

What Parents Talk About When They Talk About Learning

A National Survey
About Young Children
and Science

SUMMARY



→ **The early years in a child’s life are the most transformative and essential to laying the groundwork for later success in life.**

All parents want what’s best for their children and are working hard to help them grow and learn.

To set children on a healthy learning path, parents need resources and supports that are clear and developmentally aligned with young children’s linguistic, conceptual, and mathematical understanding — and early science learning can be a powerful part of this foundation.

Young children are naturally curious about the world around them. They mix water and dirt to create mud, wonder whether plants eat food like people do, follow ants marching along a sidewalk crack, and ask questions about everything they see. With help from adults, these early experiences are key to children developing the important thinking and reasoning skills they will later use to become creative problem solvers.

About

This report describes results from a national telephone survey of 1,442 parents* with at least one three- to six-year-old child living at home. The survey asked parents about their attitudes, beliefs, and practices related to early learning, science learning, and digital media use: it asked parents about their sense of responsibility and confidence in helping their children learn outside of school, the skills and knowledge they feel are important for their young children to learn, the kinds of learning activities that they do with them, and how the family uses learning-related digital media.

A goal of the survey is to bring attention to the experiences families living with limited financial resources have in helping their young children learn. The survey study oversampled parents living in economically disadvantaged communities; 909 of 1,442 families (63%) had an annual household income of \$50,000 or less.

* We use “parents” in a broad sense, as our sample includes guardians and others caring for children.





Responsibility for Learning

Parental involvement is essential to young children's learning. The ways parents and other caring adults talk and interact with children at home and beyond, and the kinds of learning resources parents provide for children are key to helping children develop the knowledge and skills they need to succeed.

85%

- of parents say their children will not learn everything they need to know in school.

99%

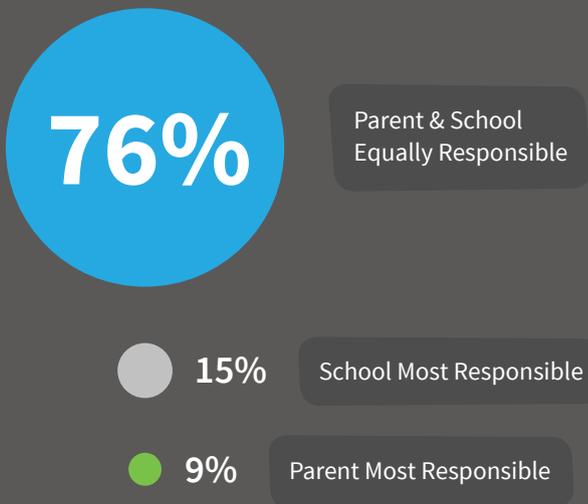
- of parents want to be involved in their children's education.

→ Parents see themselves as playing an important role in their children's education.

→ Parent Reports Regarding Responsibilities for Teaching Their Child

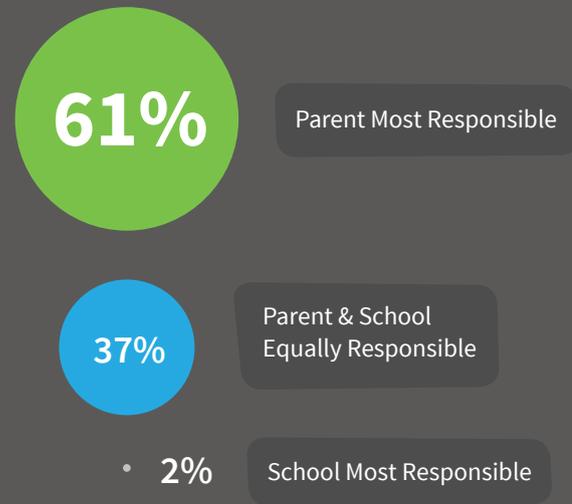
Academic skills, like reading and math

More than three-quarters of parents said responsibility for helping children learn academic skills is shared equally between themselves and schools.



Social skills, like sharing and being patient

Most parents feel they bear the most responsibility for helping their children learn social skills.



Parents with less than a high school education are more likely than more highly educated parents to feel their children will learn everything they need to know in school.





Confidence

When parents feel confident about their abilities to support their children's learning, they are more likely to provide their child with effective supports.

→ Most parents are **confident** about their ability to teach their young children math, literacy and behavior. Fewer are confident about science.

→ Percentage of Parents Who Feel "Very Confident" in Their Ability to Help Their Children Learn Age-Appropriate Skills

75%

Reading and writing skills

73%

Math skills

71%

Behavioral, social, and emotional needs

54%

Science skills

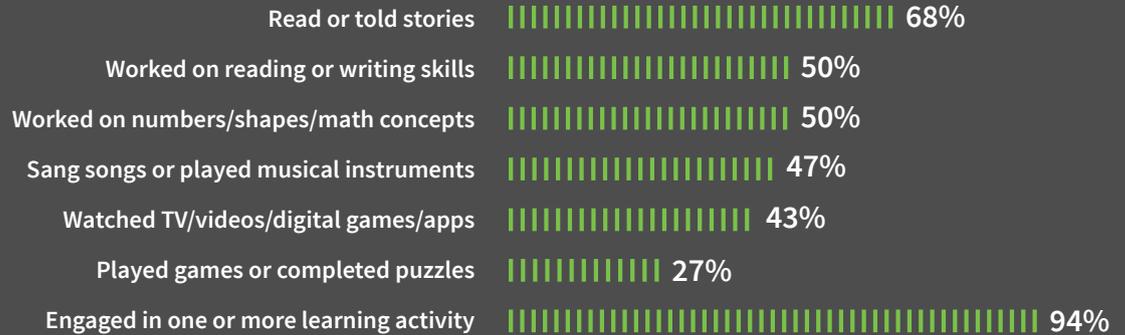
94%

of parents engage in daily learning activities with their children.

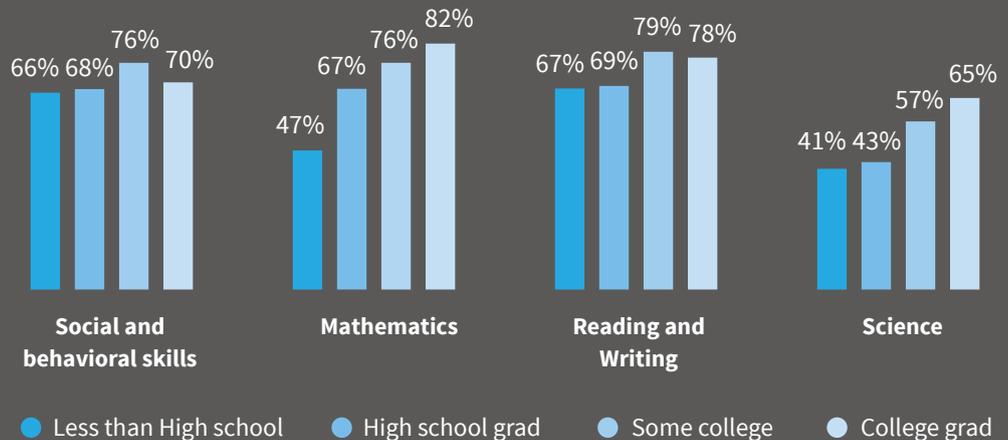


Percentage of Parents Who Report Engaging in Learning Activities With Their Children Daily

General Learning Activities



Percentage of Parents Who Report Being “Very Confident” in Their Ability to Help Their Child Learn Various Types of Age-Appropriate Skills, by Parent Level of Education



Parents with lower levels of education are less likely to be very confident in their ability to support their child’s mathematics and science learning at home than are parents with higher levels of education.



Science Learning

Parents can play a critical role in fostering children’s interest in and understanding of science by providing opportunities to talk about and explore the world every day.

5 out of 10

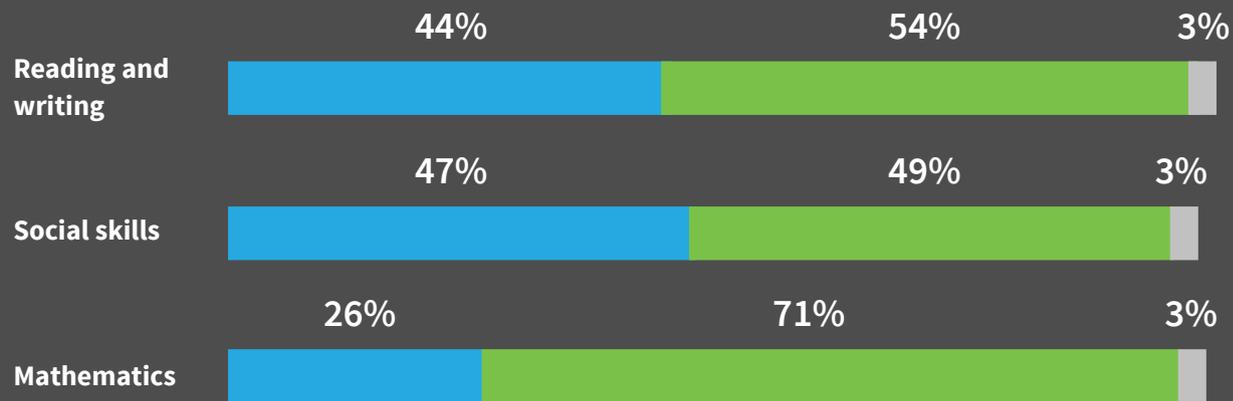
→ Parents feel “very confident” in their ability to support their children’s **science** learning (fewer than other areas, like reading and math).



1/2

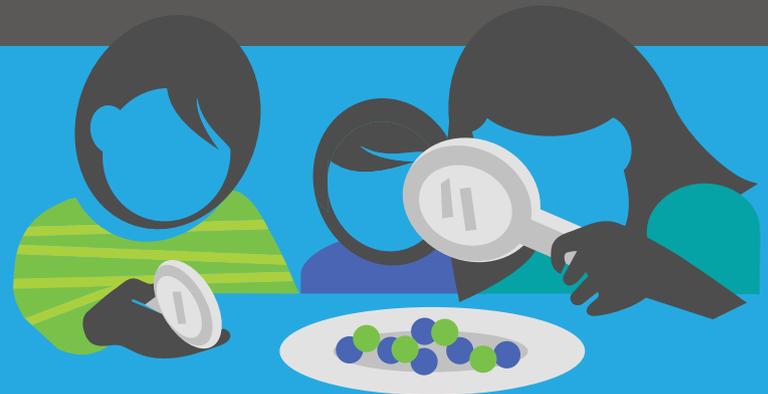
Nearly half of parents see other subjects, such as social skills and literacy, as more important than science to learn at home.

→ Parents' Perceptions of the Importance of Helping Children Learn Science at Home, Compared to Other Skills and Knowledge



- More important than science
- As important as science
- Less important than science

Moms are less likely to be very confident about supporting children's science learning — but are more likely than **dads** to do science with their children daily.





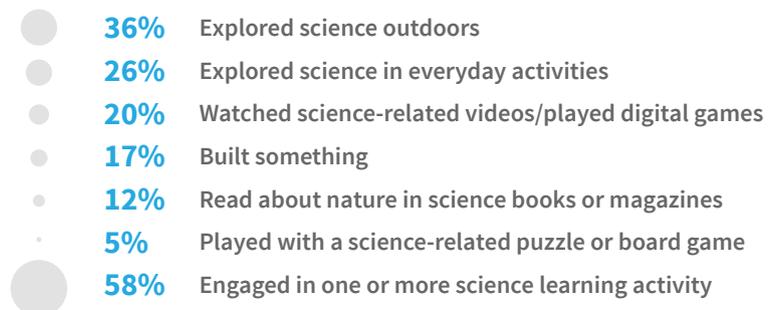
Science Activities—and Desire for Support

When parents support their children's science exploration, they are helping children develop language, literacy, and critical thinking skills necessary for them to become adults who can reason logically and problem-solve creatively.

58%

→ of parents report doing **science-related activities** with their children daily.

→ Percentage of Parents Who Report Engaging in Science Learning Activities With Their Child Daily



7 out of 10

→ Parents say having ideas for doing **science** with everyday materials would help them do a lot more science at home



Percentage of Parents Who Report That a Given Support Would Help “a Lot” in Doing More Science at Home

71%



Ideas for science activities to do with your child

71%



Ideas for doing science activities with everyday materials

64%



Information about what your child should learn about science

64%



Ways to get your child more interested in science

52%



Ways to get yourself more interested in science

45%



Better access to technology



More **lower-income** parents report engaging in science-related activities with their children daily than parents with the highest incomes.

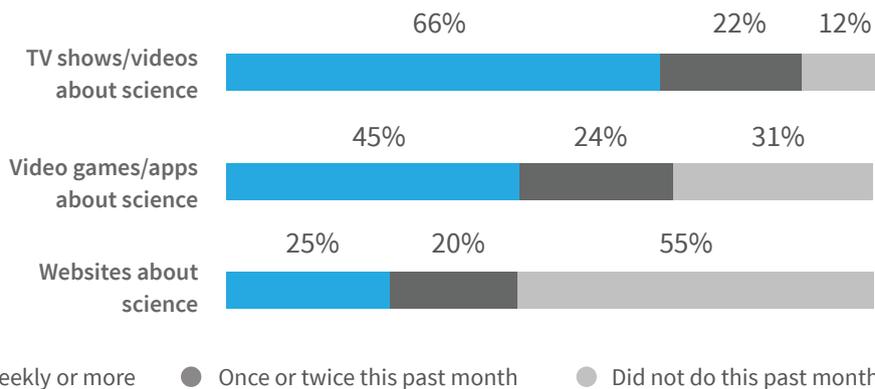


Digital Media to Support Science Learning

Digital media, because of their widespread availability and influence, can help inspire families to think and talk science.

→ **Many children use science media weekly or more.**

→ **Types of Science Media Children Use, by Frequency of Use**

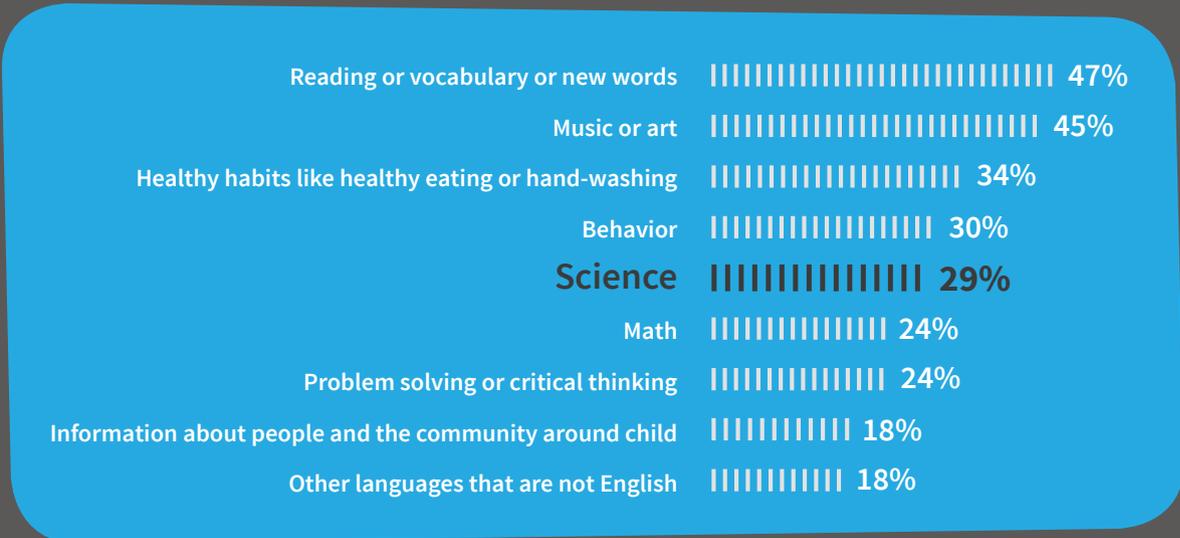




Few parents think these media resources have helped their child learn a lot of science.



Percentage of Parents who Report That Their Child “Learned a Lot” From Various Types of Media



→ Although parents regularly encourage and monitor their child’s science-related media use, they are less likely to help their child make connections between a show, app, or game and daily life.



Family Science Media Engagement Patterns: Types of Media Learning Supports that Parents Provide Weekly or More Among Parents Who Report Using Science Media in the Last Month

- 95%** Monitor child’s viewing and playing
- 94%** Compliment or encourage a child
- 86%** Explain or talk about something that you’re watching or playing
- 75%** Watch a show or play a game or app along with child
- 73%** Help your child access and play a show, app, or game
- 69%** Talk about connections between a show, app, or game and things you do in your daily life



Learn More

- These study highlights are just the beginning. The full report includes rich descriptions of parent experiences in their own words, a full set of findings, survey questions, data tables and much more.

Visit: edc.org/what-parents-talk-about



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