

Seeing My Child's Strengths

Parents learn about their children's strengths by observing their interests and what they do when participating in everyday activities. This practice guide describes several ways you can gather information about the things your child likes to do and is able to do—important information you can use to help your child take part in everyday activities to increase his or her abilities and learn new things.

Watch a video of this Learning Way

Learning Way: Identifying Children's Abilities and Interests

- To identify your child's strengths, abilities, and interests, observe your child taking part in everyday activities and routines. These can be ordinary activities in and around your home such as looking at books, building with blocks, using finger paints, playing with toys, eating meals, or taking a bath. These also include outdoor and community activities like playing in the yard and at the park, going to library story times, or tagging along with you to the grocery store. Talking with adults who know your child well or completing a child interest and strengths checklist are other ways that can help you identify your child's strengths.
- Notice how your child interacts with objects, materials, and his or her surroundings. What does your child do to stay involved in activities? Pay attention to what your child can do without help from others, is good at doing, and is just beginning to do. Remember to watch for how your child shows curiosity, explores and uses toys or other objects, and tries to do new things.
- Identify the things your child does to interact with you and with other adults and children. What does your child do to begin an interaction? What does your child do when you smile or talk to him or her? What does your child do to let you know what he or she needs, wants, and desires?
- To identify the activities, events, objects, people, places, and actions that are your child's special interests, pay attention to what your child likes to do, prefers to do, chooses to do most often, and works hard at doing. These are your child's favorite things to do—things that he or she enjoys, finds attention-grabbing, and that bring on smiles, laughter, fun, and excitement.
- Using information you learn about your child's strengths, you can match these special interests and abilities with everyday learning activities in which your child will readily participate. As you engage your child in these activities, help your child do something just a little bit differently in the activity. This can be a powerful way for your child to learn new things or build skills toward greater independence.

A Quick Peek

Olivia watched her son, Mac, play in the backyard wading pool. She was making a special effort to look at what Mac was able to do in the pool and what he enjoyed. She knew that he loved his bath and hoped he would enjoy the pool just as well. Olivia saw Mac laugh as he scooped the water with his hands, making big splashes in the pool. She noticed he seemed delighted when he tried to splash the water by kicking his feet. She noted that Mac watched his sister,



Reese, reached out for her, and babbled at her when she took his hand. He picked up a rubber duck, chewed on it, and dropped it into the water. Olivia recalled that Mac was more reluctant in his uncle's big pool earlier in the summer and recognized that he now was able to do more things in the wading pool. She decided to give Mac lots of opportunities to play with Reese in the wading pool both at home and at the park and planned to add other toys and some containers that the two of them could use with the water.

You'll know it's working if ...

- Your child stays involved in activities that match his or her abilities and interests.
- Your child enjoys participating in everyday activities at home and in the community.
- Your child can do more things on his or her own while participating in everyday activities.

Learn more about how to identify your young child's strengths and interests with online resources such as [*What Makes Your Child "Tick"? Using Children's Interests to Build Communication Skills*](#), from The Hanen Centre in Canada.