

W is for **WAYS TO LEARN**

Enriching Learning Opportunities for Infants, Toddlers, and Preschoolers

Look, listen, touch, hear, taste and smell! Infants, toddlers, and preschoolers use their senses as they explore and learn in everyday activities. Caregivers and practitioners can help children understand what they are seeing, hearing, feeling, tasting, or smelling as part of their everyday experiences and there are strategies to provide additional support to children who may need it. Research shows caregivers and practitioners can encourage and maximize children's development and learning by creating opportunities that engage children's senses during everyday routines and activities.

Strategies for Supporting Young Children to Learn Through Their Senses

Here are five strategies for promoting young children's learning during everyday routines and activities using each of their senses.

Strategy 1:

Emphasize young children's use of their eyes to look, see, and learn.

Help children understand what they see by emphasizing the use of their eyes to look, then describe and talk about what they are seeing. For example, while a toddler is looking at a caregiver during an interactive game, the adult might say, "I see you looking at me with your eyes." For a preschooler with low vision, reading a book with the aid of a magnifying glass could support seeing and talking about colors with an adult: "Look at the colored letters on the page! I see blue, green, and yellow letters! Can you point to a yellow letter?"

Strategy 2:

Encourage young children to use their ears to listen and learn.

Call attention to opportunities for young children to use their ears to hear what is going on around them, then talk about the things they are hearing. For example, encourage toddlers to use household items to experiment with softer sounds and louder sounds. Place a handful of dry pasta in a plastic container and a few pennies in another container, securing the lids and shaking them one at a time. Ask questions like, "Do you hear the different sounds they make? Show me the one that makes louder sounds." Encourage young children who have hearing loss to feel the vibrations of the containers while shaking them.



Strategy 3:

Invite young children to use their sense of touch to feel and learn.

Children's sense of touch can help them explore new ideas and learn from them. Provide a variety of fun and interesting ways for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers to explore their world through their sense of touch. For example, when encouraging an older infant who is sensitive to different food textures to try a new food, encourage them to feel the food's textures by touching the food with their fingers first.

Strategy 4:

Support young children to use their sense of taste to learn.

Young children learn about taste by trying a variety of foods and drinks. Talking about tastes they enjoy or might not enjoy helps young children increase their awareness of different tastes and builds early language and social skills. For example, you can provide a toddler with a variety of fruits to taste (e.g., mashed bananas, apple, and watermelon) and ask them about each one (e.g., "Is the applesauce sweet?") and wait for their reply. These back-and-forth exchanges support positive relationships and healthy eating habits.

Strategy 5:

Provide opportunities for young children to use their nose to learn through their sense of smell.

All of us, including infants, toddlers, and preschoolers, encounter many different scents as we engage in everyday activities and routines. As children interact with different scents, encourage them to use their nose to learn and talk about what they are smelling. For example, you can add different scents (e.g., cocoa or peppermint extract) to pieces of playdough and place each one in a jar. Encourage preschoolers to pick up each jar and smell it while asking them questions (e.g., "What do you smell? Is it sweet?").

What We Are Doing

The Anita Zucker Center and our collaborators are helping families and practitioners learn effective ways to maximize young children's development and learning by creating opportunities that engage their senses during everyday routines and activities.