

Child Learning Comes Naturally

Parents can use the everyday activities in their homes and communities to support their children's participation in activities, children's attempts to interact with people or materials, and their efforts to do new things. You can encourage your child's participation and learning during everyday activities by providing your child opportunities to do what he or she can and likes to do during everyday activities, responding positively to your child's attempts to interact with you and others, and helping your child do new and different things.

Watch a video of this Learning Guide

Learning Guide: Encouraging Your Child's Participation and Learning

- Watch your child during everyday activities to find out what he or she likes to do and the things he or she is able to do. Notice the objects, people, activities, and actions that are your child's favorite things to do, get your child to smile or laugh, be excited, or stick to an activity. Watch for the things your child can do that help him or her participate in different activities.
- Provide your child lots of opportunities to be involved in activities that match the things he or she is able to do and likes to do. Use toys and materials that can capture your child's attention and interest. During the activities, give your child lots of opportunities and enough time to try to start interactions with toys, materials, you, or others.
- While your child is involved in the interest-based activities, notice what captures his or her attention. Pay particular attention to how your child starts to do something on his or her own, tries to start interactions with you or other people, or starts to play with toys and other objects in the activities.
- As soon as you notice your child starting to interact with people or materials in an activity, encourage your child to keep interacting by responding positively to him or her. Show your enthusiasm and pleasure with your child's actions by joining in the activity and taking turns with your child, repeating your child's actions, or saying something positive about what your child does.
- Encourage your child to stay involved in an activity by continuing to provide interesting materials and responding right away to his or her actions. Try to match the intensity of your response to the level of your child's behavior. Try not to disrupt your child's actions.
- Consider your child's special characteristics that influence how he or she participates in the activity. Give your child different types and the amount of support he or she needs to participate. You might use a special seat that supports your child when interacting with toys. Or you might help your child physically by holding a toy so your child can reach it.
- During any of the activities, encourage your child to try to do something slightly new or different. Praise your child for trying new things, encourage your child to vary his or her behavior, show him or her how to do something a little bit differently, or add toys or materials that encourage your child to do something new or different. Give your child plenty of opportunities to practice things he or she is just learning to do in the activities.

A Quick Peek

Pilar knew that her daughter Esme loved putting things in containers and doing activities together, especially helping with chores. Esme was excited when Pilar suggested that it was time to take clothes out of the dryer. "I do it! I do it," Esme exclaimed. Together they started taking the clothes out of the dryer. Pilar saw that Esme named the owner of the clothing as she dropped each piece in the laundry basket. "Mami. Papi. Esme," she would say. Pilar smiled and repeated the names Esme said each time she put something in the basket. Then as Esme dropped a pair of her pants into the basket and said, "Esme," Pilar responded with "Esme's pants." Esme grinned and reached for another pair of pants, saying "Esme's pants," as she handed them to Pilar. Pilar said, "Yes. Esme's pants. Esme's pink pants." Esme laughed with delight and said, "Pink pants. Pink pants. Esme's pink pants." Pilar continued to help Esme name the articles of clothing along with the owner as they completed the chore together.



You'll know the practice is working if ...

- Your child stays involved in activities for longer periods of time
- Your child starts an interaction with you or with toys/materials more often
- Your child does things in new and different ways during everyday activities

Learn more about naturalistic instruction from other experienced parents, your child's teacher or early interventionist, and online activities and resources such as "[Getting in Step with Responsive Teaching.](#)"