

LEARNING - Every day...all day

Learning does not take place in a vacuum and it certainly does not take place in a workbook! Learning is something that takes place every day during experiences, daily routines and free play. Your role is to facilitate learning in as many ways as possible. Taking advantage of teachable moments, setting up activities on the spur of the moment and using daily routine times, like eating, as learning opportunities are just a few of the ways you can make sure that learning is a part of each child's day. At Gee Whiz, the curriculum provides numerous activities and experiences that help you address all 10 developmental areas. Our picture codes enable you to easily connect each learning experience to the developmental areas it addresses. We provide the foundation...then it is up to you to "build the house" based on the individual children in your group.

This section will give you tips to help you plan your own learning experiences while also helping you see how daily routine times like handwashing and eating facilitate learning. It is very important that you understand this concept so you can share it with parents/caregivers. Too often, parents/caregivers think of "learning" in terms that relate to more formal schooling like worksheets and craft projects. It is your job to help them see that playing in the dirt and painting are very important learning opportunities for young children.

PLANNING ACTIVITIES

When planning experiences for the children in your group, it is important to ask yourself, "What are the goals I hope to accomplish by doing this activity with the children?" If you cannot answer this question, then STOP! Doing activities just for the sake of "doing something" is not an effective planning approach. Instead, ask yourself these three questions:

- 1) What skills do I want the children will develop by doing the activity?
- 2) How will I evaluate if the children develop these skills?
- 3) What adaptations will the activity or experience need so that all of the children can participate?

INDIVIDUALIZE!

Are all two-year-olds the same? Is a four-year-old the same as a toddler? Of course not! Each child is unique and special in his/her own way. Individualizing experiences is very important because it helps you adapt activities to each individual child's needs and developmental levels. For instance, maybe you want to play a game that involves throwing a ball but you have a child that has limited eye-hand coordination. Perhaps you could roll the ball with this child instead. Individualizing does not need to be hard or complicated. Just ask yourself, "Do I need to adjust this activity for (child's name)?" and if so, "What can I do to make it match his/her developmental needs?"

The Gee Whiz curriculum includes tools and information to help you individualize. Check out our User's Guide on our website for more details as well as samples of our Individualization Web and Observe & Reflect Grids.



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LEARNING DURING TRANSITIONS

Every day the children make many transitions. They arrive. They depart. They move from group time to learning center time. They go outside. They come inside. You get the point. Transitions are a natural part of every day so why not turn them into a learning time as well? Singing a song, reciting a chant, looking for a specific color, etc. are all ways you can help children transition from one experience to another. The Gee Whiz curriculum includes a transition idea each day. The goal is to help turn a routine time into a learning time. You can do the same thing on your own! For instance, you might want to adopt a clean up song that you sing each time it is clean up time. You could also create a rhyme to say when it is time to tuck in for a nap. Be creative! If you have more advanced children in your group, challenge them to help you come up with transition ideas. You might just be surprised at what they suggest!

LEARNING DURING MEALTIMES

Do you feel like you are serving meals and snacks constantly? Well, that is because you are! Mealtimes and snacks provide more opportunities to promote learning in a meaningful way. Here are just a few ideas on how you can accomplish this goal. We are sure you will have more ideas as well.

- Have the children set the table! This is an excellent way for them to practice one-to-one correspondence.
- Talk about the colors, shapes and textures of foods while children eat.
- Have children count the number of peas or green beans or even apple slices on their plate.
- Use terms like *whole*, *half* and *quarter* as the children enjoy foods like apples or oranges.
- Build vocabulary by naming foods and talking about how they are grown (and/or processed).

LEARNING DURING HANDWASHING, DIAPERING, TOILETING AND TOOTHBRUSHING!

Spend a lot of time doing these routine activities? We are SURE you do! Again, they can easily be turned into learning opportunities with just a little thought and effort. Here are a few ideas to get you started.

- Sing a song as children brush their teeth. Not only will this help them brush long enough, it will also enhance language and vocabulary.
- Practice following three-step directions when toileting (e.g., wipe, flush, wash).
- Hang things above the diapering area for infants/toddlers to look at while diapering. Talk about what the infant sees as a way of building vocabulary.
- Count the children's teeth as they brush. This is a meaningful way of exposing them the numerals.