

Motivating the Desire to Learn

Lupe isn't crawling, pulling herself to a standing position or walking yet, but when she's sitting near something she wants she is persistent about reaching for it and inching her way closer until she can grasp it. She has also learned how to use her index finger to bring the object close enough to grab. And when she finally has the object in her hands, she breaks into a broad baby smile of pride in achievement. She's obviously happy about learning new skills, and she's beginning to feel competent. How can we continue to encourage and nurture her natural desire to learn?



How children are motivated to learn

- **Birth-9 months:** beginning desire to control their environment; by seeing the consequence of their actions, they're motivated to continue
- **9-24 months:** ability to accomplish what they want; by being able to independently explore objects, they develop mastery
- **24-36 months:** desire to do well; by experiencing pride in accomplishing difficult tasks, they're motivated to move on to the next level
- **3-5 years:** ability to direct their own learning; by being able to self-regulate and experience some autonomy and independence, they learn how to apply skills in different situations

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Tips for motivating children's desire to learn

- Allow children to play independently and explore the world on their own terms. Give choices. Encourage them to try new things.
- Teach them that mistakes are part of life and it's okay to fail.
- On the one hand, don't make tasks too difficult for children to accomplish some success; on the other hand, don't make them so easy that they feel no real sense of accomplishment.
- Help children develop confidence in their skills by doing the same thing over and over if they want.
- Let children do their own problem-solving. Make suggestions but don't take over. Ask questions to help them find a solution (e.g., "What do you think you need to do to...").
- Show them how they were able to achieve a goal (e.g., name the steps they took to accomplish a task).

R E S O U R C E S

Fostering Intrinsic Motivation in Early Childhood Classrooms, by Martha Carlton and Adam Wisler, *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 1998.

Getting Ready for School Begins at Birth, Zero to Three; <http://bit.ly/2Yq2Wby>

Fuel Your Child's Desire to Learn, by Leslie Pfaff; <http://ow.ly/jzMpG>

Motivating Learning in Young Children, National Association of School Psychologists; <http://bit.ly/2JZtfRQ>

Programs and families can contact the program leadership directly at PAIECMH@pakeys.org with questions or concerns.

