

HELP YOUR CHILD THRIVE AS A PROBLEM SOLVER!

Children learn to problem-solve through experimenting and exploring their environment. Problem-solving is part of how a child understands the world. Being able to solve problems requires an understanding of concepts like cause and effect, memory, logical thinking skills, and imagination.

BIRTH THROUGH ONE YEAR

Starting at birth, babies learn through interacting with others and exploring objects. Through these activities, they figure out there are predictable responses to actions, for example, "when I reach for Daddy, he picks me up." This is a concept known as cause and effect, which is a critical component of problem-solving.

ONE TO TWO YEARS

Babies begin categorizing things as soon as 3-4 months. By one to two years, their organizing skills have improved, and they understand more about how things are connected. Organization is a crucial skill in solving problems, especially when learning math concepts and problem-solving.

TWO TO THREE YEARS

Between 2-3 years of age, pretend play becomes a big focus for many children. Any time a child pretends that one item represents something else, they are displaying an understanding of symbols, which is important for the development of math, reading, writing, and science skills.

THREE TO FIVE YEARS

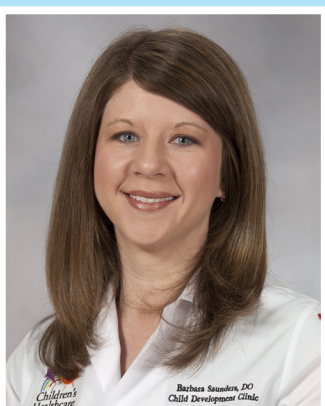
By 3-5 years of age, children begin to play more collaboratively. They are more capable of controlling their impulses, practicing cognitive flexibility, and thinking of things in different ways. How does this help problem solving? It promotes focus and self-control.

RESEARCHER SPOTLIGHT: DR. HEATHER HANNA



Researcher Dr. Heather Hanna works daily to improve health outcomes for Mississippi's children at the Social Science Research Center (SSRC) at Mississippi State University. As a child, she was always sensitive to the emotional and social well-being of her family members and friends—and later this bloomed into an interest in how individuals interact with, and are affected by, their families, communities, and the larger society. This led to her obtaining degrees in psychology, sociology, and public policy and administration. Over 18 years ago, she started as a Graduate Research Assistant at the SSRC and is now an Assistant Research Professor. She is Co-Principal Investigator for the Child Health Development Project: Mississippi Thrive!, a joint effort between The University of Mississippi Medical Center and the SSRC. Her work focuses on expanding education and policy on early childhood development.

PHYSICIAN SPOTLIGHT: DR. BARBARA SAUNDERS



Dr. Barbara Saunders, developmental-behavioral pediatrician, told her parents she wanted to be a doctor when she was just five years old. She never changed her mind and set goals to become a pediatrician. She received a B.S. in biology at the University of Mobile and then went on to complete medical school at Oklahoma State University. She had a passion for early childhood development and completed her fellowship in developmental-behavioral pediatrics at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences, where she also received a Graduate Certificate in Clinical and Translational Science. She is currently the Chief of the Division of Child Development, Medical Director of the Center for Advancement of Youth, and Executive Director of the Center of Excellence in Developmental Outcomes Research at the University of Mississippi Medical Center. She works with children, families, and healthcare providers to improve developmental health outcomes for Mississippi's children.



KICK AND PLAY

Does your child like to kick their legs during tummy-time? Putting things like crumpled paper or a rolled up towel behind their legs can make it even more interesting. Talk with your baby about how it might feel or sound when they kick. What else could you use for kicking?

BRAINY BACKGROUND

Your child learns about the world through their senses. It is important to share words for how things feel and sound as well as the names of things. You're helping them learn to connect language with the world around them. Giving them something to kick also helps them learn to link their actions with an outcome.



LAUNDRY SORT

During laundry time, pull out a single sock and see if your child can find a match for it in the laundry basket. Once they get it, let them pull out another sock and you find the match. Talk about the clues you use to find the match.

BRAINY BACKGROUND

Your child is figuring out what's the same and what's different. This is an important early math skill that they'll use to organize their thinking and solve math problems later in school.



BE A FIXER

Pretend to fix things with your child. With a plastic spoon, pretend to fix a hinge on a kitchen cabinet. "I'm fixing this broken hinge on the cabinet door. Now it's your turn." After their turn, hold out your hand saying, "My turn!" Keep taking turns, smiling while you work.

BRAINY BACKGROUND

Pretending is an important way that children make sense of their world. When children pretend, they learn that one thing (a plastic spoon) can stand for something else (a tool to fix a broken hinge). That is the basis of understanding symbols, which is important to literacy and math.



NATURE PATTERNS

Have your child collect items like rocks and leaves. Arrange them in a pattern such as one rock, two leaves, one rock, two leaves. Then mix them up and ask your child to recreate your pattern. Can they remember the order? Have them take a turn making a simple pattern for you to remember.

BRAINY BACKGROUND

Finding and repeating patterns builds focus and memory. It is a great way to make connections and solve problems. These are all important skills for learning. Playing with patterns also builds math skills like comparing sizes, numbers, and shapes.



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