

Hobbies Make Smarter Kids

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Kids have hobbies and passions: some are fond of music, many love to play sports while others enjoy the challenge of puzzles and games. Hobbies are not merely for relaxing but they are modes of boosting cognitive function and memory, which are key to academic performance. So let's take a closer look at our favourite pastimes and some of the valuable life skills they can teach our children.

Music

Many parents enroll their children in music classes at a young age. Playing an instrument stimulates and engages the brain by employing motor, math and analytical skills. New connections are created between the left and right hemispheres of the brain, making it stronger. Key values, such as patience and perseverance, are learnt and one's concentration is refined. Research has shown that kids who are able to play an instrument show improved verbal fluency and processing speed. A study conducted by researchers at the University of Toronto found that taking music lessons from early childhood was a clear predictor of better grades in high school and beyond. Music programmes also serve to enhance students' self-esteem, developing happier and smarter kids. Violin, cello, guitar, piano, drums and flute are but a few of the many instruments children could learn to play. Help your child to find one of interest and something that will showcase their skills.

Puzzles and Games

Challenging the brain with puzzles and games is a good way to get the entire family together. Crossword puzzles, Sudoku, board games, cards and good old fashioned puzzles test the intellect and sharpen the mind. They promote strategic thinking, problem solving and complex decision making abilities. Video games can be useful as well, but stick to ones that are less violent and do not allow them to consume your child's free time. Gaming for thirty minutes a day is enough to enrich the brain and can be useful in improving spatial visualization and motor skills. Puzzles and games have been shown to increase the neuroplasticity of the brain and to reduce the likelihood of developing anxiety and depression.

Sports

Sports such as lawn tennis, cricket, basketball and football all involve physical exercise, which promotes a healthy body and a healthy brain. Exercise improves a person's mental acuity by producing BDNF (Brain Derived Neurotrophic Factor), a protein responsible for focus,

concentration and understanding. BDNF also reduces tension and may even help in gaining a good night's rest.

Reading

Reading is a remarkable, inexpensive hobby. There are thousands of books to choose from, and it is a tried and true method of improving learning and cognitive functions. The act of reading involves decoding symbols in order to derive meaning. Reading reduces stress as it is a peaceful hobby; it teaches about many subjects, both non-fiction and fiction, and allows the reader to experience many emotions. Furthermore, reading improves grammar, vocabulary and indulges your imagination. It is a good idea to read to children from a young age to instill this practice as early as possible.

Photography

Photography can be an expensive hobby, depending on the equipment purchased, but it can be a pleasurable activity, which could even glean financial rewards later in life. Good photography demands the use of cognitive function, effective problem solving and visual skills, and requires an interplay of left and right brain functions.

Dancing

Dancing is a form of physical exercise and is a great stress-relieving activity for kids. In young children in particular, it will improve coordination and motor skills as it involves hand-eye coordination, timing and rhythm. A positive correlation has **even** been found between dancing and improved scores in reading comprehension and spelling.

Find What's Right for Your Child

Other hobbies may include arts and crafts, cooking, singing, learning a new language, sewing and gardening. Some pastimes are more mentally challenging while others may be more physically demanding. Help your children to discover their natural abilities and what they truly enjoy by trying out different activities and finding the best fit for them.

Kids need at least one interest outside of school to help them to unwind. Hobbies are not only fun but they also exercise the mind with challenging stimuli, relieve stress, build self-esteem and enrich lives. These activities help to teach patience, time management, determination and dedication, all critical factors in achieving academic success.