

Puzzles and brain games for kids to boost mental skills

TODDLER

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Enhance children's brain growth by exposing them to brain games for kids that can nurture creative thinking and problem-solving skills. Board games, puzzles, and jigsaws can help increase their spatial abilities.

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The first five years of a child's life are crucial as they form the foundation for brain development. Exposing them to brain games for kids can help enhance their mental abilities.

For parents, there may be no prouder moment than seeing their children excel in school and sharing their achievements with family, friends, and social media connections. And the best time to prepare kids for the rigors of studying is in early childhood.

The first five years of life are important in a person's brain development. According to the United Nations, during this period children's experiences lay the foundation for the brain's organizational development and functioning, and how they hone their learning skills¹. Among those experiences, parents can include certain brain games for kids to enhance their mental abilities.

Puzzles

With toddlers, try solving puzzles, for example, jigsaw or shape-matching puzzles. Studies conducted by researchers at the University of Chicago showed that kids who played with puzzles when they were 26 to 46 months old demonstrated better spatial skills when they were 54 months old. Spatial abilities are a significant predictor that children will go for degrees in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics² later in life.

As for children learning words and spelling, challenge them to a word search/jumble. A literature review pointed to the usefulness of such word puzzles when teaching a second language³.

Children who are studying addition and subtraction can benefit from playing the popular Japanese number puzzle sudoku. A report by the University of Cambridge says sudoku improves memory in children and is helpful in learning math and science.⁴

Board Games

Board games are fun activities where kids learn to count, recognize colors, and match figures⁵. In a program where preschoolers from low-income families played a simple numerical board game, just four sessions of the game removed the gap in numerical knowledge between them and preschoolers belonging to the middle-income bracket⁶.

Through strategy board games, on the other hand, children get a chance to make tactics and decisions⁷. They learn to plan ahead and concentrate, which they need to do when they study. They also realize what to do next time to avoid any mistakes made. One centuries-old board game parents can introduce to kids is chess. A study by the University of Texas at Dallas of children who attended a summer chess camp showed that they improved their concentration and multi-tasking skills, and that teaching them chess had the potential of strengthening “the building blocks of complex cognitive skills.”⁹ Moreover, an experiment in Germany concluded that students with learning disabilities who got one hour of chess lesson each week, instead of the regular one hour of math class, significantly improved their simple addition and counting skills after one school year¹⁰.

But at what age can children start mastering the rules of chess? Several chess masters began learning the game at the age of 4 or 5, and they went on to win national and international tournaments.¹¹

To complement child mental development, proper nutrition is important. In a trial, infants who were given a high-nutrient diet demonstrated a higher IQ when they reached the age of 7-8 years old, compared with those who received a standard diet¹². At the other extreme, malnutrition in the first two years of life has an adverse impact on a child’s reasoning, IQ, language development, attention, learning, and academic achievement later in life¹³.

This is why super foods like milk are necessary for complete child health. For toddlers, the healthy fats in whole milk are crucial to the formation of neurons and brain health in general¹⁴. This is why the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that children drink whole milk until the age of 2, after which parents

can replace it little by little with low-fat or non-fat milk¹⁵.

Brain games for kids, combined with a proper diet that includes milk, can truly increase children's mental development, their chances of succeeding in school, and the number of "proud parent" moments shared with family and friends.

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