

Keys to New Learning

Open young children's minds to new learning with six child-focused keys

Use these six "keys" to help your young child open the door to new skills for talking and playing:

1. Give choices

Let your child make choices about activities or materials that he wants to use with you.

2. Change activities and topics of conversation to keep her interest

After your child has participated in one activity with you for a length of time, ask if she would like to continue in the activity or do something different. By varying the activities or the topics that you converse about, you help maintain her interest and attention in interacting socially with you. The longer she interacts socially, the more opportunities she will have for gaining and practicing new social skills.

3. Mix activities he knows how to do well with new ones

Introduce activities that give him opportunities to try something new with those that he has already mastered. This will help him feel confident about his abilities as he takes on new challenges.

4. Show her how

Model the desired skills for him as you interact, such as saying "please" or "thank you" at the appropriate times, using simple

When children joyfully participate in everyday activities with adults, they can learn new social and communication skills

phrases for asking questions or making requests, or showing him how to make something work.

5. Reward! Reward! Reward!

Reward him each and every time that he tries to do or say something new, even if he does not do it or say it correctly. For example, if he tries to ask for a cup of milk by saying "mick" instead of "milk," reward him by giving him the drink.

6. Keep it natural

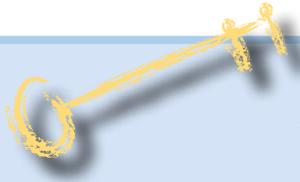
Interacting with and rewarding your child should be done in a way that flows naturally from your interaction with him. Rewards should always be directly related to his behavior. For example, if your child hands you an object in an attempt to show it to you, looking at the object with him and commenting on it would be a more natural way to reward him than it would be to give him a sticker or food treat.



Dad rewards his toddler's interest in an insect she's spotted on the living room floor by stopping to examine it and talk about it together.

More opportunities ...

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2. Change activities and topics of conversation to keep her interest
3. Mix activities he knows how to do well with new ones
4. Show her how!
5. Reward! Reward! Reward!
6. Keep it natural



Child-focused keys in the community Example: **SUPERMARKET SHOPPING**

- Key 1** Give your child a choice in items to buy.
- Key 2** Discuss different types of food, what to have for dinner, and the child's favorite foods.
- Key 3** Mix activities: A learned task such as handing money to the checkout clerk mixed with a new task such as putting the change in a coin purse.
- Key 4** Say the names of items in the store; say or sign "thank you" to the checkout clerk.
- Key 5** Reward the child for trying to find items you ask for or for trying to converse.
- Key 6** Purchase an item the child indicates that she wants; let her hold or look at something that interests her.

Put it all together ...

If your child tries to roll a ball to you and it doesn't go very far, you can naturally reward his attempt by retrieving the ball and rolling it back. Not only will you reward him by rolling it back, you'll show him how to do it. Once he has mastered rolling the ball, you can vary the activity by using different types of balls or by throwing it sometimes and rolling it other times. This will maintain his interest in learning to play ball with you while reinforcing his existing skills and providing opportunities to gain new ones.

Child-focused keys in home routines Example: **HELPING MAKE LUNCH**

- Key 1** Child selects a menu from a choice of foods she likes.
- Key 2** Child engages in different activities such as assembling ingredients, choosing place mats for the table, etc.
- Key 3** Mix activities: A learned task such as putting food on plates mixed with a new task such as pouring juice in cups.
- Key 4** Thank the child for helping; tell her the names of unfamiliar foods; use adjectives to describe foods.
- Key 5** Reward attempts to set the table, pour juice, etc., even if it isn't done perfectly or if a parent's help is needed.
- Key 6** Let the child choose the drink to have for helping to pour it; tell the child how helpful she is.

Material in this *Parents CAN!* is adapted from a practice guide developed by the Research and Training Center on Early Childhood Development (RTC), www.puckett.org.



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