

CogAT Parent Resource™

How to Talk with Your Child about Their Learning

The *Cognitive Abilities Test™ (CogAT®)* gives us valuable information about how our children learn. *The Ability Profile™* can help inform the way we speak with our children by helping us see both successes and challenges our child faces at school through a lens of greater understanding.

Here are five approaches you can use to talk to your child about their learning:

Make it a **question**

Thoughtful questions help children learn the skills of self-reflection and encourage conversation. When we ask open-ended questions and express curiosity about our child's life, it allows them to reflect more deeply on their thoughts and experiences. While questions such as "*How was school today?*" and "*Did you have a good day?*" show we care, asking even more specific questions can open deeper conversation about learning:

- "*How did you feel about the test you took today?*"
- "*What was the most fun thing you did in class?*"
- "*What was the most challenging thing you did at school today?*"
- "*Did you learn anything that surprised you today?*"
- "*What did you do at school today that you are proud of?*"

These conversations strengthen your bond, while also building verbal reasoning skills. Plus, asking questions encourages your child in their own curiosity, and curiosity is where learning begins.

Stay curious

Model lifelong learning by *staying curious*. When our children are small, it's hard to imagine that the days of endless "Why?" and "How?" questions will dwindle to an end. When the opportunity arises, try to accept the invitation to curiosity from your child.

"That's an interesting question. I wonder about that, too. Why don't we look it up together?"

If you need to have a difficult conversation about your child's learning, can you challenge yourself to start with curiosity?

For example: *"Look at this spelling test! I thought we studied this!"* could become, *"I remember you studied hard for this spelling test. How do you feel about how you did?"*

Starting with a question can help us come from a gentler place, and can give us more insight into our learner's experience by encouraging the self-reflection, conversation and connection that statements do not.

It is important to note that as parents, we aren't always going to get this "just right", especially at the end of a long day or in a difficult moment. But remembering to stay curious and try to turn our statements into questions is one tool in our parenting toolbox to keep open conversations with our child about their learning.

Have a growth mindset

You may have heard your child's teacher use the term "growth mindset." This is the belief that through effort, seeking help, and trying new strategies we can grow and improve our abilities. This can be distinguished from a fixed mindset, which instead sees intelligence, ability and talent as stable over time. While the fixed mindset says, "I can't do this," the growth mindset says, "I can try another strategy." The CogAT Ability Profile shows a snapshot of your child's abilities at this point in time, yet there is always potential for growth through intentional focus and support. Here are some statements and questions that can encourage a growth mindset:

- *"Wow – that was a challenging problem. But I saw you try a different way to solve it and you didn't give up!"*
- *"I can tell that you are really frustrated with that problem. Is there something different we can try, or do you need a break and we can come back to it?"*
- *"Do you remember last year when those addition math facts were really hard? Look at you now! How does that feel?"*
- *"I can tell you are almost ready for your test. Let's study a little more of this today and the rest of it tomorrow. What do you think?"*
- *"You read that paragraph all by yourself! Can you believe how many new words you have learned this year? Wow – you're doing it!"*

By encouraging a growth mindset and talking about the process of learning at home, we can strengthen our bond with our children and help them grow as learners.

Encourage your child in their **strengths**

Now that you have seen your child's *Ability Profile*, you have more information about what areas they excel in. Where do you see your child shining in their strengths? When we notice and call out the good in others, it often starts to multiply!

- **Nonverbal:** *"I saw how persistent you were when you put together that block tower. It might be taller than you!"*
- **Verbal:** *"Your jokes sure do make me laugh."*
- **Quantitative:** *"Wow, I am impressed with the way you solved that big problem!"*

When possible, allow your child to choose extracurricular activities where their strengths can shine. The feelings of success and competence children get in activities outside of school can bolster them in the learning environment. Simply allowing children to play creatively and move their bodies in ways that they choose, especially outdoors, is one of the best ways we can encourage their strengths at home. Play costs us nothing but gives us priceless information about what that child loves and excels at.

Model approaches to **bolster weakness**

If we have strong quantitative reasoning skills and loved math class, it may be hard for us to accept that our child may have a relative strength in a different area. This also means that the strategies that worked for us to learn mathematics when we were in school may not work for our child. This discrepancy can cause frustration, especially when helping with homework.

How can we as parents honor our child's differences, while encouraging them to strengthen their weaknesses?

One of the best ways we can do this with our children is to allow them to see our weaknesses and learning processes as adults, thus modeling behavior that can help them with their own learning. Sharing our struggles with children in age-appropriate ways gives them tools to manage their own challenges in areas of weakness and push through towards learning and growth.

- In order to learn, we must admit we don't know everything. As parents, we can admit when we do not know or understand something: *"That's a good question. I don't know the answer, but let's find out."*
- Learning requires us to persist through areas of discomfort and challenge. We can model for our children how to handle this when we learn new things. *"I had a hard time keeping up with the moves in my new workout class today. I am going to go back next week and try it again."*
- No one learns without making mistakes. By showing our children that even adults make mistakes, they can understand how to learn from theirs without shame. *"I am trying this new recipe but I made a mistake and missed a step. Next time, I will pay close attention to what order to add the ingredients in. Want to order pizza tonight?"*

As adults, we often know intuitively when we need to step away from a problem in order to solve it. Model that sometimes when we are learning and growing, our brains need a break to process. *"I'm having a hard time figuring out what to do with my project at work. I am frustrated and I need to sleep on it. I will try again tomorrow."*

We all need support from others to learn. By modeling for our children that we can ask others for help, they can feel encouraged to do the same. *"I'm struggling with this problem; I am going to call a friend and talk it through."*

As parents and caregivers, we can give children the words they need to narrate their interior lives. When we share our positive beliefs about learning with our child and model desirable behaviors, they can internalize those words to create their own inner narrative that will carry them through school and beyond.

We hope these approaches help you to have continuous age-appropriate conversations with the children in your care about their own learning.

Additional resources

Mindset
The New Psychology of Success
Carol S. Dweck, Ph.D.
2007 | ISBN 9780345472328

How to Talk So Kids Will Listen and Listen So Kids Will Talk
Adele Faber, Elaine Mazlish
2013 | ISBN 9781848123090, 1848123094