



ZERO TO THREE
Early connections last a lifetime



Challenges

Are How Children Learn

In the early years, children are learning lots of new skills. They are trying, testing, exploring. They are thinking about what they see happening in the world around them. They face many challenges. They jump and lose their balance. Their block tower falls down. They can't find the right place for a puzzle piece. These everyday challenges are important learning opportunities.

Children learn by facing challenges.

Challenges can certainly be frustrating! But everyday challenges offer opportunities for practice and new learning. And learning to handle frustration is important for life. Children develop resilience and grit when they work at a new skill.

Challenges can build self-confidence.

Your child just climbed to the top of the “big” slide at the playground. They were a little unsure. But when it was their turn, they slid right down to the bottom! What did you see in their face? It was pride. They realized that they could succeed at something hard. They felt confident *and* capable. This is a great foundation because children will face challenges — big and little — all through their lives.



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Parents help most when they wait before jumping in.

When we see our children struggling, it's normal to feel the urge to jump in and help. But when we pause, we give our child a chance to persist, try again, and perhaps do it without our help. Next time, take a moment to watch your child. Ask yourself: Is my child very frustrated? If not, let them try a little longer on their own.

Coach before doing.

Sometimes a child does need help to master a new skill. Sometimes they just don't have the knowledge or ability to solve the problem. Ask yourself: What is the smallest boost I could give to help them master this challenge? If their block tower keeps falling down, don't build a better one for them. Instead, point to smaller blocks as you explain: "The big blocks are heavy. I wonder if the smaller blocks might work better at the top." This way, your child still gets to experience a burst of pride when their tower stands tall.

Temperament matters.

Temperament is your child's way of experiencing the world. Some children are naturally very persistent. They are able to manage frustration more easily. Some children tend to get overwhelmed with frustration more quickly. Neither way is right or wrong. It's just how your child is wired. If your child gets frustrated, you can help by modeling how to take a breath, take a break, or ask for help. You are their role model for learning how to manage big feelings.

Have more questions? Talk to your child's healthcare provider or one of the professionals supporting your family.

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