

# LIFE AFTER PRESCHOOL: SUPPORTING SKILLS THAT HELP CHILDREN THRIVE

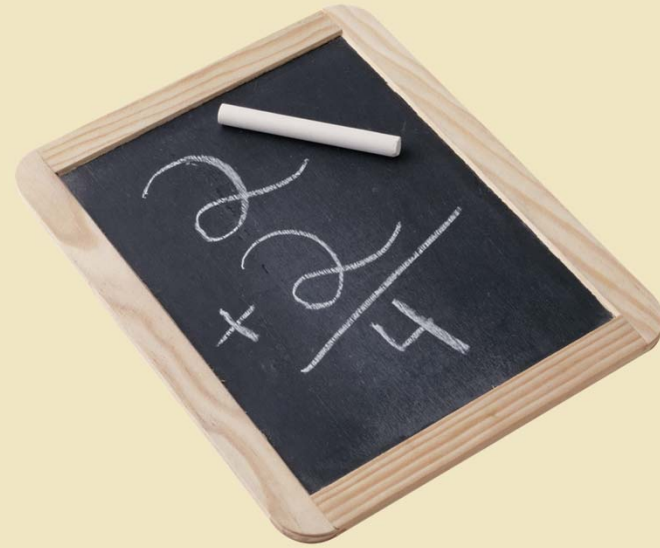


Dr. Candice M. Mills

Associate Professor of Psychology

The University of Texas at Dallas





Circle



Triangle



Square



Star



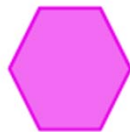
Moon



Rectangle



Pentagon



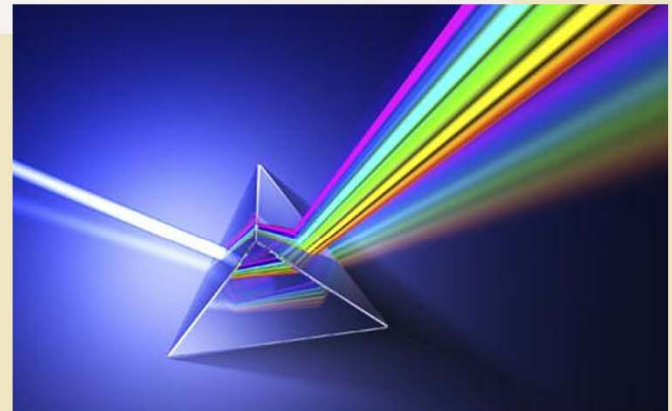
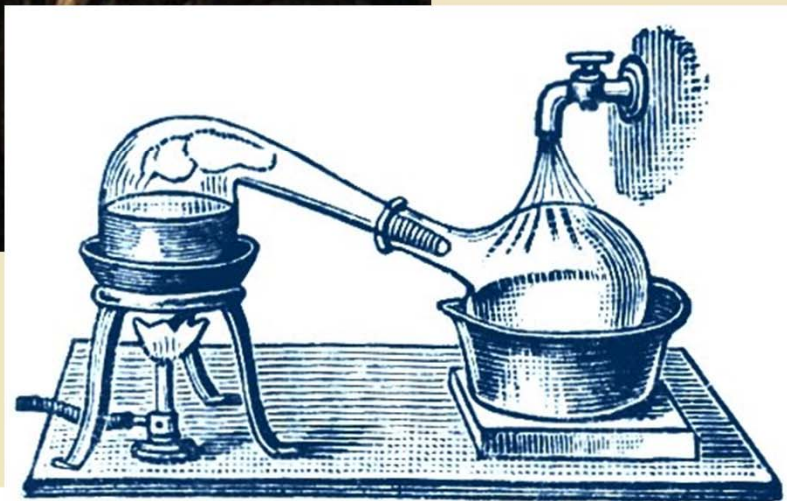
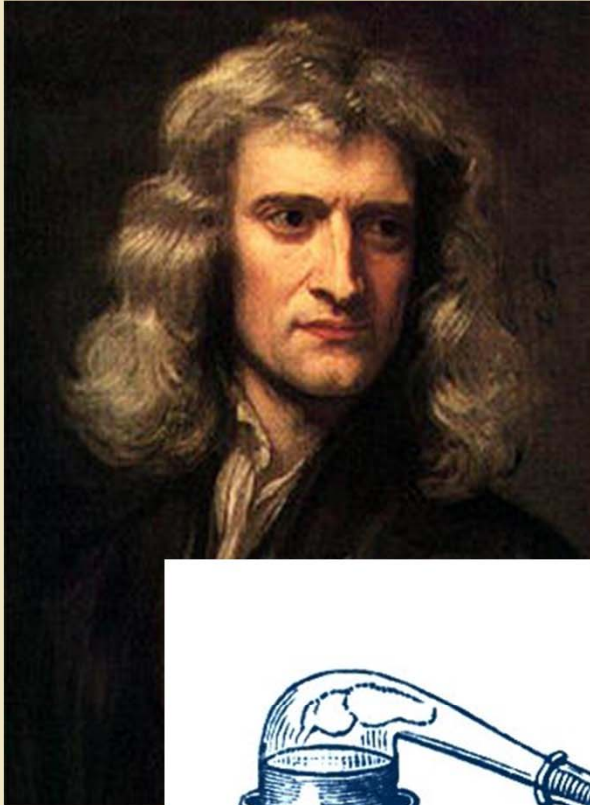
Hexagon



# THREE MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT WHAT CHILDREN NEED TO SUCCEED

- ① It is best for them to know as much as possible (i.e., my child is smart because she knows X)

# We can't know everything

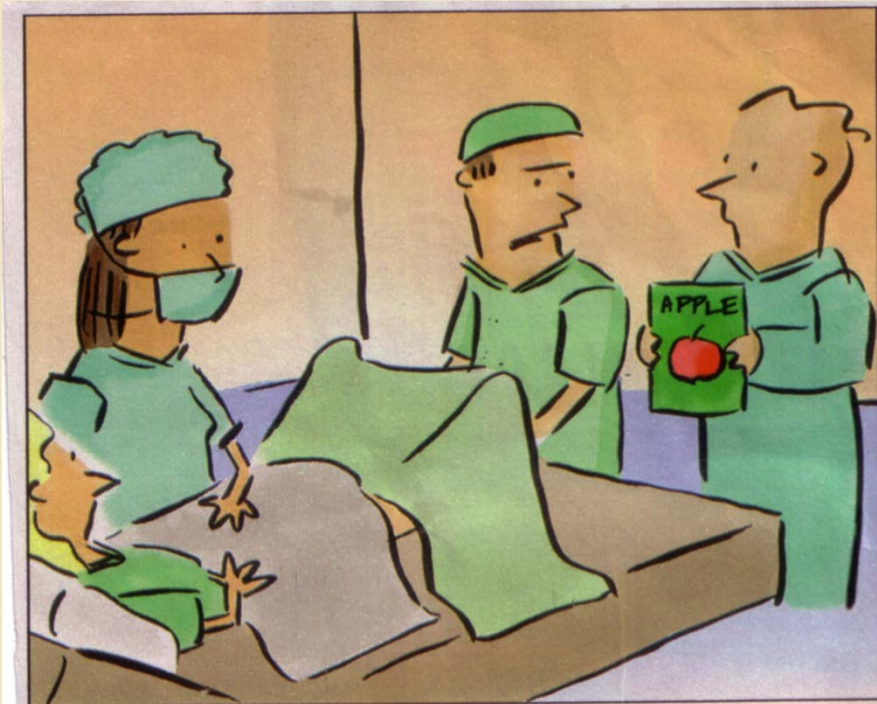


# THE IMPORTANCE OF SKILLS

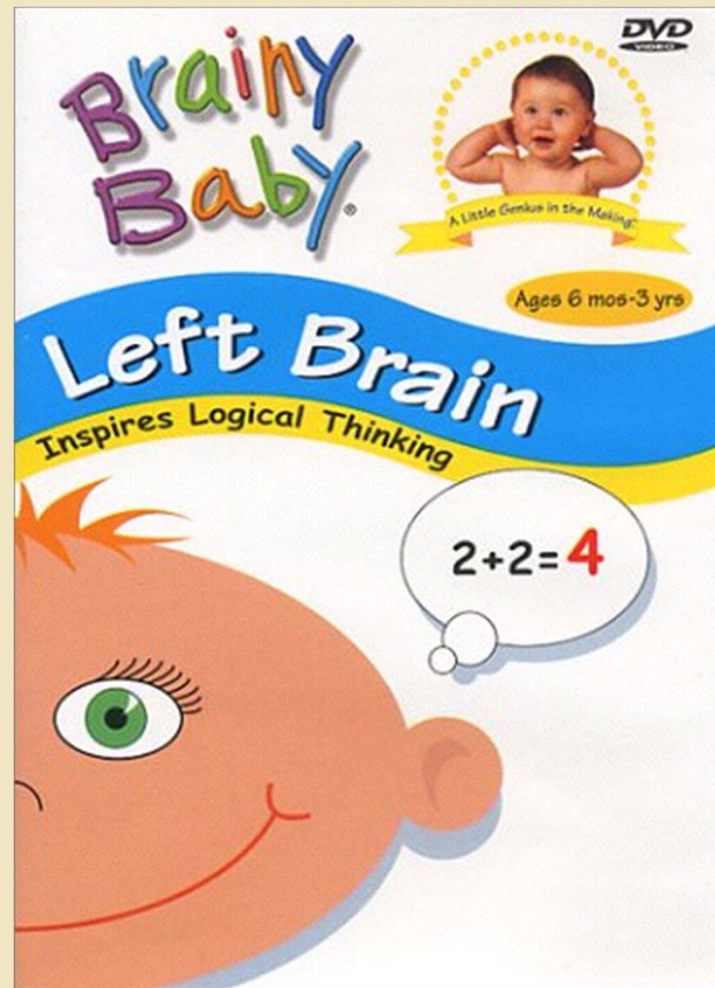
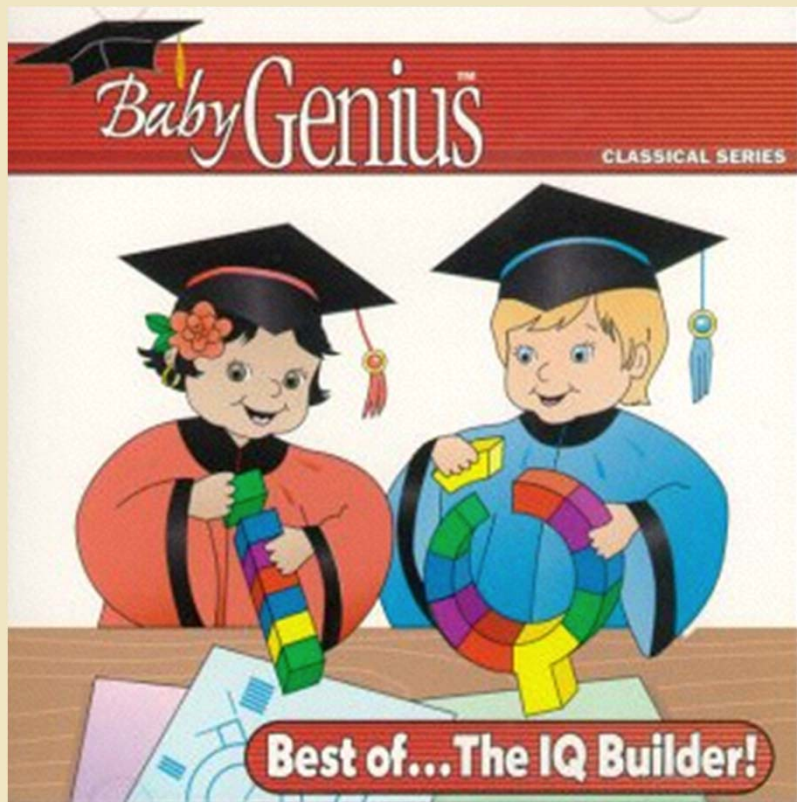
- Some things useful to know off-hand
- But also important to be willing to ask questions, capable of navigating through a complex world, resilient when faced with obstacles, and eager to learn

# THREE MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT WHAT CHILDREN NEED TO SUCCEED

- ② It is best for them to learn things as early as possible (i.e., my child is smart because she learned to do this at X age)



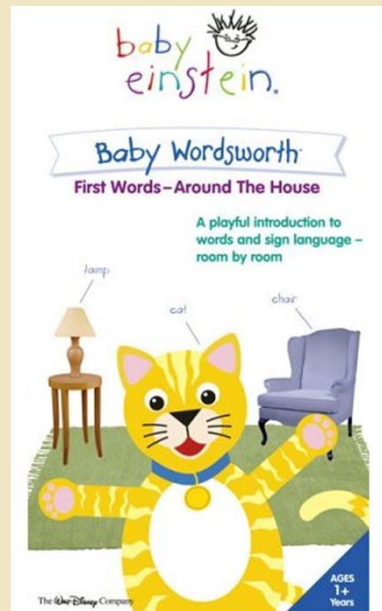
"Could you at least lay off the flash cards until we see a head?!"





# Earlier isn't necessarily better

- Do programs to increase language skills in toddlers work?
  - **NO!**
  - The more children 8-16 months old watched “baby” DVDs, the *fewer* words they understood (Zimmerman, Christakis, & Meltzoff, 2007)



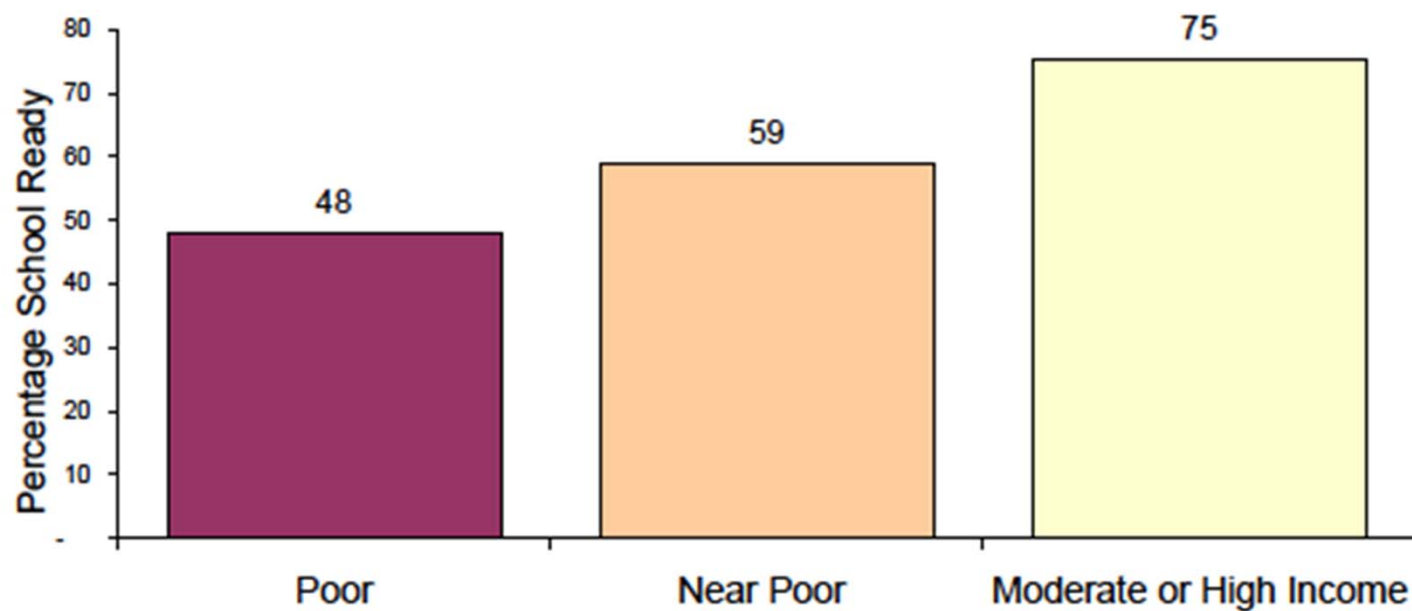
# Earlier isn't necessarily better

- “Cognitive immaturity hypothesis” – some immaturity may be adaptive for learning (Bjorklund)
  - Example: Preschoolers’ tendency to overestimate their skills (which seems immature) might help them persist at difficult tasks (Shin, Bjorklund, & Beck, 2007)
- Just because something is seen early doesn’t make it predictive of long-term success
  - Example: Early language production and later outcomes

# THREE MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT WHAT CHILDREN NEED TO SUCCEED

- 3) Children need lots of toys, books, and activities to fully succeed (i.e., more money = better life).

Figure 1: Likelihood of Being Ready for School at Age Five, by Poverty Status at Birth





Source and Notes: Brookings tabulations of data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study - Birth Cohort (ECLS-B). Near poor is defined as household income between 100 and 185 of poverty percent and moderate or high income is defined as household income above 185 percent of poverty.

It's not about the BENJAMINS...



# WHAT CAN WE DO TO HELP CHILDREN SUCCEED?

<p>CONSTRUCTION CO.</p>	<p>PROJECT NOTES:</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
<p>EQUIPMENT SUGGESTIONS:</p>  <p>HAIR</p> <p>BINKY</p> <p>SHIRT</p> <p>RATTLE</p> <p>DIAPERS</p> <p>MILK</p> <p>BOOTIES</p>	<p>CURRENT STATUS AS OF: _____</p> 
<p>PLANS DRAWN BY: _____ PROJECT SUPERVISOR</p>	

“We can best help children learn, not by deciding what we think they should learn and thinking of ingenious ways to teach it to them, but by making the world, as far as we can, accessible to them, paying serious attention to what they do, answering their questions -- if they have any -- and helping them explore the things they are most interested in.”

**-John Holt**



# OVERVIEW

- Review general recommendations for helping a child prepare for school
- Discuss some specific things that caregivers can do related to these recommendations to:
  - Bolster language and general knowledge
  - Strengthen self-control skills
  - Encourage positive approaches to learning



## READY-FOR-SCHOOL CHECKLIST

The following checklist, although not exhaustive, can help to guide you as you prepare your child for school. It's best to look at the items on the list as goals toward which to aim. They should be accomplished, as much as possible, through everyday routines or by enjoyable activities that you've planned with your child. If your child lags behind in some areas, don't worry. Remember that children grow and develop at different rates.

### Good Health and Physical Well-Being

My child:

- Eats a balanced diet
- Gets plenty of rest
- Receives regular medical and dental care
- Has had all the necessary immunizations
- Runs, jumps, plays outdoors and does other activities that help develop his large muscles and provide exercise
- Works puzzles, scribbles, colors, paints and does other activities that help develop her small muscles

### Social and Emotional Preparation

My child:

- Is learning to explore and try new things
- Is learning to work well alone and to do many tasks for himself
- Has many opportunities to be with other children and is learning to cooperate with them
- Is curious and is motivated to learn
- Is learning to finish tasks
- Is learning to use self-control
- Can follow simple instructions
- Helps with family chores

### Language and General Knowledge

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- Is learning to write her name and address
- Is learning to count and plays counting games
- Is learning to identify and name shapes and colors
- Has opportunities to draw, listen to and make music and to dance
- Has opportunities to get first-hand experiences to do things in the world-to see and touch objects, hear new sounds, smell and taste foods and watch things move

Good health and physical well-being

Social and emotional preparation

Language and general knowledge

Source: U.S. Department of Education

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# LANGUAGE AND GENERAL KNOWLEDGE

- Has familiarity with letters, numbers, shapes, and colors
- Is encouraged to notice opposites, make comparisons
- Is encouraged to ask questions
- Has opportunities to draw, dance, hear music, hear books



# BOLSTER LANGUAGE AND GENERAL KNOWLEDGE

## ■ PLAY!!

- Books
- Comparison games (e.g., similarities and differences, big versus little, sorting)
- Opportunities to draw, listen to music, dance
- Exploring the world through sight, sound, smell, taste
- Pretend
- Asking QUESTIONS



## Early Learning and Development Guidelines

# Older Infants 9 to 18 Months

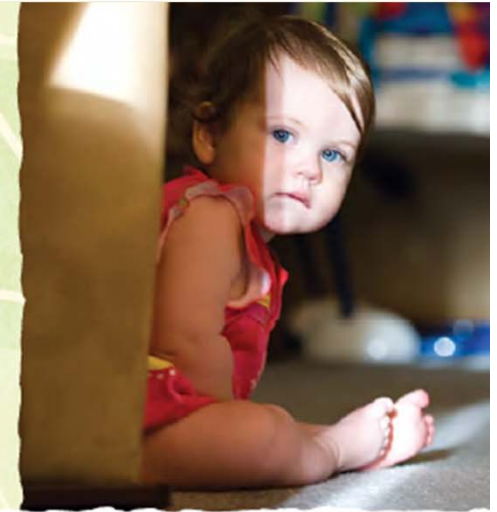


*"A mother was trying to get her 13 month-old boy to stand by himself. He would get his legs bent with feet on the floor, but his head was still on the floor, too. All of a sudden, he rolled up into a squat. Then he pulled himself up almost to standing. And boom! Down he went to sit on the floor again. But he thought this was fun! He'd pull himself up and fall back down over and over, laughing. Eventually he got the hang of it and could stand on his own next to his excited and proud mom."*

Sabrina Fields, Home Visitor, Denise Louie Education Center, Seattle

*"When working with children, I am constantly amazed at the unlimited potential that each child has. The glow in children's eyes and excitement on their faces as they learn new skills and reach new achievements is the ultimate reward. We, as adults, have the power and responsibility to keep this glow and excitement alive as children move through their educational journey."*

Lexi Catlin, Early Childhood Professional Development Coordinator, Educational Service District 105



**Note:** Child continues the growth and learning from the prior age.

## 1. About me and my family and culture

### ↓ Children may ...

#### Family and culture

**Older Infants develop trusting relationships with familiar adults**

- Respond when someone speaks the child's name.
- Seek out trusted caregiver(s) for comfort and support.
- Demonstrate fear of unknown people and places.

#### Self concept

**Older Infants show their preferences**

- Protest when does not want to do something; know what he or she likes to do.
- Point to indicate what he or she wants.
- Choose things to play with.
- Try to do things on own. Show joy when completing a simple task.

### ↓ Ideas to try with children ...

#### Family and culture

**Older Infants develop trusting relationships with familiar adults**

- Hold, cuddle, hug, talk and play with child.
- Respond consistently to child's requests for attention or help. Soothe child in distress with closeness and words.
- Involve your child in family and cultural traditions, rituals, routines and activities.
- Prepare for transitions or separations; tell what will happen next; use a consistent departure routine.
- Arrange a meeting with all the adults caring for your child, to become acquainted.

#### Self concept

**Older Infants show their preferences**

- Respond in a positive and helpful way to child's moods, gestures, words and facial expressions.
- Use your child's name when talking with him/her.
- Talk with your child about parts of the body and what they do ("We use our teeth to chew").
- Provide objects for the child to learn to use.
- Be aware that change of routine, being overtired, or being ill may result in more protests and resistance.

## Moving On

Toddlers love to explore spaces and to climb over, through and into things.

### What You Need

- ★ Stuffed animal or toy
- ★ Large board boxes
- ★ Pillows
- ★ A large sheet
- ★ A soft ball
- ★ A large plastic laundry basket
- ★ Elastic
- ★ Bells



### What to Do

- ★ **Pillow jump.** Give your child several pillows to jump into. (Toddlers usually figure out how to do this on their own.)
- ★ **Box car.** Give your child a large cardboard box to push around the room. He may want to take his stuffed animal or toy for a ride in it. If the box isn't too high—you'll most likely find your toddler in the box as well.



Movement activities help children to gain control of their large muscles. They also help children to learn new words and important concepts such as locations: up, down, inside, outside, over, behind, beside and under.



# Blocks... a case study

- Help encourage motor skills, spatial skills, social skills, language skills
- Low-income children given blocks show increases in verbal skills 6 months later (Christakis et al, 2007)



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# SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL PREPARATION



# STRENGTHEN SELF-CONTROL SKILLS



# SELF-CONTROL SKILLS (AKA EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONS)

- **Inhibition** – ability to control one’s impulses, attention, and emotions
- **Working memory** – ability to hold information in mind and mentally work with it
- **Cognitive flexibility** – ability to change perspectives, adjust priorities based on new information



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- **Working memory** – ability to hold information in mind and mentally work with it
- **Cognitive flexibility** – ability to change perspectives, adjust priorities based on new information
- **CRUCIAL** for success in school, on the job, in friendships, in marriage, for mental and physical health, etcetera (e.g., Diamond, 2012)

# SELF-CONTROL SKILLS (AKA EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONS)

- Marshmallow task (Walter Mischel)
  - 4-year-olds given a treat and then given two options for while experimenter leaves the room
    - Wait for experimenter to return and get 2 treats
    - Ring a bell and get 1 treat now



# SELF-CONTROL SKILLS (AKA EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONS)

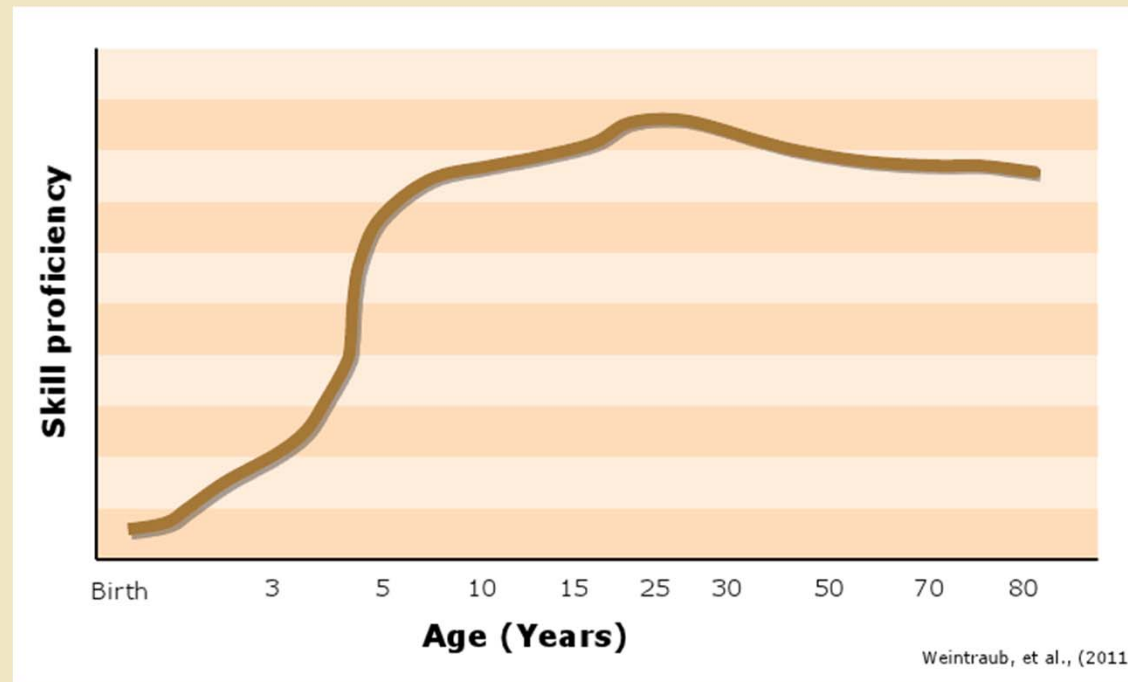
- Marshmallow task (Walter Mischel)
  - 4-year-olds given a treat and then given two options for while experimenter leaves the room
    - Wait for experimenter to return and get 2 treats
    - Ring a bell and get 1 treat now
  - The better children were at delaying gratification, the better they were at:
    - explaining ideas
    - paying attention
    - coping with stress
    - SATs





# SELF-CONTROL SKILLS (AKA EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONS)

- CRUCIAL for success in school, on the job, in friendships, in marriage, for mental and physical health, etcetera (e.g., Diamond, 2012)
- **Improve over time**



# SELF-CONTROL SKILLS (AKA EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONS)

- Can also be improved through experiences
- But keep realistic expectations!



# HOW TO STRENGTHEN SELF-CONTROL SKILLS

- **Model** these skills yourself
  - Demonstrate good “cooling” strategies (e.g., counting to 10, taking someone else’s perspective)
  - Talk about both short-term and long-term consequences

# HOW TO STRENGTHEN SELF-CONTROL SKILLS

- Foster healthy **relationships**
  - Support children's efforts
  - Provide a consistent, reliable presence that young children can trust
  - Guide them from complete dependence on adults to gradual independence
  - Protect them from chaos, violence, and chronic adversity (toxic stress -> “act now think later” behavior)

# HOW TO STRENGTHEN SELF-CONTROL SKILLS

- Provide children with **activities** that promote emotional, social, cognitive, and physical development
  - Foster social connection and **open-ended creative play**, supported by adults
  - Incorporate vigorous physical exercise into daily activities
  - Increase the complexity of skills step-by-step by finding each child's zone of being challenged but not frustrated
  - Include repeated practice of skills over time



Source: [www.developingchild.harvard.edu](http://www.developingchild.harvard.edu)

# ENCOURAGING POSITIVE APPROACHES TO LEARNING



# POSITIVE APPROACHES TO LEARNING (AKA GROWTH MINDSET)

- How children and adults think about learning influences how well they learn and how they bounce back from obstacles.
- “Fixed mindset” versus “Growth mindset”

# POSITIVE APPROACHES TO LEARNING (AKA GROWTH MINDSET)

- 5<sup>th</sup> graders given a relatively easy test of puzzles (Dweck)
  - Half told “you must be smart at this”; Other half told “you must have worked really hard”
  - Then offered a choice of an easier or more challenging puzzle
    - 90% of kids praised for effort chose the harder set of puzzles, worked hard to learn from mistakes, showed improvement
    - Many of those praised for smarts chose the easier set of puzzles, were easily discouraged, showed decrease in performance





# POSITIVE APPROACHES TO LEARNING (AKA GROWTH MINDSET)

	<b>“Fixed”</b>	<b>“Growth”</b>
<i>Challenges</i>	Avoid	Embrace
<i>Obstacles</i>	Give up easily	Persist
<i>Effort</i>	Bad, useless	Path to mastery
<i>Criticism</i>	Ignored	Learn from it
<i>Success</i>	Threatened by others	Inspired by others
<i>Results</i>	Plateau early	Achieve

# HOW TO ENCOURAGE A POSITIVE APPROACH TO LEARNING

- Instead of praising ABILITY, **praise EFFORT**
  - “You are a fantastic baseball player” versus “You connected with the ball much better this time”
  - “You’re so smart!” versus “You worked so hard to build that tower!”
  - “You finished that so fast. You are lucky it is easy for you! You have it made!” versus “You finished that so fast, it must be too easy for you. Let’s find something challenging and fun!”
- Praise for taking initiative, seeing a difficult task through, struggling to learn something new, being open to and acting on feedback

# HOW TO ENCOURAGE A POSITIVE APPROACH TO LEARNING

- Tell stories about achievements through hard work.
- When a child receives a poor grade, try to focus on effort and future actions.
- Talk to children as they get older about how they can “strengthen” their brains.
- Encourage passionate interests.
- Demonstrate to children that you think learning is important.





# WHAT CAN WE DO TO HELP CHILDREN *THRIVE* IN SCHOOL?

- Recognize that it's not about how much they know, how fast they know it, and how much they have.
- Be familiar with what schools expect for children to be ready to succeed in school and beyond.
- Bolster language and general knowledge.
- Strengthen children's self-control.
- Encourage positive approaches to learning.



**THANK YOU!**





- **“It is true that we cannot make a genius. We can only give to teach child the chance to fulfill his potential possibilities.”**

**-Maria Montessori**