

**Life after preschool: Supporting skills that help children thrive**

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Candice M. Mills, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of Psychological Sciences

Director of the UTD Think Lab

The University of Texas at Dallas

**Some misconceptions and facts about encouraging children’s development**

- Misconception: It is best for children to know as much as possible.
  - Fact: Knowing more facts is not necessarily better; developing skills matters more.
- Misconception: It is best for them to learn things as early as they can.
  - Fact: Earlier is not necessarily better or meaningful, and some immaturity is helpful.
- Misconception: Children need lots of “stuff” to thrive.
  - Fact: Relationships and experiences are far more important than things.

**What are some of the most important areas to strengthen in order to help children be ready for kindergarten and beyond?**

- Physical well-being
- Language and general knowledge
- Social and emotional development

**What matters MOST to help children THRIVE in school and beyond?**

- No blueprint, but much boils down to two things: try to be a supportive caregiver, and encourage your child to play.

**How do we bolster language and general knowledge?**

*The Research*

- Kindergarten teachers report wanting children to be familiar with letters, numbers, shapes, and colors, but certain social skills (e.g., the ability to listen to instructions) are often mentioned as being just as important.
- Important skills can be gained from both structured and unstructured play.
- A case study: play with blocks encourages motor, spatial, social, and language skills.

*Specific Actions*

- Consider reading up on the recommendations for what to expect from children of different ages and ideas for playing with them (specific resources mentioned below).
- Encourage children to ask questions and demonstrate to children what to do if you do not know all of the answers.
- Remember that learning can occur in almost every situation.

**How do we strengthen children’s self-control skills?**

*The Research*

- Self-control skills – also sometimes called executive functioning skills – are crucial for success in school, in friendships, in health, and beyond.

- One example of this: the better preschool-aged children are at delaying gratification, the better they tend to be at verbally expressing ideas, paying attention, thinking ahead, interacting with others, and coping with stress. This ability even relates to SAT scores (Walter Mischel of Columbia University).
- Executive functions include inhibitory control (i.e., the ability to control one's impulses, attention, and emotions), working memory (i.e., the ability to hold information in mind and mentally work with it), and cognitive flexibility (i.e., the ability to change perspectives and adjust priorities based on new information).
- These skills generally increase with age, but they can also be improved. That said, it is good to keep realistic expectations.

### ***Specific Actions***

- Model good executive functioning skills yourself (e.g., demonstrate good “cooling” strategies).
- Foster healthy relationships (e.g., guide children from complete dependence to gradual independence).
- Provide children with activities that promote different kinds of development (e.g., unstructured play, vigorous physical exercise).

## **How do we encourage children to have positive approaches to learning?**

### ***The Research***

- Some people have a “fixed mindset”, thinking that one's level of intelligence is something you're born with. Other people have a “growth mindset”, thinking that one can increase one's intelligence and general knowledge through effort.
- Children with growth mindsets are more likely to persist in the face of obstacles, learn from criticism, and reach higher levels of achievement (Carol Dweck of Stanford University).

### ***Specific Actions***

- Instead of praising ability, praise effort.
- Tell stories about achievements through hard work.
- Talk to children as they get older about how they can “strengthen” their brains.
- Demonstrate to children that you think that learning is important.
- Encourage passionate interests.

## **Internet Resources**

*U.S. Department of Education – Helping Your Preschool Child:*

<http://www2.ed.gov/parents/earlychild/ready/preschool/index.html>

*Washington State Early Learning and Development Guidelines:*

<http://www.del.wa.gov/development/guidelines/>

*Texas Early Learning Council (still in development):*

<http://earlylearningtexas.org/itelg.aspx>

*Center on the Developing Child:*

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

## **Books**

*Mindset: The New Psychology of Success* by Carol Dweck

*Einstein Never Used Flash Cards* by Roberta Golinkoff, Kathy Hirsh-Pasek, and Diane Eyer

*Mind in the Making* by Ellen Galinsky