



Executive Summary shared discoveries: positive parent-child relationships and child development

The relationship between a parent and child has an enormous impact on every aspect of the child's development. From the very beginning, the types of shared experiences, activities, and behaviors that parents and children engage in together set the stage for children's cognitive, social, and emotional development. Researchers from numerous fields including psychology, sociology and education have documented and investigated the impact of parent-child interactions beginning in infancy through adolescence and into early adulthood. The findings from this diverse body of research support the conventional wisdom that parents have a profound and enduring impact on their child's development and path to success in school and beyond.



Positive parent-child interactions—how parents and children communicate through language, shared experiences, and mutual discovery—powerfully influence how children learn, grow, and thrive.

A key theory from developmental psychologist Lev Vygotsky emphasizes that development takes place through direct interactions with other people—parents, teachers, siblings, friends—who support and guide children's cognitive and social activities. Guided participation by knowledgeable adults allows children to participate at a higher level than they could manage on their own. Parents and children participate in these types of interactions in everyday activities such as putting together a puzzle, learning to ride a bike, and discovering how bees make honey. Children, most of the time, are the learner in these interactions, but they can also serve as the teacher.

The three themes that emerged from the research are cognition and learning, informal learning environments and play, and social and emotional development. In this paper, we survey some of the most recent and noteworthy research in the following topic areas:

- language acquisition
- motivation
- executive function
- academic engagement
- free-choice learning and informal science environments
- play
- prosocial behavior
- peer relationships
- emotion regulation

To read *Shared Discoveries*, please visit:
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