

Focus on Equity

Family Activities

At the University of Washington's Institute for Learning & Brain Sciences (I-LABS), our research tells us that children's earliest experiences influence their developing identities. As communities nationwide wrestle with systemic racism and inequities, we are committed to ensuring children's experiences and needs are included in this important work.

We've joined with Vroom® to develop this set of activities. Vroom provides science-based tips to turn shared everyday moments into Brain Building Moments. These resources are designed to inspire families and communities to incorporate conversations about race, equity, and basic fairness into our everyday interactions with young children.



Celebrating Multilingualism

Help all children celebrate multilingualism with these research-based activities.



Bias in Childhood

Explore tips to help children counteract the negative impact of social bias.



Talking About Race

What we do and say matters. Try these activities to start talking to children about race.



Representation in STEM

Discover fun ways to help all children get engaged and feel like STEM is for them too.



Learning is for Everyone

Use these ideas to help create learning environments where children can be motivated and curious learners.

Celebrating Multilingualism

Learning more than one language has social, cultural, and cognitive benefits. Language is a part of culture, and learning multiple languages helps children build their identities and understand multiple ways of knowing and being. Use these research-based activities to help all children celebrate the power of multilingualism.

Talk it Out

Language, culture, and identity are intertwined. As children learn language, they build knowledge about how things work and who they are. Help your child develop a strong foundation in the language(s) you speak at home.

To support children, connect the words they are learning to their experiences. Children learn best when what they are learning is meaningful to them.



Multiplying Words

When your child starts to say words or make sounds that could be words, connect them to more words. If they say "nose," you can say, "There's your nose and there's mine." If they say "beep, beep," you can say, "The horns on the car go beep, beep." Later you can ask, "What sound do cars make?"

Brainy Background

Children learn to speak by hearing you connect the sounds they make with words. And they learn more words when you add your words to theirs. In this way their brains become more efficient and faster at processing sounds—the building blocks of speech.

Suggested Age 12 months - 2 1/2 years

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Sort & Clean

Encourage your child to sort objects during cleanup. Talk about what you're doing: "All of the small lids go into the little bowl and the big lids go into the big bowl." Then mix it up and ask them to put the small objects in the big bowl. You can also sort by shape or color.

Suggested Age 18 months - 4 years

Brainy Background

Being able to group things by size or color is an important skill. When you switch the rules of the game, you're helping them learn how to think flexibly, use self-control and not go on autopilot.

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Switch it Up

Learning more than one language is linked to improved flexible thinking skills, the ability to switch between tasks and sets of rules. Everyone can improve these skills, but multilingual experience provides natural practice.

As children learn two languages, they often mix them together. Code-mixing is not a sign of confusion, but an indication that children are successfully building two vocabularies.

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Bias in Childhood

Biases based on race, ethnicity, nationality, and language begin to emerge before kindergarten. Children notice differences all around them, including differences in how people act and treat others. Use these research-based tips to help children process the differences they observe and counteract the negative impact of bias.



Body Language

Practice using gestures with your child as another way to communicate. You can wave your hand and say "hi!" or shake your head and say "no." Or you can clap your hands and say "yay!" See if they will mimic your actions and sounds. Try going back and forth like a conversation.

Brainy Background

Many children use gestures before they speak. When you show your child how bodies and words work together, you teach them how to communicate. You also help them make connections between words and actions, an important part of talking, reading, and writing.

Suggested Age 0 - 2 years

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Do As I Do

It's not just what we say that matters. Children learn many things, including biases, by observing and imitating the behaviors of trusted adults around them.

Pay attention not only to what you do, but also how you do it, including being attuned to your body language. Model the behaviors, values, and actions you want your child to replicate. Caregivers and teachers are children's earliest role models.

Perspectives

From a young age, children recognize differences between people. Parents can help children make meaning of the world around them by talking about human diversity, including race, gender, interests, and abilities.

If you don't talk about differences, children will make their own assumptions. Spend time talking about not only differences in appearance, but also different experiences and perspectives.



Comparing Faces

Find a picture of a child in a magazine, book, or even a sign you may see around you. Point it out to them and talk about what is the same and what is different between them and the child in the picture. "She has two eyes and so do you!" "Her eyes are blue and yours are brown." Take turns!

Suggested Age 1 - 3 years

Brainy Background

As you talk about the details in what you notice together, you're promoting the life skill of focus. You're also helping your child see similarities and differences between them and others. This is an important part of being able to understand another person's point of view.

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Talking About Race

Racism is prevalent in our society and it impacts how children exist in and view the world around them. Children look to adults to understand how they should treat and perceive themselves and others. What we say and do matters. Use these research-based activities to start talking to children about race from an early age.

The Way You Are

Children are aware of race. In the first years of life, they begin to absorb ideas about themselves and others from people around them. Children reflect these ideas about race in their own attitudes and behaviors.

Talk with young children about how everyone is a little bit different. Everyone has their own experiences. It is important that children understand there is not only one right way to look, feel, or be.



Toothy Wonder

When you're brushing your child's teeth, look in the mirror together. Talk about how your faces are the same and different from theirs. For example, you have more teeth, and bigger teeth, but you both can make funny faces. Follow their lead and talk about what they notice.

Brainy Background

Comparing things that are the same and different will help your child sort their experiences into categories and make connections—skills that are important in reading, math, and science in the future. This also builds their connection with you!

Suggested Age 1 - 2 years

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Same and Different

On the go? Call your child's attention to the people you see. How are they the same or different? Do you see people with dark hair or light hair? Short or long hair? Share what you see, back and forth. Are they walking or riding? Carrying something or not?

Brainy Background

People watching is a great time to focus on details of how people look, what they're doing, and how they're the same and different. Does your child notice anything you missed? These are thinking skills that will help them understand the world.

Suggested Age 3 - 5 years

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Recognize Race

Talking about race in early childhood is important. These discussions help children form positive views about themselves and people of different races.

If children, especially white children, don't learn to recognize and talk about race, they are less able to identify inequities. They are also left to get their ideas about race from peers and society. Avoiding race also makes it an uncomfortable topic, which perpetuates divisions.

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Representation in STEM

Stereotypes about who participates in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math), lack of role models and access to STEM experiences can make many children feel unwelcome in these fields. Use these research-based activities to help all children feel like STEM is for them too!



Fitting Cups

Give your child safe containers of different sizes to play with. You can use measuring cups, bowls, or whatever is handy. Encourage them to try placing some of the containers inside others. Talk together about what they're doing. "Two cups fit inside the big pot." "Which others fit? Which ones don't?" Ask questions to keep it going.

Suggested Age 12 months - 2 1/2 years

Brainy Background

Your child learns ideas like numbers, shapes, and sizes by using them in simple ways like this. Talk about what your child is doing also helps them learn new words. Plus, it motivates them to keep exploring and learning.

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STEM for All!

Being actively engaged is an important part of the learning process. Provide hands-on opportunities for all children to build STEM skills.

Often, boys are the ones taken to science museums, gifted with engineering toys, or assumed to be 'naturally' good at math. Counter these stereotypes by providing girls and BIPOC children access to fun, hands-on STEM experiences too.

Everyday STEM

STEM doesn't only happen in a lab or office. Exploring, wondering, and experimenting together is the root of all STEM skills. Don't know the answer? That's OK Try to figure it out together.

Talking and wondering with your child builds their confidence. Help children connect these everyday activities to STEM by using specific language. "I like that question. It's so interesting. Let's do science together!"



Bye-Bye Bubbles!

While cleaning up, give your child a soapy sponge and a large container with a little water so they can help wash safe kitchen items. Scrub up lots of bubbles together. When you're ready say, "Bye-bye bubbles!" and show them how to rinse the bubbles away. Encourage them to try it.

Suggested Age 1 - 2 years

Brainy Background

You're helping your child think like a scientist as they explore the water and bubbles. This kind of play will help them with learning math and science later on. Plus, when you include them in daily chores, you help them feel confident and independent.

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Our scientists have put together materials to alert teens about the pernicious nature of STEM stereotypes. This material offers information and exercises about the science of stereotyping. The feedback we've received so far is that teens are engaged and motivated to learn about this research that examines how cultural stereotypes and pigeon-holing relates to what they experience every day. See this link for more: <https://bit.ly/3FHG3cO>

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Learning is for Everyone

All children should feel welcome, valued, and empowered. This is true for children's interactions with adults at home and in educational settings. It is important to make sure a child is seen and celebrated for who they are and that the learning environment is tailored to their needs. Use these research-based tips to strengthen these critical relationships.

Time to Shine

Children learn best when what they are learning is meaningful and relevant to them. Center the child by paying attention to their interests. What do they like to do? What are they thinking about? Even very young children have their own preferences.

Being attuned to the diversity of children's experiences, interests, and abilities helps parents and caregivers tailor learning opportunities to meet the specific needs of that child.



Take Time to Watch

Take a minute today to watch your child. Pay attention to what they look at. How do they move? What do they sound like? What are they learning? Even when you're busy, responding to what they are learning deepens your connection with them.

Brainy Background

When you're in tune with your child, you'll be able to pay attention to their needs and interests. This deepens the trust between you. Your child needs this security to reach out in the world to explore, experiment, discover, and learn.

Suggested Age 0 months - 5 years

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Tell me a Tale

Look for something you see that could start a story. It could be a picture or an object. Begin with "Once upon a time, there was a ...". Encourage your child to continue the story. Take turns adding to it. It doesn't matter if the story makes sense, as long as you're having fun!

Suggested Age 4 - 5 years

Brainy Background

Having fun with stories is a great way for your child to learn and use many different words. When you make up the story together, your child is practicing working together creatively. They're also using their memory to remember what has already happened in the story.

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Sharing is Caring

In addition to building strong language and early literacy skills, creating stories with your child helps them learn to weave two perspectives together and work as a collaborative team.

Listening to stories and sharing their own stories also helps children gain confidence and give voice to their experiences. Creating spaces where all children can show up as their full self is part of creating equitable communities.

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