

Helping Your Child to Learn and Grow in the Early Years: A Guide for Parents

Understanding the World

What Is Understanding the World?

Understanding the world covers science, history, geography, technology and RE. Its starting point is the fact that very young children find it easier to relate to and learn from their own direct experiences of the world, whether this is their own family, what they observe in the world around them or what they discover through play and exploration. Understanding the world is divided into three aspects. 'People and communities' focuses on families, changes over time (past and present), and understanding that people are different and have different traditions and customs. 'The world' looks at the world around us, similarities and differences between animals, materials and places and also looks at changes over time. 'Technology' concerns children's understanding and use of technology in the world around them.

People and Communities	The World	Technology
Early Learning Goal – Children talk about past and present events in their own lives and the lives of family members. They know that other children don't always enjoy the same things, and are sensitive to this. They know about similarities and differences between themselves and others, and among families, communities and traditions.	Early Learning Goal – Children know about similarities and differences in relation to places, objects, materials and living things. They talk about the features of their own immediate environment and how environments might vary from one another. They make observations of animals and plants and explain why some things occur, and talk about changes.	Early Learning Goal – Children recognise that a range of technology is used in places such as homes and schools. They select and use technology for particular purposes.
Get out the photo albums and talk about your family. Reminisce about past events such as holidays (bearing in mind that a four-year-old has a limited memory of the past!). Talk to other members of the family, such as grandparents, about family traditions at special times such as Christmas and birthdays.	The best place to learn about the world is outside. Spend as much time as you can outside with your child, in all weathers if possible. Let them explore and investigate. Keep a weather diary and talk about changes through the day or through the year. Put a white sheet under a bush, shake the bush and look at the creatures that emerge. Talk about how they are similar and different.	Go on a technology treasure hunt at home – see how many examples you and your child can find. Anything from your phone to a tablet, vacuum cleaner, TV, microwave or a remote-controlled car will count. Talk to your child about how we make these things work, and speculate about what is going on inside them. Discuss how some things are powered by electricity, others by batteries or even the sun.
Talk about how you may have different customs to your family friends or your child's friends. 'We always go to Grandma's on Christmas Day, but Sam's family stay at their house,' or 'We visit the temple but Jane's family go to church.' Encourage your child to see and celebrate differences.	In a room such as the kitchen, make a collection of objects made from different materials. Can your child find other objects that belong to each group? Why are these objects made from these materials? What do the materials look like and feel like? Use words such as 'shiny', 'dull', 'heavy', 'light', 'rough', 'smooth', 'hard', 'soft'.	Look for uses of technology when you're out and about. Let your child press the button on the pelican crossing or unlock the car with the electronic fob.
When you've done something special, such as a day out or a family wedding, help your child to make a scrapbook or draw a picture and talk about some of the things that they recall and that they enjoyed. Encourage them to take this to school to discuss with their teacher and classmates.	Get cooking. Your child will be able to explore concepts such as melting and find out what happens to an egg when it is boiled. Explore ice and what happens to it when you sprinkle salt or food colouring onto it. 'Ice balloons' are great fun – fill a balloon with water, freeze, then peel the balloon off and explore.	Make use of modern technology. There are lots of brilliant apps and programmes for children to use, and many children are more IT-savvy than their parents! Just remember that this should be balanced with free physical play and exploration of the real world.