



Enhancing Mental Growth in Children

Learning is often limited to math, spelling, phonics, and science; overlooking the most important subject—thinking. It is a fact, that while children often learn the mechanics of mathematics, they quite frequently fail at interpreting—deciding what to do with the answers they get.

If this problem were limited to that “age brings wisdom.” But ability are also weak thinkers. thoughts. We become perspective. We approach all our strategy does not work.

Children can be helped out of better thinkers. Make thinking suggestions.



children, then we could relax, saying sad to note, that many adults of normal Many of us become prisoners of our accustomed to viewing life from one problems in the same manner, even if

this rut. We can all be helped to become a fun activity. Here are some

1. Provide your children with feasts for the senses. The more children see, feel, hear, taste, and smell in early childhood, the sharper their mental processes will be. Play observation games involving as many senses as possible.
2. Speak intelligently to youngsters. The language young children hear forms building blocks for later on in life.
3. Expose your children to music. They can take note of patters in the music. Susan Ludlington, a UCLA assistant professor of maternal-child health, says that classical compositions are the best for developing pitch discrimination, because the notes are not slurred.
4. Take time to answer your children’s questions. They are in the process of making order out of the barrage of information that their senses receive.
5. Try to view life through the eyes of children sometimes.
6. When sharing stories, encourage awareness of story sequence. Ask children to predict the outcome.
7. Let the children write. Writing forces children to put their thoughts in order.
8. Play word games: opposites, rhyming sounds, similar meaning, etc.
9. Let children learn to categorize and prioritize by arranging their belonging, grouping books, budgeting their allowances, and making a daily schedule of activities. These help children to classify and evaluate.
10. Encourage the children to talk about their day. Set aside time to talk. This provides an opportunity to think.
11. Turn off the television and talk. Too much television viewing promotes passive, not active, thinking. However, if you can’t beat ‘em, join ‘em, but discuss.



12. Ask questions that invite thought—questions without correct answers which prompt children to infer, analyze, hypothesize, and make judgments.
13. Reciprocate your children's reading. Let children read to you, and you read to them.
14. Don't be too quick to commend or to correct. We do know that constant correcting is a turn-off to thinking. Did you realize that too-quick praise can also halt the thinking process? Elicit more answers. A brief pause encourages children to think again and make them realize they are responsible for answers.
15. Let children help you solve practical problems. Children need the challenge of real problems to stimulate mental growth. Get their input to plan the family budget, family vacation, map reading, etc.
16. Play thinking games, e.g., "Mastermind" and "Battleship."
17. Try changing the rules of a familiar game.
18. Debate current issues at the dinner table. Encourage children to form their own opinions. Don't get side-tracked on factual disputes, check references.
19. Help young people think through problems, weigh options, and make decisions. Discuss values—traditions versus trends.

These are some strategies that can be used at home and at school, by parents and teachers alike. Be patient. It takes time to develop intellectually.

Adapted from "25 Ways to Teach Your Child to Think", by Ruth Duskin Feldman, Woman's Day, 11/11/86.

