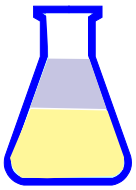
Discovering Science at Home

Children wonder endlessly about how and why things are the way they are. They also use scientific skills during everyday play - observing, identifying, classifying, and predicting. There's no need to bone up on a variety of topics to answer all your child's questions. Simply sharing the enthusiasm for discovery encourages kids and helps them value the process of learning.

Cristina Latici, former teacher, came up with the following tips for supporting your elementary child's natural curiosity along with some simple ideas for indoor experiments.

Create a Science Center:

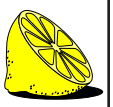
Assemble a variety of tools for exploring: a magnifying glass, prism, measuring tape, kaleidoscope, and some plastic storage containers are a good base. Then add everyday objects to examine - sand, seeds, newsprint, and stones - plus a notebook and pen for recording observations. For investigating simple mechanics, include hardware such as locks and keys, nuts, bolts, screws, and screwdrivers. Kids also love to dissect broken gadgets, so include a Walkman, wind-up alarm clock, old telephone - or anything else that you don't need reassembled!



Play with Water:

Plain old water offers unlimited opportunities for discovery and introduces the concepts of density, volume, and cause and effect. In glass jars filled with water, let kids test different objects to see what dissolves, floats, or sinks. Try "painting" with water to encourage a discussion about evaporation. Show your child why oil and water don't mix: Combine equal parts water (dyed blue with food coloring) and vegetable oil (dyed yellow) in a half-liter plastic bottle. When shaken, the colors will momentarily blend to create green before slowly dispersing to their separate sides.

Involve the Senses:



Gather items that have interesting smells and textures - citrus fruits, cocoa, coffee beans, leaves, feathers, scented soap - and ask your child to identify each by just using her hands and nose.

Explore sounds using a stethoscope or a glass to the wall. Take turns recording different sounds and guessing what they are. Encourage your child's discovery by asking questions - for example, What sounds need to be amplified for us to hear them? How many different sounds can you identify in our home? How many in just one room?

Conclusion:

Sharing science with kids encourages them to take their inquiries seriously and to seek out answers. With a bit of structure and a few tools, you can open the door to an exciting laboratory where your little scientist can explore and find the answers to questions that truly interest her. And just watch where these investigations lead - you'll see your child organize ideas in new and varied ways as her problem-solving skills become more sophisticated.

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