

# Skill-Building Opportunities:

## Encouraging Your Child to Develop Interests

**Question:** My son doesn't have many interests. I worry that he isn't excited about many things. How can I help him find some interests?

Don't we all have those FOMO moments? The fear of missing out? But it's normal for children—and adults—to go through phases of intense interests and also phases where they're not as excited about things. Support your child through all of these phases, and help him explore new ideas and experiences, by encouraging the life skill of Self-Directed, Engaged Learning.

**Self-Directed, Engaged Learning:** It's through learning that we realize our potential. As the world changes, so can we, for as long as we live and as long as we learn.

1

### Look for a glimmer in your child's eyes that reflects an interest.

Patricia Kuhl, a scientist at the University of Washington, notes the importance of looking for what makes your child's eyes light up:

*"As I've watched my own child grow, there are various times and various things that light her up. As parents and as caretakers of a whole generation of kids, we have to be tuned in to the engagement process."*

Are there clues that might shine a light on what your son is noticing or thinking about? With your encouragement and support, something as small as him watching a car on the street can turn into an interest in cars that leads to a passion for understanding how the objects in our lives work. Or, watching the rain make patterns on windows might lead to a passion for photography.

2

### Jump-start your child's imagination.

Look for ways to deepen his experiences. This will help him discover new interests. What's happening in his life? Did he or another family member recently take a trip somewhere? Does he have a favorite character from a movie or video game? Use these ideas as starting points for discussions and activities.

- Take a trip to your local library and look for books about some of these subjects. Encourage your child to find different types of reading material, like books with photographs, storybooks and magazines.
- Give your child a subject or question to think about, like: "What will the world be like in 50 years?" Then, ask him to write or tell a story, paint, draw or use some other kind of creative way to express himself.

## 3

**Offer your child experiences that involve his brain, his body, his feelings and his relationships.**

Geoffrey Canada, the CEO and President of the Harlem Children's Zone in New York City, says it is essential for parents and teachers to recognize that children learn in different ways and are good at different things. Every child's individual strengths need to be promoted:

*"We want great music, great art, great sports. We want young people to excel in multiple things, not just in academics."*

Emotional learning, social learning and academic learning are all connected when children are really absorbed in learning. Look for experiences or activities that engage your child on all of these levels. Consider these questions to brainstorm ideas are:

- Does he seem to like one-on-one activities, or does he like to be around a lot of people?
- Does he do well in one particular subject at school?
- Does he like to be active or to participate in calmer activities?
- What are his friends interested in?

Remember that many children have schedules jam-packed with after-school activities, homework and other responsibilities. Make sure your child has enough time to relax and enjoy unstructured playtime during the week. Find a schedule that works for your entire family.

## 4

**Ask your child open-ended questions.**

Ask questions that use the words "who," "what," "where," "when" and "why." Questions like these ask your child to elaborate, to come up with more than simple yes or no answers. Try asking questions like:

- "What is one new thing you did today?"
- "When was a time you laughed today?"
- "What is something you learned today?"

Make these questions part of your routine at the beginning or end of the day. Remember to share your own answers to the questions with your child. This is a great way to connect every day and learn more about what's on his mind.

## 5

**Talk to your child about the things that interest you.**

When you keep your own fire for learning alive, your child is likely to follow your lead. When your child sees you doing something that interests you, like reading a book or playing a sport, he learns from your example. You will also benefit from taking time for yourself to do something you enjoy!

- Point out the things you're interested in and what you do to learn more. Say something like: "The story in the newspaper about the history of our community interested me. I am going to talk with some of our older friends and neighbors to see what they remember about this community when they were growing up." Give your child the chance to join you.