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The Early Childhood Years: Building Blocks for Life

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The Early Childhood Years: Building Blocks for Life

Abstract

"In the early childhood years, so much growth and development occurs. It truly is the foundation for the formal learning that happens later in life."

Posting about education in the formative years from *In All Things* - an online journal for critical reflection on faith, culture, art, and every ordinary-yet-graced square inch of God's creation.

<https://inallthings.org/the-early-childhood-years-building-blocks-for-life/>

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Comments

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in All things

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The Early Childhood Years: Building Blocks for Life

Gwen Marra

Wonder.

I think that is what convinced me to teach in the early childhood years. I love each child's sense of wonder and discovery of all the new and exciting things in the world. I love to watch children play and interact with each other and their environment. It causes me to stand in awe of God, the Creator, the Mastermind who created humans to learn and to glorify Him through the discovery of the world they live in.

In the early childhood years, so much growth and development occurs. It truly is the foundation for the formal learning that happens later in life. Children go from being totally dependent on their parents and caregivers for everything, to being able to walk and talk and read and write. Brain science regarding child development is fascinating.

Children are born with the capacity to learn language, and at a very young age they are able to recognize their native language.¹ Anyone working with young children needs to realize that they are modeling and teaching speech from Day One (or before) and their words and actions are being closely observed by the little ones around them. Most children learn language in a way that seems effortless, but actually their brains are hard at work deciphering the code and making sense of the many sounds they encounter.

In the brain, connections and learning pathways are strengthened as they are more frequently used. The pathways that are not used begin to disappear. Usually around their first birthday, children begin to speak words that are understood by those around them. This language learning continues and develops more complexity. It is vitally important that children are spoken to and interacted with during these early childhood years. Reading to children from birth on is a great way to assist language development. Some children love hearing the same book again and again. Not only does this build language skills, but as a parent or caregiver holds a child in their lap a safe and positive mindset for learning is fostered.

Another way to help a child feel safe is by having order and structure in your home. Routines help children to know what to expect. Following simple routines in the morning and evening teaches children important self-care steps like brushing teeth, getting dressed and undressed, and eating breakfast. This can transition to independence as children mature. It is also important for children to understand how to handle a situation when a routine is disturbed. They may feel frustrated or lost. Helping children talk through these times helps them to understand that they can problem-solve and move past the disruption rather than focusing on it.

When children are included in the household responsibilities it gives them a sense of belonging. A young child can help sort and fold the laundry or set the table before meals and help to clear the table after meals. Children can put dirty laundry in a laundry basket and pick up their toys. Most children will make mistakes as they learn how to help their families. These are wonderful opportunities to show grace and to build a growth mindset, focusing on the positives and the learning process rather than the perfection of the final product. Taking time to empathize when tempers flare or frustration sets in helps a child learn how to self-regulate and problem-solve. Helping each other with household responsibilities can be fun and an enjoyable way to share that God created us to live together in community as part of a family.

There are times when children will fail. There are times when a child may treat a friend unkindly or be disrespectful to an adult or property. No child is perfect, and it is okay to recognize this and to help children turn challenging moments and emotional outbursts into opportunities for growth. Using these opportunities to teach children how to handle hard situations will help prepare them for future life experiences. Children can be taught how these challenging times affect their emotions. They can learn strategies to help themselves regain control. Parents and caregivers can help children learn about their emotions and how to self-regulate their emotions.

Each child is unique, and parents and caregivers need to embrace and celebrate this. Children may be early walkers or late talkers. Children may crave order or enjoy creativity and a bit of chaos. What works with one child may not work with another. Build on children's strengths and interests, celebrating them for who God created them to be. As parents, it is inspiring to be part of this journey, yet important to continually look to God for guidance and realize that we are meant to parent our children and not worship them.

FOOTNOTES

1. Brynie, F. (2010, February 19). Infant brains are hard-wired for language. In *Psychology Today*. Retrieved from <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/brain-sense/201002/infant-brains-are-hardwired-language>