

Exploration

What is Exploration?

Your baby puts everything in her mouth. Your toddler drops her cup off the tray of her high chair over and over again. Your preschooler is exploring new ways to climb the furniture. What is going on here? In each case, the child is exploring the world – and in the process, learning how things work.

Exploration is an essential part of how a young child learns to relate to others and to the things around them.

Starting even before birth, babies begin to develop the ability to think, draw conclusions, make predictions, look for explanations, and even conduct experiments to understand their surroundings.

Exploration is as simple as a baby putting toys into and out of a bowl, a toddler repeating an action after a parent has said “no,” or a preschooler running out of sight. Each is learning by testing – the world, you, and their own abilities.

Why Exploration Matters

Exploration matters because it establishes a life-long pattern for learning.

Knowledge builds on prior knowledge, so if your child is unable to lay the groundwork for certain skills in early childhood, she will have a much more difficult time with the skill later. For example, if a child fails to learn strategies to calm down when upset, it will be very difficult to do later on.



What Parents Can Do

THINK ABOUT SAFETY FIRST!

- ★ Babies and toddlers don't know what is dangerous and what is safe. Parents and caregivers must make their environment safe for exploration. Baby-proof your child's environment
- ★ Always pay attention, and be ready to warn your child about danger.

NEXT, THINK ABOUT YOUR CHILD'S VIEW OF THE WORLD

- ★ **Be patient.** Children of all ages learn through exploration, so do your best to remain patient.



- ★ **Find ways to stay interested as your child explores.** Research tells us that a parent's reaction to a baby's explorations will help determine whether or not he will continue a particular activity. In most situations parents become bored with an exploration activity long before the child does. So try to keep your facial expressions and body language showing interest and excitement.
- ★ **Include your interests in your child's exploration.** Toddlers in particular love to be included. For example, if you love gardening, give your child a small shovel and invite her to work alongside you.
- ★ **Be creative.** Give your child new experiences to try. For example, if he loves putting sand in a bucket, encourage him to use water instead. This helps him develop creativity and feel good about trying new things.
- ★ **Slow down!** See the world through your child's eyes and at his pace – you will both enjoy it.
- ★ **Don't expect perfection – from anyone!** Exploration will certainly include challenges for both you and your child. Your child will encounter things he wants to try but cannot, and you will almost certainly be faced with the occasional mess to clean up.
- ★ **Expect some frustration.** Remember that your child is testing to learn how the world works; the testing is not an attempt to drive you crazy!