right"</p> <p><i>Good effort, I'm looking forward to making it even more tricky next time!</i></p>	<p>"I just keep forgetting how to do it"</p> <p><i>Let's think about how we can train your brain.</i></p>	<p>"I didn't get the right answer"</p> <p><i>It's no fun when we get things right all the time. Mistakes help us learn new things.</i></p>

One of the simplest ways to nurture a growth mindset is through the language we use. A few choice phrases can have big impact on how children view their learning.

Regulation Behaviour

Behaviours that model, demonstrate or tell the child how to regulate their behaviour in order to succeed. For example: Regulating speed, accuracy, force, sequence of activities.

Before a child can self-regulate they need another person to co-regulate with them. Caregivers help children develop awareness to recognise sensations, states and feelings. Children with attachment difficulties can become dysregulated easily and need adult support to co-regulate before they can effectively self-regulate.

The way in which we, as adults, model our own regulation of behaviour has an extremely powerful impact on how children learn to do this. Click on this video to find out more: [Children See Children Do](#)



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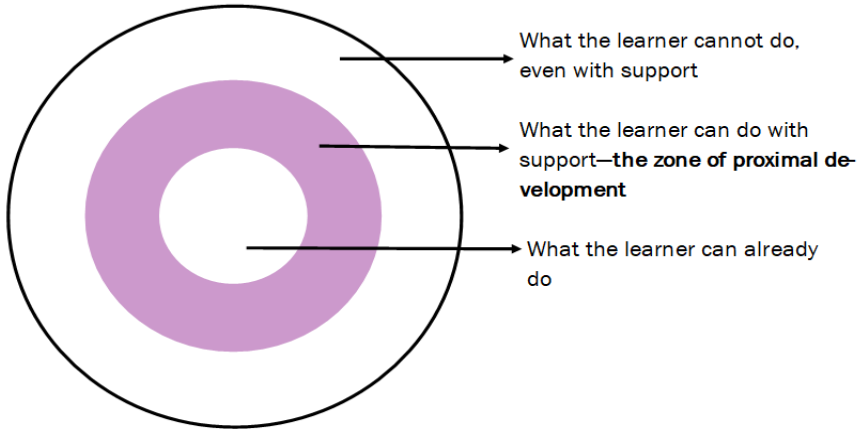


Get in the zone– The Zone of proximal

Psychologist Lev Vygotsky introduced the concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD) as a way of looking at progressing children's learning and development. The ZPD is the difference between a child's current level of competence, working on their own, and their potential level of competence if supported by an adult or more experienced child. In other words, it is the difference between what they can do now and what they would be able to do with some help.



Can a swimming instructor teach you to swim by talking about how good a swimmer he/she is?
How can children learn to think without given the opportunity?



Working within the ZPD is when children develop their skills best. If a task is too easy, it won't push them. If it is too difficult they can't achieve success and learn from it. Children need to experience some success or progress to keep them motivated and engaged. The key is about finding that right level of challenge and support that will help children move forward with their learning, but not making things too difficult that the task is beyond them.

Say, for example, your child can complete a 50 piece jigsaw puzzle by themselves. Once they do this a few times they are likely to get bored and not want to do it any more. You could buy another 50 piece puzzle and they may continue to develop their jigsaw skills, but they will likely master it quickly and get bored. This is what they can already do.

You could up the game by getting a 100 piece puzzle and leave them to it, but that is quite a big leap and there is a good chance they won't succeed. Some help from an adult or older child will keep them engaged and learning. The adult or older child could be suggesting strategies to try rather than doing it for them—what colour is it? Have a look at the picture. Is it a corner piece? With this help there is a good chance the child will master the new puzzle—this is their zone of proximal development.

If you had gone for a 500 piece puzzle it is likely they would have given up as it was too hard or overwhelming, even with support. This is the area where they cannot do the task even with support.



The best thing to do is to focus on what your child can do right now, and not worry about what their sibling did at their age or what their friends can do. ZPD is all about working together—cooperation and collaboration. It is about helping children to enhance their skills through support and suggestions rather than instruction and direction. No matter what the task, find out what they can already do then provide enough challenge and support to prompt improvement, but not so much that they get frustrated or fail—that's when you're in the zone.



Mediated Learning



Mediated learning is a special quality interaction between a learner and someone else and is about how these interactions can support learning in the most efficient and effective way. When your child becomes old enough to begin learning tasks and begin their academics there are some ways to consider how much help and support to provide. Generally we have a natural urge to step in and do things for our children, especially if we are in a hurry or your child is finding something particularly difficult. It's always easier to do it ourselves. See below the levels of assistance to provide—try starting with the step 1 first and move through them slowly. By allowing them to do the work, you are developing their capacity to think and learn!



Step 1: Encourage them to identify the problem

- ◆ What do you see?
- ◆ What do you think you are supposed to do?
- ◆ Can you tell me about the problem?

Step 3: Suggest an approach/strategy

- ◆ I wonder if it would work if you....
- ◆ What about trying to.....
- ◆ I have an idea, but you might think of a better one
- ◆ Lets try this....

Step 5: Provide part of a response

- ◆ What if we put ___ here, then do you see what comes next?
- ◆ I'll do this part, then you finish
- ◆ What part do you want help with?

Step 2: Help them to think about their approach to the task

- ◆ What do you think you could do to solve this?
- ◆ What will you do first?
- ◆ Do you have any ideas of how to start?
- ◆ What strategy do you think might work?

Step 4: Lead your child to a response

- ◆ Look at the example, now let's try that method.
- ◆ In what ways does your work match the model?
- ◆ Show me what part you can do.
- ◆ Let's start here and see if you can do it.

Step 6: Model the response and provide another opportunity

- ◆ Watch carefully while I do this. You think about why I am doing it this way and explain what parts you can do when I finish.
- ◆ Are you ready to do this on your own?
- ◆ What part can I help you with?

Learning Pit

The 'Learning Pit' concept is a helpful analogy to help your children understand why finding things challenging and tricky can actually enhance their learning. It was created by James Nottingham and it is great for helping children to think and talk about their learning and also to visualise their learning journey. The core values of the learning pit are:

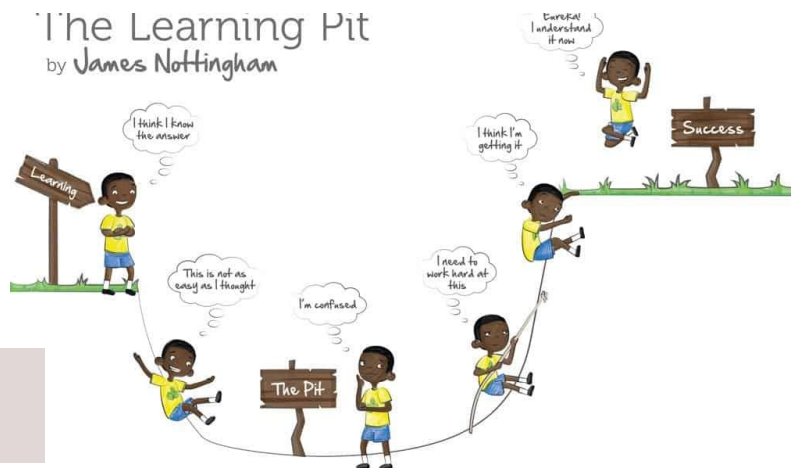
1. Children are generally more interested in learning when others around them are curious and that it is ok to say 'I'm not sure'
2. We should be willing to admit or point out our own errors
3. Learning is enhanced by participation in guided inquiry
4. High quality learning comes from making connections and understanding relationships between ideas. Being in the Pit compels us to make these links
5. Knowledge, understanding, skills and attitudes transcend school subject categories. Therefore attention should be given to the transferability and connectedness of what is learnt
6. Everyone who takes part in lessons involving the Learning Pit should aim to be thoughtful, reflective, supportive and reasonable. Nottingham believes that within teaching and learning, personal qualities should not be overlooked and that these kinds of virtues tend to be developed in the Pit.
7. Most lessons involving the Pit will result in agreement about the 'right' answer but Nottingham says there are occasions where (often in philosophical questions) no right answer is achievable but this doesn't make the experience any less valid. It is the process of thinking together, reflecting and giving reasons that is at the heart of learning.

Have a look at this YouTube video which explains the learning pit:

[The Learning Pit](#) by James Nottingham



Refer to [Growth mindset leaflet](#) for more information



Cognitive Feedback

- ◆ When giving feedback try and think about the cognitive or thinking skills they used
- ◆ Make your comments about the skills or approach they used to solve the problem "You drew a picture to help show you show to do it, that was a good choice!"
- ◆ Praise with cognitive feedback is more effective for enhancing learning skills than just praise alone
- ◆ When children know how and why they are correct, they can transfer these skills to other situations

As children grow and develop you will be able to ask them more and more questions. It is important to allow children some time to think about your questions and provide their answers. In order to develop your child's thinking skills then try and set aside the time when they are working on a problem or activity and use the questions below and allow them time to think about the problem. Try using the first three questions as much as possible.

Good questions to ask

1. What do you see?
2. What is the problem?
3. What is your plan?
4. When have you done something like this before?
5. Yes, that's right, but how did you know it was right?
6. When is another time you needed to....?
7. Can you think of another way we could do this?
8. Why is this one better than that one?
9. How can you find out?
10. How is X different/the same as Y?



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We value your feedback, please complete our short survey by scanning the QR code.



Further information and resources

Regulation behaviour [Children See Children Do](#)

Click on this link to watch A Study on Praise and Mindset by Carol Dweck [Mindset & Praise \(Dweck\)](#)

Click this link to see [The still face experiment](#)

[The Learning Pit](#) by James Nottingham

Click this link for formation on the [Zone of Proximal Development](#)

Click this link for Information on [Mediated Learning Experience](#)



The [Thinking skills leaflet](#) can be found here

The [Growth mindset leaflet](#) can be found here

[Transforming lives through reading and writing - Scottish Book Trust](#)

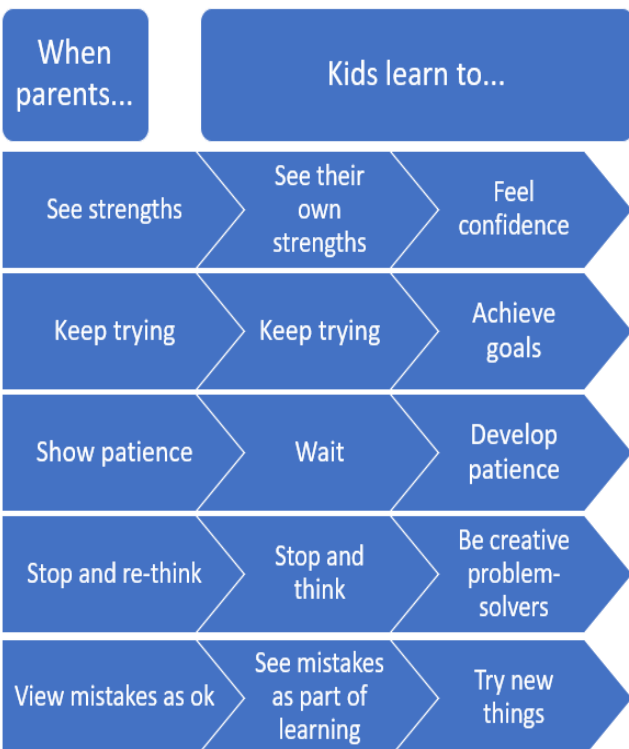


[Read, Write, Count - Scottish Book Trust](#)

Even a four month old child can detect when you are asking a question by recognising the change in your voice as it goes up at the end.



Being a positive role model



Imagine
With all your mind,
Believe
With all your heart,
Achieve
With all your might.

GOAL SETTING

- S**pecific
- M**easurable
- A**chievable
- R**ealistic
- T**imely

