

Understanding the world

Understanding the world involves guiding children to make sense of their physical world and their community. The frequency and range of children's personal experiences increases their knowledge and sense of the world around them – from visiting parks, libraries, and museums to meeting important members of society such as police officers, nurses, and firefighters. In addition, listening to a broad selection of stories, non-fiction, rhymes, and poems will foster their understanding of our culturally, socially, technologically, and ecologically diverse world.

Why is understanding the world important?

Children need opportunities to make sense of their physical world and their community through observing, exploring, and investigating, and opportunities to find out about places, people, technology, and the environment. Babies and young children find out about the world very effectively when they investigate by touching, holding, or pressing things and by climbing on and jumping off things – basically by doing a lot of the things we ask them not to do!!!

Through understanding:

- Past & present
- People, culture, and communities
- The natural world

Children learn about differences and similarities around them and in the wider world. They can experiment and learn about why some things occur and to talk about how and why things change, by learning to make observations. Understanding the world helps children learn, acknowledge, and accept the differences between people, and learn about and celebrate cultural celebrations and events. They gain an understanding of their family and about events in their lives both past and present. They learn about everything around them including places and all the things within them such as trees in the natural environment and roads and traffic in the built environment.

How can I encourage an understanding of the world?

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Below are 10 ideas to help you develop your child's understanding of the world, to play around with and to explore the limitless possibilities. They do not contain specific instructions or predetermined outcomes so are all very open-ended. Have fun! Do please share your experiences with us on Tapestry!

"We may have different religions, different languages, different coloured skin, but we all belong to one human race.... "

- Kofi Annan

Celebrate diversity



Children's growing awareness of diverse family structures provides rich opportunities to celebrate family diversity and engage them in conversation about who is in THEIR family, who lives in THEIR house and more importantly, who takes care of them. Point out the wonderful, interesting diversity of families, which might include blended families, foster families, LGBTQ families, multi-generational families, and many others. This diversity of families makes life richer and ensures that every child can hopefully have someone who loves and cares for them.

'The most important thing in the world is love and family'

– John Wooden

Define what makes a family



Children tend to flourish when they come to understand there are differing family structures and that all families are amazing, so long as the people in them love and care about each other. This repeated message helps children feel secure, even if their family configuration changes through death, separation, or other life events.

When children ask, "Can a family have two mummies?" one suggested response is: "Yes, some families may have two mummies, one mummy, no mummy, or even lots of mummies. And some families may have two daddies, one daddy, no daddy, or even lots of daddies. Some families also include grandparents, foster parents, aunts, and uncles. Any combination works. It's love that makes a family—just like in our family."

Literature is a wonderful way to expose children to the world. By sharing books such as the ones listed below, you are communicating that diverse families and people are all acceptable. There may be different values and structures, but in the end...it's about family.

- **The Great Big Book of Families** by Mary Hoffman. This book features a diverse variety of family structures, what family members do, and where they live.
- **The Family Book** by Todd Parr. In this book, the author celebrates all types of families in a funny, reassuring manner. He includes diverse family structures like adoptive families, step-families, single-parent families, two-mum and two-dad families, and families with both a mum and a dad.
- **Whoever You Are** by Mem Fox. This beautifully illustrated book reminds children that we may be of different nationalities, races, ethnicities, languages, or faiths, and may live our lives very differently, but we all still have the same daily needs, hopes, and dreams.

“It’s not a museum. It’s not a place of artifacts; it’s a place of ideas.”

– Jeanie Kahnke

Make a museum



If your child has collected little treasures over the years (rocks, shells, toy dinosaurs, buttons, etc.), show them how to arrange their collections in themed displays using shoe boxes, small jars, or egg cartons. Help children label their treasures—a great way to practice letter writing and recognition—and build their language skills by encouraging them to give “tours” of their personal museum to visitors. (Also, did you know that many museums are giving free virtual tours right now?)

THE LOUVRE

[Online tours \(louvre.fr\)](https://www.louvre.fr)

THE BRITISH MUSEUM

[Museum of the World \(britishmuseum.withgoogle.com\)](https://www.britishmuseum.org)

THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

[MetKids | The Metropolitan Museum of Art \(metmuseum.org\)](https://www.metmuseum.org)

VAN GOGH MUSEUM

[Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam, Netherlands — Google Arts & Culture](https://www.vangoghmuseum.com)

BOSTON CHILDREN’S MUSEUM

[Museum Virtual Tour | Boston Children's Museum \(bostonchildrensmuseum.org\)](https://www.bostonchildrensmuseum.org)

SMITHSONIAN NATIONAL MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY

[Virtual Tour | Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History \(si.edu\)](https://www.si.edu)

THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

[National Gallery of Art, Washington DC, Washington, DC, United States — Google Arts & Culture](https://www.nga.gov)

EASTER ISLAND

[Explore the Moai Up Close — Google Arts & Culture](#)

MONTEREY BAY AQUARIUM

<https://www.montereybayaquarium.org/animals/live-cams>

NASA GLENN RESEARCH CENTER

[NASA Glenn Virtual Tours | NASA](#)

[Mission Operations - 360-Degree Virtual Tour | NASA](#)

“We do not inherit the Earth from our ancestors; we borrow it from our children”

– Native American Proverb

Recycling



Get your child involved in recycling as much as possible, by having a clear system of easily accessible boxes with labels/pictures on them and making sure that everyone understands what goes where. This includes food waste after meals/snacks. Talk about why recycling is important, what can be recycled, and what happens once it's been collected (you could find some examples of products made from recycled materials).

“There are no gardening mistakes, only experiments”

– Janet Kilburn Phillips

Gardening



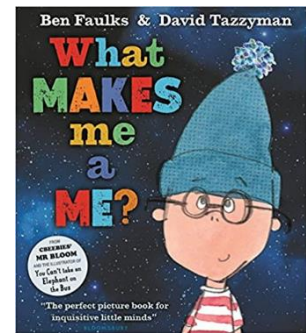
Getting your child involved in gardening. It is a brilliant way to explore all kinds of environmental concepts. How about;

- growing some plants from food scraps (eg carrot/celery tops, or fruit seeds)?
- building a worm farm (or source one that's premade), and let your child have some fun creating their own natural fertiliser for the garden. Worm farming teaches children about recycling, sustainability, and animal behaviour, as well as caring for animals.
- Making a Bug Hotel. Make a home for insects in a quiet, shady corner of your garden, and then get your child to help monitor its inhabitants. You can make a bug hotel from things like wooden pallets, pipes, slates and all kinds of other repurposed materials, as well as natural resources such as bamboo canes, pinecones, twigs and bark. Making crevices of different shapes and sizes will provide shelter to a range of invertebrates, such as spiders, bees, ladybirds, beetles, centipedes, and woodlice.

“Be who you are and say what you feel because those who mind don't matter and those who matter don't mind.”

-Dr. Seuss

Who am I?



Learn that different things contribute to identity. Explore similarities and differences between you and your child, as well as dreams and goals. You could use a mirror, and each take a turn at drawing what you look like.

*“Alone, we can do so little; together, we can do so much”
– Helen Keller*

Explore jobs in the community



Learn about the meaning of community, and that there are all kinds of different people in the community doing a variety of jobs. Go and visit the shop, library, fire station etc

*“The only thing new in the world is the history you do not know.”
-Harry S. Truman*

Past and present



Find pictures of family members and relatives (or even pets!) and create a memory box that you can share or try making an actual family tree, or a wall display, or a photobook. Talk about people in the past and present.

“Cultural differences should not separate us from each other, but rather cultural diversity brings a collective strength that can benefit all of humanity”

-Robert Alan

Different cultures



Try these activities about other cultures and customs to help your child respect and celebrate the differences in all people, while gaining a deeper understanding for others.

- **LISTEN TO SONGS IN DIFFERENT LANGUAGES**- Maybe start with a few nursery rhymes found on YouTube.
- **PLAY A BOARD GAME**- One which helps children learn about landmarks, flags and geography around the world such as;

[Z-Man Games | My First Carcassonne Board Game | Ages 4 and up | 2-4 Players : Amazon.co.uk: Toys & Games](#)

[Top Trumps Countries and Flags Quiz Game : Amazon.co.uk: Toys & Games](#)

- **EAT AT A LOCAL ETHNIC RESTAURANT.**
- **LISTEN TO MUSIC-** [This website](#) has samples of music from all over the world. Put some on and have a dance party!
- **COOK UP A STORM-** Find a traditional recipe from another culture and prepare the dish at home.
- **READ A BOOK!-** [This one](#) shows what different houses look like around the world.
- **LEARN HOW TO SAY, 'THANK YOU' IN MULTIPLE LANGUAGES.**
- **ACT OUT A FOLK TALE!**

"Artists are just children who refuse to put down their crayons"
— Al Hirschfeld

Fundamental British values



Encourage your child to develop the 4 fundamental British values.

1. Democracy

Democracy is where we make decisions together. It is about making sure that everyone has equal rights and is treated equally. Each child's views matter, and it is important they are given the opportunity to share and collaborate to make decisions together.

- Allow your child to feel comfortable asking and answering questions.
- Encourage your child to share, take turns, collaborate, and work together towards a common goal wherever possible.
- Encourage your child to make decisions, such as asking them what they would like for tea or where they would like to go.

2. Rule of Law

- This is about understanding that rules matter in our society and that there are some rules that we need to follow. Encourage your child to understand cause and effect and that our actions have consequences. Teach them right and wrong.
- You could create a short set of simple, consistent house rules. Making sure you model behaviour by following these rules is important too.
- Understanding the nature of cause and effect is a massive part of the rule of law. At a younger age, children will love discovering how their actions can alter things physically.
- Explain to your child how actions have consequences, for example explain how something they have done might have made another person feel, instead of just asking them to say a meaningless 'sorry'.

3. Individual Liberty

- This focuses on freedom for everyone. The main point developmentally is to give children a positive sense of themselves. Promoting their self-confidence and self-awareness is important, as well as giving them the language and context to understand their own emotions.
- Child-led play is a simple way to develop a child's liberty. Allowing them to explore their own interests rather than moving them towards your pre-made plan is a great way to raise their self-confidence.
- Allow your child to have favourite things and explore these. Let them mix their own colours and explore the results. Read them their favourite book. Let them gather up leaves and sticks in the forest that interest them.
- The language of feelings is crucial to a child's self-confidence and awareness, and you can model these feelings yourself, or explain them through play. "How's Teddy feeling today Sophie?" is a great question to encourage your child to think about the thoughts and feelings of others.
- Let your child take risks in their play. It is crucial to develop their sense of confidence and awareness of what they are doing.

4. Mutual Respect and Tolerance

This is basically, 'Treat others as you would like to be treated'. There should be an environment that encourages tolerance of all faiths, cultures, races, and views, along with an understanding of our differences and similarities.

- Help your child understand our similarities and differences. Encourage them to be aware of others and how they might be the same or differ. This is key to respecting other cultures that might seem entirely different from their own background.
- Create a calendar of cultural events and find ways to bring them into your activities. This way your child can gain an understanding and play a part in cultures that they wouldn't necessarily see in their lives.

- Read stories about children who have a range of experiences. They will be fascinating to little brains and allow them to understand and be tolerant of other faiths.
- An understanding of the wider community in which they live is also a way of showing the diverse world that we live in. Visit other families, the fire station, our local care home, the shops.

Remember, just as with other areas of development different children will develop different skills at different stages but if you are worried about your child's understanding of the world then do talk to us.

Further resources

[Children in Our World: Culture and Diversity : Marie Murray : 9781526310958 \(bookdepository.com\)](#)

[I Am Whole: A Multi-Racial Children's Book Celebrating Diversity, Language, Race and Culture : Oz, Shola: Amazon.co.uk: Books](#)

[Not Like The Others: A Hidden Picture Book About Diversity \(UK Edition\) \(Another Found It\) : Broecker, Jana: Amazon.co.uk: Books](#)

[We All Belong: A Children's Book About Diversity, Race and Empathy : Goss, Nathalie, Goss, Alex, Castle, Goss: Amazon.co.uk: Books](#)

[Acceptance is my Superpower: A children's Book about Diversity and Equality : Ortego, Alicia: Amazon.co.uk: Books](#)

[Gardening For Children: What It Takes To Grow And Maintain Your Garden: Teaching Kids To Garden: Amazon.co.uk: Burum, Karole: 9798500700933: Books](#)

[The Kew Gardens Children's Cookbook: Plant, Cook, Eat: Amazon.co.uk: Craig, Caroline, Archer, Joe: 9780750298193: Books](#)

[this is me and this is my family tree: Multi-activity Book \(Ragged Bears\): Amazon.co.uk: nicky may: 9781857143911: Books](#)

[Me and My Family Tree: Amazon.co.uk: Joan Sweeney, Emma Trithart: 9781524768515: Books](#)

[We All Have Different Families \(Celebrating Differences\): Amazon.co.uk: Higgins, Melissa: 9781429678896: Books](#)

[Every Family Is Different: Even Animal Families! : O'Connor, Constance, Rojas, Natalia, Poley, Lucy: Amazon.co.uk: Books](#)

[What Bug Am I?: A Funny, Educational Story about Backyard Bugs. Bug Book for Kids with Insect Facts. : Wade, Skye, Snowlet, Anna: Amazon.co.uk: Books](#)

[Life Cycles: Everything from Start to Finish: Amazon.co.uk: DK, Falconer, Sam: 9780241410998: Books](#)

[The Amazing Plant Life Cycle Story \(Look and Wonder\) : Barnham, Kay: Amazon.co.uk: Books](#)