

# CAREGIVER

Primary research with caregivers of children in the preschool years  
**To identify spaces and opportunities for learning**


**February 2022**

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## The vision of EkStep foundation

**By 2030 – healthy, curious children in every learning space and feeling safe**




**Be Healthy** - physically, mentally and in spirit

**Be Curious** - play, question, engage, laugh, explore and be free.

Have every space they inhabit (school, home, outdoors) as **a space for play, exploration, learning and freedom**

**Be and feel safe** - from fear, harm and influence of harmful external factors

EkStep chooses to focus on children in the foundational Stage, between 0-8 years, the bridge years between home and school, and the preparatory stage before entering school, **to achieve the most impact for those most impacted**. These are years when the child needs:

- Care, in the form of good health & nutrition and a safe environment, and
  - Stimulation that fosters curiosity, particularly “planned play, adult-child interactions, child-child interactions, and opportunities for holistic development”.
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## The key questions for research

Who are the new/existing actors in the ecosystem who could support the primary caregiver – in creating a safe and enriching environment and opportunities for preschool children?

Look at the demand side independently – what is the need, struggle, and aspiration of the caregiver?

What are the resources (people, expertise, places) that are abundant and can be leveraged to nurture curiosity and a love for learning in children?



**To address the vision of creating learning moments & learning spaces for the child anytime, anywhere with ease**



## The focus during this phase : was to unbundle the problem and understand the complexities



*Unbundling the problems - that come in the way of children experiencing learning opportunities in their everyday life.*

*Through the lens of the primary caregiver (from nuclear, joint and migrant families and also caregivers of neuro-typical and neuro-diverse children*

*Through the lens of an expert on early child education*

*Through the lens of the system (the anganwadi workers/preschool teachers)*

WHO

*Solutions tried, struggles experiences, possibilities going forward*

WHAT

*In tier 1 and tier 2 cities spread across the country.*

WHERE

28 interviews were conducted across the following segments

	Parent / primary care giver	Preschool teacher / anganwadi worker	ECCE experts
Tier 2 North (Lucknow)	3 interviews	2 interviews	
Tier 1 South (Chennai)	3 interviews	2 interviews	
Tier 1 - East (Kolkata)	3 interviews	2 interviews	
Tier 2 West (Jaipur)	3 interviews	2 interviews	
Total	<b>12 interviews</b>	<b>8 interviews</b>	<b>2 interviews</b>
Migrant families	<b>3 interviews</b>	Migrant families interviews were conducted in Delhi. Primary caregivers of children with special needs were based out of Bangalore and Gurgaon	
Children with special needs	<b>3 interviews</b>		



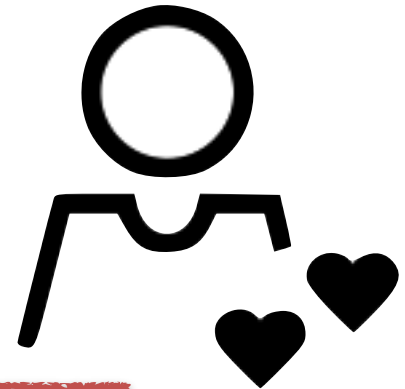
WE STARTED THIS RESEARCH WITH SOME

# BIG QUESTIONS

IN MIND

## Who is the primary care-giver?

In most families, whether joint or nuclear it is the mother who is the primary caregiver i.e. 90% of the child's time is spent with the mother while at home.



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**Grandparents are less and less involved** these days. They tend to have other ways of keeping themselves occupied.

Children these days tend to be physically active/restless much more and grandparents also find it difficult to handle children.

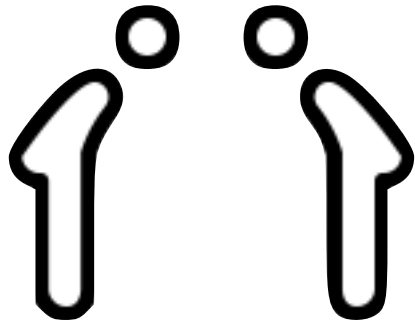
**Mothers have also become more discerning about how the grandparents interact** with the child and hence prefer to handle children themselves especially anything related to learning where they like to have more control.

Only mothers from nuclear families wished that children had more time with grandparents since they find themselves running out of patience often.

Mothers **feel supported by sending children to the anganwadi** where they are engaged and can spend time safely.

# What are the Aspirations, beliefs and expectations of the primary care-giver?

**‘Respect’ was an oft-mention aspect of aspiration - a respectable and good human being.**



Coming from **underprivileged backgrounds, respect is something which they feel a lack of.** Also, the environment in which the child is growing up can be an adverse influence on the child. Hence mothers emphasise respectful language and respectful behaviour as one of the first things the child should learn at home.

Mothers wanted children to accomplish something in the absolute sense. There were no strong mentions of wanting to see children stand out in a crowd or get ahead in the rat race. Barring a few who mentioned doctors and teachers, there were **no specific labels on what they wanted their children to become.**

**Spoken English** is also mentioned in this context as something a child ought to learn and almost all mothers we spoke to are teaching their kids English along with the native language. **It is a sign of an educated person and earns him respect.**

# What is the extent of Time given by the caregiver to the child?



The mothers (mostly housewives) spend dedicated 'learning time' with the child.

The pandemic and lack of access to schools seem to have accentuated this.

2 - 3 slots for learning commonly mentioned were :

Pre-noon as soon as the father is off to work

**Post-lunch - when she has finished her chores** and just before the children can rest.

**Pre-dinner - when the father is back from work.** This is downtime for the whole family to sit together and for the children to **show off what they have learnt.**

Some mothers **took advantage of the pre-bed-time slot** when children were naturally inclined to delay bedtime and asked a lot of questions.

Some slots like bath-time can also be used to extend the range of topics that can be discussed.

Time spent with grandparents/fathers can also be made more constructive.

# What are the frictions / concerns (of the caregiver)

Beliefs of the older family members **especially in joint families, that it is not necessary to teach a child** anything at home. More pressure on the child's brain early on would harm the child.

The role expectation of a child, from the mother, that gets in the way of her 'teaching'.

The sense of **self-doubt** - am I doing enough for my children?



**Lack of time and energy** when the mother is working.

**Environmental distraction** - music in the background, relatives visiting

**Lack of patience** - especially amongst women in nuclear families

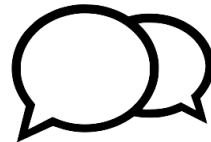
**Age in-appropriate expectation of the mother** from the child. Teaching him too much at one time.

**Environmental preparedness or the lack of it** - no visual aids, props or peers. Nothing that would sustain the child's interest.

## How to connect with the child? Through whom?

Through the mother, the Anganwadi worker or older children in the community.

Fathers could be roped in though with some effort or through the authority of an institution.



## What are The opportunities for learning? in the early years

Any method through which the **child learns without being conscious of learning**: conversations, games, learning toys.

Anything that leverages the natural ability of the child to EXPLORE

Visuals, activities, songs, stories, and conversations.



**Sensory stimuli work** well in keeping the child's interest sustained.





## What are Resources that are within reach that could create The Plus 1 opportunities for learning?

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Mothers rely on YouTube heavily (since searching and finding is easy using the voice search)

Though in conversation they do mention that household things can be used to teach so much to a child, their **idea of learning is pre-conditioned by the paper-pencil method.**

TV is not used much since they are aware that the learning experience on smart TV is very different from a 'dabba' TV they have access to.

Mainstream movies/television serials can be a big influencer since they naturally tune into those.

Mothers also **mentioned looking at the preschool / Anganwadi teaching methods for inspiration** on how to make learning interesting for a child.

# Where do the views of the key stakeholders converge v/s diverge?

## Anganwadi workers

## Experts

Experts and anganwadi workers believe that social-emotional development is only possible through 'real-life' interactions.

**Everyone understands and acknowledges that the 3 - 6 years are critical in the life of a child**

During these years they notice everything and their capacity to absorb is very high.

**Social-emotional development is very critical**

**Almost all sets of people interviewed (parents, Anganwadi workers, experts, mothers of neuro-diverse children) believe the Anganwadi environment, as compared to the privatised preschool is much more aligned with the needs of a young child.**


**Learning at this age should be through play.**

## Mothers

There is a difference in the mother's beliefs and her behaviour.

Mothers though think of social emotional-development as important, want to ensure consistency in the information/values that the child receives and feel it is best that child spends time with her. Hence the mother, limits interaction with neighbours and grandparents too.

They also sometimes overemphasise academic learning overplay.

WHAT TOOK US BY 

# SURPRISE



Balwaadis / anganwadis are a hidden gem appreciated by everyone across segments and cities. Despite the constraints in the physical infrastructure, **the social infrastructure of an anganwadi is very attuned to the needs of a child.**

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Mothers have made teaching their kids a priority. It is her way of proving her worth to her immediate family and society at large. **Her expression of identity has moved from the kitchen to the child.**

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Every individual spoken to during this research emphasised **the importance of nurture over nature** in the way the development of a child unfurls. No one cited their socio-economic circumstance as a limitation with respect to how they could potentially bring up their children.

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Women from the poorest of families when asked about **what is abundantly available** to every individual that could shape the future of their child - said - ***'humari soch'* (our thinking).**

# **Context to the findings**

**HOW TO READ AND USE THIS RESEARCH REPORT**

## WHAT WE SET OUT TO EXPLORE V/S WHAT WE FOUND?

The research was designed to **explore ‘who the primary caregiver is to a child under 6 years of age.** We did not want to assume it is necessarily, the mother.

Though the research findings re-affirmed that the mother is still the primary caregiver, sometimes out of lack of other support, but often out of choice.

Interestingly, the research pointed to the fact that **the segment of mothers as primary caregivers is not a homogenous segment. Psychographically, we found four different sub-segments - the struggler, the striver, the solution seeker & the solution creator** which we could roughly trace back to the four types of personas we have explored in the detailed findings of this report.

The **Struggler** could be traced back to the mother in the **nuclear family**

The **Striver** could be traced back to the mother in the **migrant family**

The **Solution Seeker** could be traced back to the mother in the **joint family**

The **Solution Creator** could be traced back to the **mother of the neuro-diverse child**

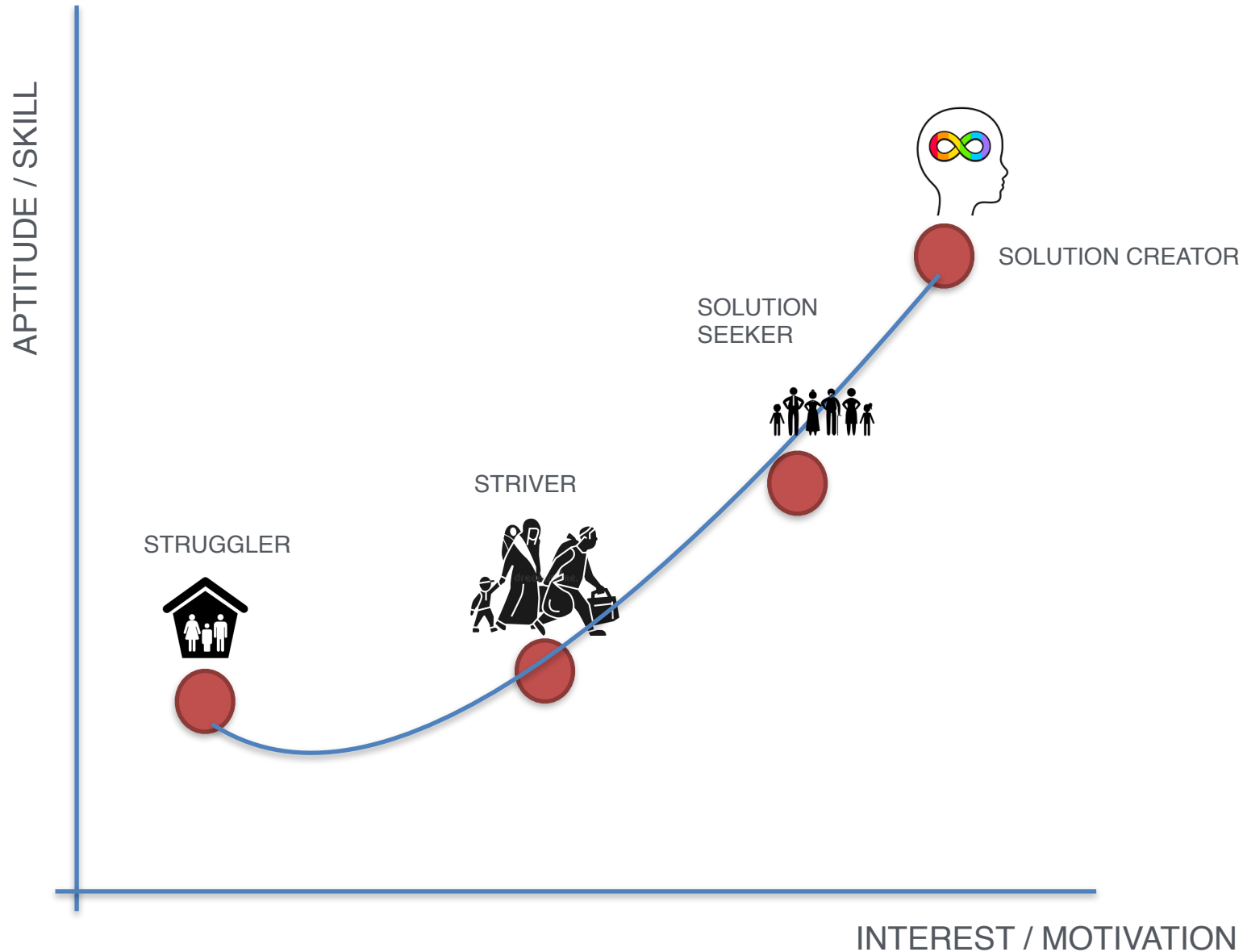
Though the psychographic segments are mapped to family type/circumstances since that is where we encountered the most vivid manifestation of this caregiver type, **this classification is not watertight.** In your work, you could find a struggler in a migrant family or a solution-creator in a joint family.

We also hypothesize, as **the caregiver upskills or is empowered with more information - she could move from one segment to the next** as outlined in the figure on slide 18. Though this is not a linear curve. At different points in time, due to challenging circumstances, it is possible to imagine a movement back and forth along the curve.



	NUCLEAR FAMILY	MIGRANT FAMILY	JOINT FAMILY	SPECIAL NEEDS
MINDSET	<b>STRUGGLER</b>	<b>STRIVER</b>	<b>SOLUTION SEEKER</b>	<b>SOLUTION CREATOR</b>
INTENSITY OF NEED	Low - reluctant to go beyond her comfort zone.	High - need to prove to others that she is doing her best.	Moderate - aspires that her child develops in a well-rounded way. She believes.	High - children may exhibit traits that are neuro-diverse Aspires integration into mainstream.
EFFORT SHE PUTS IN	Low - when children play, she thinks of the mess they make. Enrolled child in a tuition class.	Moderate - when the paper pencil methods don't work, she observes, goes back to age-old practices	High - she is observant and understands her child well. Is quick to gauge if methods are not working with the child. Her frustration are momentary	High - well read, could be trained in teaching skills
ATTITUDE TO LEARNING	Direct, structured, often leads to conflicts	Direct, structured, often leads to conflicts. Does not know what to teach the child.	Progressive, indirect, more enjoyment, fewer conflicts. Does not mind going slow.	Progressive, indirect, more enjoyment, fewer conflicts.
THE PAY OFF SHE IS SEEKING	Convenience for herself, less guilt, less conflicts with the child	Visible difference in the child's learning to feel reassured and prove to extended family	Inputs to sustain her teaching journey and appreciation for her efforts	To reconnect with her child in a non-authoritative way.

The user personas reflect the learning curve the 'primary caregiver' could take on her journey from being a mother to a teacher to her child







USER PERSONA

# THE STRUGGLER

REPRESENTED BY  
THE NUCLEAR  
FAMILY -  
CAREGIVER

# Madhu

Mother of a single child

Nuclear family. Grandparents live in a different city.

## HUSBAND :

Clerk in a construction office  
Carpenter  
Tyre business

## EDUCATION :

12th pass (Chennai moms)  
MA (Kolkatta Mom)



*I can teach her everything, but, I lack the patience to teach her.*

*Everyone should have confidence. We may win or lose. But, we should participate in everything. No one is born to win. We have to accept the loss. After losing several times, we will win. This mental strength is necessary. This my child lacks.*



## HER CONTEXT AND CONCERNS

Her child is enrolled in a Baalwadi. Apart from those few hours, the child mostly spends time with her. **She finds herself losing patience with the child very often and speaks to him sternly to get the job done** whether it is eating or homework.



## HER CONTEXT AND CONCERNS

Though **grandparents** do not live with them, she realises whenever he visits them they deal with him very differently. They **have a lot more patience** and she knows that their ways of talking to him and storytelling **helps them not just bond with the child but also help her son develop his curiosity.**

**Time with the father is mostly spent playing** either at home in the evenings or on weekends they go out to the park or the beach. Father and child engage in pretend to play teacher-student where the child is the teacher.



*Feeding children with a mobile phone is the worst method to feed them, but I knowingly feed my child with a phone because I lack patience and now my child is addicted to the phone and only eats if we give the phone in his hands. It does have some advantages like he learns new words from the stories he is watching on YouTube but it will spoil his eyesight. I feel good when he asks me the meanings of new words but sometimes he also picks up abusive words and I scold him.*



## ASPIRATIONS

**She wants her child to become confident**, especially in the case of the girl child they want her to grow up confident and **not inferior to a boy**. They teach her to speak confidently. Whenever the child visits the grandparents, they tell her stories of inspirational leaders. She wished the child had more time with his / her grandparents.



*My husband wants to teach her Silambam (a form of Indian martial art), he had found a class in the vicinity at the YWCA.*

*From now, I try to build up his confidence. The school is closed now. But after a few months, he will have to go to school. If he doesn't have enough courage, then he may not do the sums. He will get afraid of whether the sum will be right or wrong; so, let's leave it. I keep telling him- even if you do a mistake, do it; you will learn from mistakes.*

*'aindhil  
valyadhadhadhu  
aimbathil  
valaiyadhu' (what  
does not bend at 5  
years, does not  
bend at 50 years).  
Parents train and  
mould the child*



## CHALLENGES / FRUSTRATIONS

She has seen her child imitate her and pretend plays with his kitchen toys. **Though she knows he is learning in the process, she finds cleaning up the additional mess at the end of play frustrating.**

**Getting him into a habit of sitting and writing has been difficult** and frustrating for both of them. Though the child has gotten used to it since there was no escape.

She also worries that her child is glued to the TV or phone whenever she is busy.

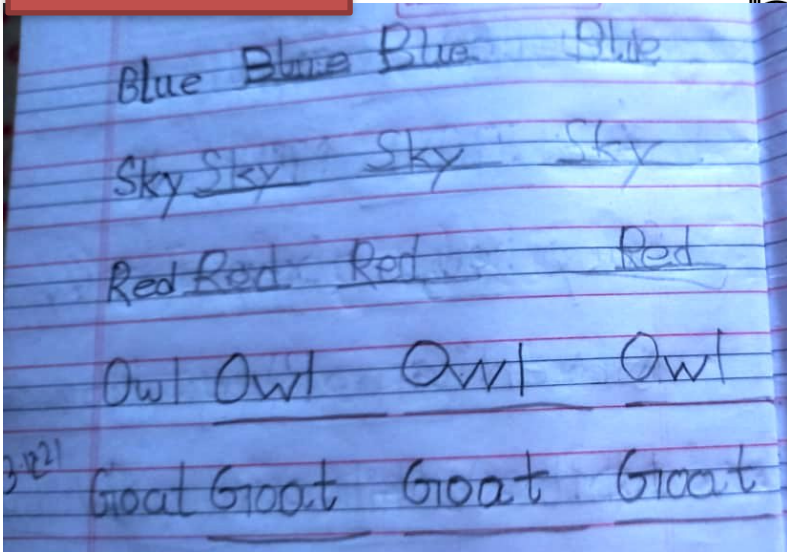
Less experimental and hence learning becomes a power struggle.



*Audio can be used to learn, but for him to understand the concept, he needs to write it down. I wish he would sit longer to study.*



Emphasises repetition



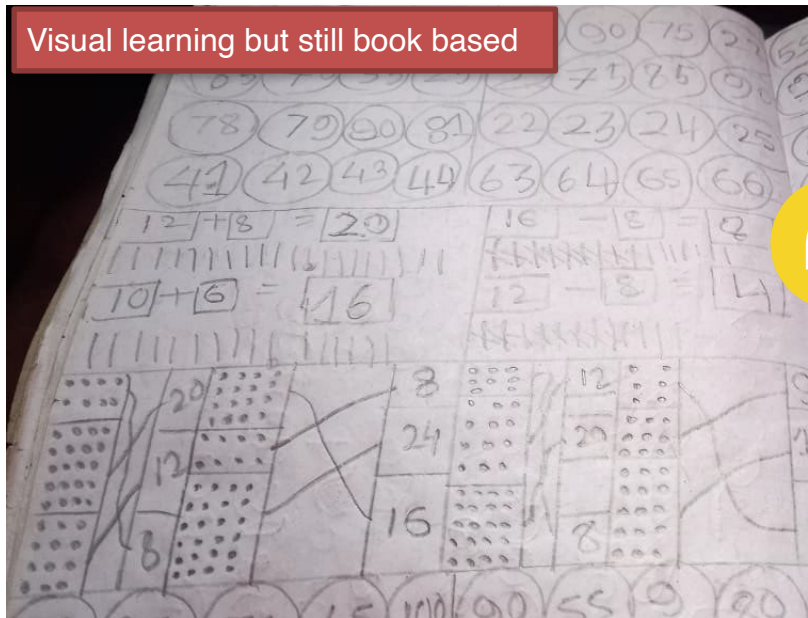
## ATTITUDE AND BEHAVIOUR W.R.T LEARNING

She has enrolled her child in a tuition class so that his foundation is strong.

**She only reinforces what is learnt at school, and does not teach afresh.** Though she does like to teach him *shlokas*.

She believes that the child should not be competitive and excel only in studies. She should know about the world too and grow up with good values.

Visual learning but still book based



**Children who are taught at home grasp faster at school.**

“

*As he is a small child, he understands what is been taught to him in school, he understands up to 50%, and as a parent, I feel that he should understand 100% and excel in his studies in future, I send him to tuition, though I can make him study at home, but, I have other household chores due to which I don't find sufficient time.*

*I make him practice every day, for example, I ask him to recite Guru Brahma shloka, before he sits to study.*

## HER SOURCES OF IDEAS

She gets her ideas from **watching TV serials**, from what is taught at school and also getting tips from how neighbours teach their children



“ *There is a serial called Abhiyum nanum, I have seen and learnt how the child sings, studies and speaks boldly.* ”

## WHY SHE FEELS JOINING SCHOOL EARLY IS CRITICAL?



Since her child is a single child she feels that he can mingle with other children only at school. **Social skills and communication skills she feels are very important determinants of future success.** At school, they also learn to take care of their belongings. At home the child expects the mother to do the same. She feels **the company of other children and other people also makes them learn faster.**

At school, she feels, teachers are far more patient with children at the anganwadi they have age-appropriate expectations.

“ *If I expect her to learn the whole verse in a day, at the anganwadi they would just focus on 1 - 2 lines. They also put in a lot of effort to explain things. At home, we do not put in that much effort.* ”



## HAPPY LEARNING MOMENTS

She feels relieved and proud when the child learns something on her own.



*When she tells me things that I don't know, I would feel happy, for example, she would use the feature of talking on the search engine, instead of typing.*

Child learning on her own = happy child, happy mom.



## TIME SLOTS FOR LEARNING

The time when the child has undivided time and attention from his mother is the best time to teach him something. She talks to him when they are walking back home from school and also in the evenings for an hour or two before father returns home.

*If we see a dog on the road, I would tell him if he troubles the dog, the dog would bite him. That teaches him consequences of actions.*





Looking for proof of her efforts - through writing

## HER EXPERIMENTS WITH TEACHING



She tries to think of ways to make learning interesting for him though in her mind ‘writing in the book’ is critical to learning. Any form of ambient learning would be followed up by a writing activity, which becomes an uphill task for the child and her - hence starts to become a negative spiral.

When she visits her grandparents, her grandmother tells her **stories based on her favourite cartoon characters that teach her lessons**. For instance, she would tell the Hare and the Tortoise story but change the characters to Motu-Patlu. She also relies on cartoons and TV to make teaching easier for her.

“

*“There is a count-and-write activity in his book, I ask him to count the number of blocks, tomatoes, or shampoo packets at home and then write it down. I make him learn colours through colouring books and alphabets through the writing practice books.*

*He knows that Doraemon is sky & white in colour. This is how I made him learn to identify colours. Doraemon, Tom & Jerry, Sinchan, Oggy and the Cockroaches. From these cartoon shows, he gets to know the names of different animals & reptiles*

*Children can learn from anywhere. Other than the house, they can learn about the world in the park, through pictures, at the yoga centre or even at the temple. At parks they have pictures explaining in easy terms - how to maintain hygiene safety protocols because of the pandemic and the children find it easier to follow the pictures.*

## IN A NUT SHELL

She believes the house is the first school and the mother is the first teacher. By this, she means teaching the child social norms, behaviour and values and not necessarily academic learning. Making the child a good human being is the mother's prime responsibility. The bookish knowledge is secondary and can come later. **She also finds herself limited in her imagination, energy and patience in teaching (anything academic) to her child at home.**



*The children remain in school for 3-4 hours & remain at home for 20hrs. So, the children spend maximum time at home. Thus, he learns everything from home apart from bookish knowledge. The teachers can make them learn bookish knowledge. But the mother is the actual teacher to teach him about life. The mother & child have a direct connection with each other. Since childhood, the teachings that are given by a mother to her child - gradually keep growing within him. Teachings like how to talk to people, how to be well-mannered or keep hygiene.*

*We cannot make the brain. The brain already develops before birth. We cannot create intelligence. We can make the children learn one thing several times so that they can remember it. But, their intelligence cannot be developed*

USER PERSONA

# THE STRIVER



**REPRESENTED BY  
THE MIGRANT  
FAMILY -  
CAREGIVER**

# Bindiya

Late twenties, Currently in Delhi, Rohini

Nuclear family

## HUSBAND :

Welder / rickshaw  
driver / construction  
worker

## ORIGINALLY FROM :

Jabalpur / Jharkhand / Bihar

## EDUCATION :

10TH OR LESS



*Dimaag aur soch toh sabke paas hoti hai. Bachhe paidaishi tez nahin hotein hain. Agar aap bachon ko dhyaan nahin doge toh kahan se tez banenge. I will try extra hard but I will make sure I get my child to learn. I will seek help if needed.*



## HER CONTEXT AND CONCERNS

Have moved to the city 3 years ago. The decision for the family to come to the city was that of the husband since he found it difficult. Having come to the city, they feel a **need to prove to the extended family that this has been a good decision, especially from the point of view of the child's upbringing.**



## HER CONTEXT AND CONCERNS

The child was enrolled in an Anganwadi in the village. Enrolment in the city has been delayed due to the pandemic and paperwork i.e. his birth certificate mentions the village address. **If the kids went to the Anganwadi that would be a big support since she would not have to actively teach but just reinforce what was done there. There would be a book or some guidelines to follow.** Right now she feels like she is shooting in the dark.

She could leave the child with grandparents when in the village and hence had more freedom of movement. The child also enjoyed the company of others and learnt about social living, about the environment, and picked up values by interacting with others. Though on the flip side, there is no definite routine in the village and no dedicated time for learning.



*He loves to spend time with grandma.  
I sometimes take books along and Grandma also reads for him. She takes him to the mango farm and lake. He learns about his sanskaars.*





## ASPIRATIONS

She believes that the child needs to be oriented towards studying from a very early age else he might lose interest in studying.

Whatever no one else has done in the family her children should be able to do.

Everyone in the village has their eyes on them since they have moved away from the village. The elders keep tabs on them and how the children are doing. **If she is not able to get her children educated, she would not be criticised.**

“

*Apne papa se aage badhein. Doctor bane yaan afsar bane (officer). Aaj ke zaamane mein jo unpadh (illiterate) woh bhi apne bachhe ko padha rahein hain.*

*Padhega nahin to budbak (foolish) ho jayega. School nahin ja raha hai toh iska dimaag hi khatam ho jayega.*

Child should not get caught up in play all the time





## CHALLENGES / FRUSTRATIONS

Her children **do not associate the home environment with learning.** Home is for eating, sleeping and playing.

She also has a fair amount of house chores at hand and no one to share the load. She knows that children at school copy each other and hence it is easier to get them to learn.

Her kids do not take her word seriously. She also does not know the tricks to engage their attention. **She sometimes feels at a loss of what to teach the child.**

At times teaching two children at home who are at different levels of learning becomes a challenge.

Playing the referee apart from the teacher with two kids



*I have two kids of different ages - if I have to teach one the alphabet, then the other one needs to learn tables. Maa ki baat ko mazaak mein le letein hai*



## ATTITUDE AND BEHAVIOUR W.R.T LEARNING

Her default approach to teaching is the **paper-pencil method** i.e. handhold the child to write the alphabet and numbers. If that does not work she starts to explore other solutions - find a tutor or look for ways of teaching from online resources.

She gets the child to write or say things repeatedly when the child forgets something. In effect, **though they spend time learning every day, it is the same thing rather than different topics.**

Due to the pandemic, she keeps hearing from everyone 'ghar par padhao'.

She feels learning English is important since that would differentiate a city child from a village child.

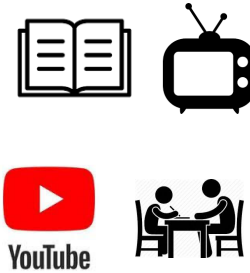


Going by old codes of learning - that is what she is exposed to.



## HER SOURCES OF IDEAS

She feels there is no dearth of information these days. Staying in the city, they have access to learning toys, books, charts etc. The neighbourhood tuition teacher is a big help in giving her tips on what to teach and so is YouTube.



*Humein humare bachoon ko padhana hai - yeh hi soch humein aage le jayegi. Hum bhi humare bachon ko jaankari de saktein hain.*



## WHY SHE FEELS JOINING SCHOOL EARLY IS CRITICAL?

It would help her child overcome separation anxiety. Besides the child would learn **social skills and independence**. After 6 kids start to form opinions and are less amenable to listening. School to her is a microcosm of society.



*School samaaj ki tarah hai.  
6 saal mein bachcha apne mann ka maalik ho jata hai. Phir uske dimaag mein jo hai woh karega aur kisi ka nahin sunega.  
Isiliye 3 saal se aadat honi chahiye.*



## HAPPY LEARNING MOMENTS

Whenever her child learns something on his own, it makes her very happy. It creates a sense of relief in more ways than one. The smaller relief is the sense of burden being lifted that she does not have to do everything. The bigger relief is that such incidents are a **manifestation of his ability to grasp and learn** and she feels a little reassurance about his future.



*“In the park, older kids were exercising and he learnt it from them and showed it to me...I felt very happy - chota hai phir bhi kar ke dikha raha hai. I felt happy thinking ki - uski pakad achhi hai - he has good grasping ability”.*



## TIME SLOTS FOR LEARNING

If she does not sit with them they won't spend time learning on their own. Somehow with great difficulty, she can spend an hour or two with them.

Sometimes they sit together in the afternoon since that is an undisturbed time. Many a time she is sleepy. The other possibility if every one has taken the afternoon nap is the evenings - 7 - 8 p.m slot.

Is aware of other methods - perhaps her conditioning gets in the way.

## HER EXPERIMENTS WITH TEACHING



She is on the lookout for what else, what more she could do to teach her child. She knows that her role goes beyond teaching to making the experience of learning engaging for the child.

Whether it is observing how older children play and learn or using some age-old practices - mixing grains and asking kids to separate them and use this to teach them names, colours etc. If nothing strikes her, she takes her child out to the park to watch other kids and learn from nature.

“

*My daughter tells good morning to her father whenever she is up early. My husband asked her Kaun sikhaya yeh baat? My daughter said, mummy ne. And he said, humein bohot achha laga. Iske papa ko bhi lagta hai ki - hum poora din ghar mein baithe nahin rehte - bachhon ko bhi sikhatein hain.*

*My child should know how to greet people, should know how to add numbers - since at school they check all this. We are not educated and hence people should never say - aap padhe likhe nahin hai toh bachha bhi aisa hi ho gaya.*

*It is better to learn via toys than household items since children naturally love toys. If I show him a fruit or a vegetable and tell him this is A se Anaar - he would say achha theek hai...usmein uska mann nahin lagega.*

*My husband bought her the kitchen set to play with - she was able to learn about things.*

## IN A NUT SHELL

She does not think of her circumstances as a limitation to her child's potential growth. She believes a good upbringing and access to education are strong determinants of how far they would go.

**Though despite her efforts and everything that she does - she is always in doubt.**



*I looked up that what are the poems to teach to a 3-year-old and made my child learn Jhonny Jhonny and Machli Jal ki Raani hai. I haven't gone to the nursery so I don't know whether my child is lagging behind or not.*

USER PERSONA



# THE SOLUTION SEEKER

**REPRESENTED BY  
THE JOINT FAMILY -  
CAREGIVER**

# Vidya

Late twenties

Joint family with grandparents and in-laws with older kids (studying in college)

## HUSBAND :

Shop owner  
Salesman  
Plumber

Originally from :

Lucknow, Jaipur, Kolkatta, Chennai.

## EDUCATION :

12th pass



“

*Parents are focussed on discipline v/s grand-parents ke saath bigad jaatein hain since they generally fulfil all their wishes. The way grandparents speak is also very different - they use 'tu' and we use 'aap' and the kids tend to copy that language. I am a housewife - I try to finish all my work by the afternoon so that I can spend some quality time with my child. If we tell grandparents to oversee anything related to studies - they would hold the child's hand and get the child to write fast and get it over and done with and not labour over it. The children also tend to like that. They tend to take shortcuts with their grandparents. Hum jitna dhyaan detain hain utna koi aur nahin de sakta hai.*



## HER CONTEXT AND CONCERNS

She is quite involved as a mother and happy to have her child spend most of his / her time with her. The child spends a couple of hours with the grandmother which gives her enough time to finish her home chores.



## HER CONTEXT AND CONCERNS

Though there is only a limited interaction with the grandparents, father and other members of the family - even that creates a sense of support and overall she is not as frustrated and worn out as the primary caregiver in the nuclear family.

She wouldn't have wanted it any other way since she **likes to have some sense of control over how she is raising her child.**

Grandparents also are not inclined to spend more time with the child since they have other preoccupations and sometimes find the kids too jumpy. She seemed **relatively more aware and exposed to holistic ways of teaching a child and was willing to go the extra mile.**



*Bachhe gilee mittii ki tarah hotein hain - jaise sanche mein dhaloge waise banega.*

*A teacher teaches for a few hours, a mother teaches throughout life.*



*I mostly keep my kids with myself - apne bachoon ko apne saath hi rakhti hoon. Others do not have time and I like to have my kids around me. Their grandparents are quite old and they are not able to handle kids.*

*They are not able to handle kids for too long. They don't like too much noise. Kids generally throw things around. The elders do not like this kind of behaviour. They tell me then to take my kids away. Pehle na TV thi and elders would have no other means of entertainment aur bachhe hi unke line manoranjan ka saadhan the.*





## ASPIRATIONS

She aspires for her child to grow up to be a good human being. Though she also emphasises education and is trying whatever she can to build a strong foundation for the child, she feels if a person is educated but lacks values and compassion - the education is of no use.



A picture of a household object - used by the mom to strike up a conversation.



*Suppose I am doing a job in a company and earning Rs 10000 and I am a teacher and earning Rs 5000. The job of a teacher has less money but she is highly respected by others. The honour that she will get is her greatest achievement. A teacher is respected by all whether rich or poor.*

*They should be very good at studying since my daughter says that she wants to become a doctor. Hence I make sure I sit with her every day and make her study. My MIL often tells me - tum to aise uske peeche padi ho jaise, M.A. B.A. ki padhai hai. But I tell my MIL that abhi uska base achha hoga toh aage usse koi dikkat nahin hogi.*





## CHALLENGES / FRUSTRATIONS

She does not really feel challenged/frustrated except momentarily. She feels that it is the working women who are time or energy strapped and are not connected enough with their children. **Being a housewife her child is her main priority.**

She also finds that teaching is not that difficult - since there is so much information on YouTube already available and children can also learn themselves from YouTube.



Sticking activity



*If my child is not able to pick up something I try to find a solution - for instance, he didn't know how to write the number 6 and I told him - you first make a small circle and then extend it like a rope. I try to teach him these tricks, I just make them up. I told him about colour names by showing vegetables.*



## ATTITUDE AND BEHAVIOUR W.R.T LEARNING

She feels a strong foundation for learning can only be created at home and she is doing all that she can to orient her child towards learning from an early age. A mother can recognise the strengths and weaknesses of her child.

She is aware of the concept of a LEARNING GAP and what could possibly happen if the child does not learn at the right age. Though others around her discourage her from teaching the child 'too much', she has a strong conviction that she is doing the best for her child's development. **She also believes in keeping her efforts regular and predictable for the child to keep his / her interest sustained. Her teaching is diverse and does not stick to just the paper-pencil method.**

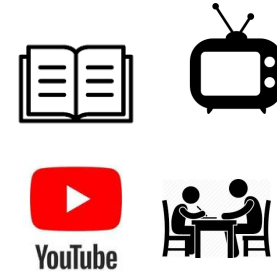


*Aaj kal education ka level bhi bohot high hai. Bade bachhe bhi fail ho jaatein hain. Abhi se level nahin banayenge toh aage level nahin banega.*

*When I go to my mother's house also I take along his books, so that his routine of learning is not disrupted. People say - zyada padheinge toh bachhon ke dimaag pe zor padega. But I don't think so - I feel if the child doesn't want to learn and is forced to learn then that would be like pressuring the child but if the child wants to learn then by stimulating the child - the brain of the child would develop (viksit hoga dimaag).*

## HER SOURCES OF IDEAS

**She draws inspiration from everywhere** whether it is YouTube, movies like Taare Zameen Par, watching how kids are taught at the neighbour play school or anganwadi, TV or even books that her older child used at school.



## WHY SHE FEELS JOINING SCHOOL EARLY IS CRITICAL?

She is discerning enough to know that what the child would learn at school would be very different from what he/she would learn at home. Home is the place for the child to learn values and that helps a child in the long term.

Though she teaches her child at home, she feels it is difficult to sustain the interest of the child at home which happens naturally at school due to the presence of other kids, a sense of competition and the presence of learning resources. School is also a place to learn social skills and discipline. **The school creates a learning habit.**



## HAPPY LEARNING MOMENTS

Two occasions help create a positive reinforcement learning cycle :

**When they are playing a game** and the child is learning in the process without much strain

**When the child gives her cues he has learnt on his own.** In this case, it does not come as a sense of relief but in fact, **motivates her to go further.**



*She was able to hold the pencil and form some letters without dots - I felt good - itna kar rahi hai toh aage bhi kar legi.*

*I was also enjoying myself and my child was also enjoying herself. Learning was not on my mind. We were playing a game of finding letters through blocks and I wasn't thinking whether she would be able to find it or not.*

*During the lockdown, we used to get a lot of veggies and spread them out in the kitchen and that was very easy for them to learn the names of fruits and veggies in Hindi and English. That was a very easy way for them to learn. At that time we did not have books too.*



## TIME SLOTS FOR LEARNING

She generally spends a couple of hours post lunch with her child on focused learning since that is the time when the child and her are undistracted.

Some have converted the evening downtime into another useful slot for learning since children are excited to 'show off' to the father what they have learnt through the day. Also, children naturally postpone bedtime and are full of questions at night and she leverages that.



## HAPPY LEARNING MOMENTS



*I got him a Hindi book. I taught him two-letter, 3 letter and 4 letter words but the words with 'aa ki matra' he learnt on his own. That made me very happy. He also learnt to say the days of the week on his own by listening to other kids. When the child learns something on his own that feels like an achievement. Then I feel that I should also teach something more to my child. **THAT SHOWS THAT THE CHILD IS INTERESTED IN LEARNING** and then I would not face a problem with the child later on.*

The mobile phone = icon of self initiated learning





## HER EXPERIMENTS WITH TEACHING



Since she spends a lot of time with her child she has observed that children at that age learn from anywhere and everywhere. They notice everything and are full of questions and answering those questions is one of the ways of teaching them. **She does not mind going slow with her child and does not want to pressurise her so much that the child loses interest or internalises the stress** since the child is too young to express it.

Though she started with the paper-pencil method she **was quick to realise it was not working and moved to to find out other ways that would keep the child's interest sustained.** She has experimented with songs, and visuals, using things in the ambient environment. She feels at a tender age it is not good to burden the child in any way. Though learning is important, it should happen without the child feeling the pressure since that would manifest as irritability and disinterest.

She is keen on teaching the child English and often teaches him the names of objects in the house in two languages.

Play is a child's work.





*I taught him initially through play. Only when he picked up names of things etc. I then gave him the slate and chalk. Initially, I would teach him the names of everything in the house in English and Hindi. We have an airport near our house - so when aeroplanes would fly, I would tell him about aeroplanes. I taught him counting through the song - dhobi aaya, dhobi aaya.*

*Even if I take her to the mall, she could catch things from there by observing. She sat in the train and the person told her only two people are allowed - so she asked me why - and I told her that if two people sit the vehicle would be balanced.*

*At first I would find it very difficult - I tried to teach her how to draw lines, or taught her using drawings - this is an apple by drawing a picture of an apple but she would just sit for 5 mins and run away or draw in another book. That was a very tough phase for me and I had to handle her very patiently. I would keep making crafts and teach her, I have danced in front of her and sang in front of her - hand hand hand - showing her the hand. She would not be able to remember colours using books or on the walls. I then started pointing out colours using clothes she was wearing or I was wearing but sometimes she would forget. Then I looked up cartoons that sing and dance and tell colours and that worked.*

*Main chahti hoon ki meri bachhi kuch zyada hi khele kude. Use kahaniyon se jaankari / seekh mile.*

*I taught him the alphabet, colour names, days of the week, months, counting and backward counting. I started teaching him when he was 2.5 years old. I noticed he had started asking me questions - mama yeh kya hai. Whatever he would see he would want to go beyond that and explore more. That was the cue for me he is willing and eager to learn. While playing I would teach him everything.*



“

*He also watches Blippy sometimes since those are learning videos. We have a board book which has everything right from the alphabet to poems, phonic sounds etc. so he flips through that. I wanted him to stay away from the phone. So I wanted something else that could keep him engaged. I found this book which he could not tear easily. My child is very fond of cars and we have about 10-12 different kinds. There are blocks and magnetic alphabets. He has a lot of older friends. He would watch them play and try to play. From that I could judge he wants to learn and that I should teach him more. He learnt to say 'thank you so much' from them.*

*If a child is fiddling with the remote control and the batteries come out - he would first try to put it himself and if he is not able to do it himself, he would bring it to me over and over again till he gets it.*

*Even letters can be taught by tracing on a plate of grains or in the mud. These are very age-old techniques and this is what my mother used to do with me.*

*Suppose two bears are playing together. This is also a kind of education. She learns how to mingle & play with others.*



*There is a Jamun tree near our house and there are a lot of birds that visit that tree. My father knows the names of all those birds and tells my child those names.*



## IN A NUT SHELL

**She is confident about her ability to teach and not afraid of trying out new things.** Her ultimate aim is that her child grows mentally and physically and she will do whatever it takes to ensure that.

She also has high standards and feels she can do the best for her child. **All she needs is a wider set of resources that she could use and information about skill-building in her child.**



*If I ask my MIL what is to be made for lunch, she also makes suggestions - that means she remembers some vegetables. On seeing the kite on the terrace she asked me what is it that is flying and how does it fly? When she saw crackers she asked what is it - I told her about Diwali. Similarly, she saw colours and we spoke about Holi. **This way she is learning so much through observation and conversation. Through play - she is learning about the world** - for instance, she changes the clothes of her doll and makes her eat - she takes care of the doll as though it were a baby and a part of the family. **Or when she is using the blocks - she is imagining different shapes and making blocks - that contributes to the physical and mental activity since she is using her mind and her hands. She tries to do everything I do - and I give her everything to imitate - for instance - when I make roti, she also wants to make some and I give her some atta to make or give her small clothes to fold. That way she will learn that clothes ought to be folded after being washed.***

USER PERSONA



# THE SOLUTION CREATOR

REPRESENTED BY  
THE CAREGIVER OF  
THE NEURO-  
DIVERSE CHILD

# Mira

Early thirties, Homemaker / special educator

Nuclear / Joint family

## HUSBAND :

IT professional

## ORIGINALLY FROM :

Bangalore / Gurgaon

## EDUCATION :

GRADUATE



Focussing on fine motor skills

“

*Therapy in India is a business. The paediatrician will put you in touch with a psychologist, who will link you up with a special educator who will link you with a speech therapist who will link you with an OT person. Before you know it your child and you will be moving from one therapist to another and neither you nor your child will have peace. You will have 10 lakhs wiped out of your account. And the child becomes uncontrollable since you have not given him a minute of peace to him. It is nothing short of a mafia - a special education mafia.*

*I had to get back to work after 3 months - my in-laws only thought about one goal - not make the child cry. My child was exposed to screens right from when he was a few months old. I think his excessive screen time has contributed to his autism. Grandparents are so hooked to the mobile. The prevailing mindset these days is, let us give the child whatever he wants so he doesn't cry. In that case, how will the child learn to ask?*



## HER CONTEXT AND CONCERNS

Well travelled. Has lived outside of India off and on. Has experienced the school system outside India - at times as a special educator and at times as a parent.



## HER CONTEXT AND CONCERNS

Her child is on the autism spectrum. She realised **something was amiss when she compared the developmental milestones with her older child**. At times it was pointed out by the Paediatrician. The biggest red flags were a) the child not making eye contact or engaging with people and b) the child being non-verbal and communicating only through gestures. Sometimes she suspects it could be a result of environmental factors rather than being wired differently by birth since she has experienced her child regressing on his milestones. Also, she is well-read on the subject and finds that the behavioural manifestations are not as severe as the ones children experienced earlier e.g. seizures.

**Having spent several years with her child in therapy, she has now come to terms with the situation and tries to focus on what the child is capable of doing and build on his strengths** rather than focus on what is lacking in the child. Handling a child with special needs becomes difficult for grandparents and hence she has had not much help on that front.



*The emotional bonding should be nil while handling a child like this- since that creates expectancy and then disappointment. That is perhaps why Anganwadi workers are able to do better at handling such children. They let the child perform to the child's potential and do not expect the child to pander to their desire.*



## ASPIRATIONS

Being able to function independently on his own is her biggest aspiration for her child.

Like every mother, **she also wishes that her child is an asset to society and not a burden on society.** However, she feels that the **system whether it is therapy or school focuses on exclusion and not inclusion** and that further delays the assimilation of such children in society.



Child trying to thread a needle - builds concentration apart from being life skill



*When he is 20 - I would want him to go alone to his granny's house or supermarket on his own. The child needs to understand that my Amma or Appa are not always going to be around with me. That is something the child will not learn through therapy since in therapy the mother is expected to interpret for the child.*

*These days parents in their race to get ahead de-emphasise basic skills like social-emotional development. They overlook problems if their children have overcompensated in a different way. The child may know all the dinosaurs but may not make an effort to communicate.*



## CHALLENGES / FRUSTRATIONS

There have been many frustrations she has encountered - the chief amongst those being the therapy / early intervention environment. **Therapy is extremely time, money and energy intensive and often an environment that is so contrived that it is difficult for the child to feel relaxed and comfortable.**

Also, **the spectrum is large and the needs of the children could be diverse.** She found that therapists who work with children are not experienced enough to understand children and use textbook approaches in dealing with them.



Therapy session for a child

*They tested my child so much and tested him so invasively.*

“

*I spent all my time reading up information on what I could do with my child so much so that I did not spend any time with my child. He was left with a gadget to keep himself occupied since that is how these children are. They can spend time without human engagement.*

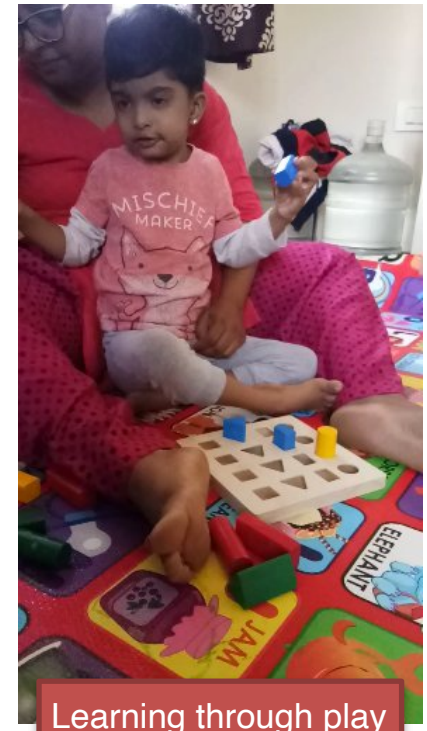
*I used to feel depressed when I used to think that he cannot even express his basic needs.*





## ATTITUDE AND BEHAVIOUR W.R.T LEARNING

She has realised in hindsight that what has finally worked for her is a trial and error approach when she started observing the child and not the prescribed solutions. Having gone through the frustrating cycle of therapy, **she started playing more with her child** and engaging less with him in 'serious work'. She realised that the best way for a child to learn is when he is not conscious of his learning - that could be through TV or play. Also started to focus on basic skills that are age appropriate i.e. fine motor skills - like cutting and pasting work.



Learning through play



*They tell us the child should not be exposed to digital devices. We as a family had not exposed him to much TV but at the end of those 5 years, we were so tired we were ready to die. We were desperate for a break and started him off with the TV. Initially, he did not even look at the TV and then in due course, he started to look and learn and start talking. Now looking back I would say whatever he has learnt has been 80% due to TV. We were made to believe we were doing a great disservice to him by letting him watch TV.*

*They do not know imitation. They have to be taught that using objects - like giving them an object and you hold an object and make it jump and the child will learn to imitate. THIS IS A VERY FUNDAMENTAL SKILL TO TEACH A CHILD since riding on this skill he can learn a lot of other skills.*



## WHAT SHE FEELS ABOUT INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT

Though institutional support is what is recommended she found that it did not work for them. **Each and every autistic child is different hence the structured rigid approach does not work.** Taking a child and sitting for 2 - 3 hours before starting the therapy really saps out the energy of the child and the accompanying adult. She felt the child was not responsive to the 30 minutes of therapy post the long wait and they were getting creamed out of their money.



*They asked me to show flash cards to my child but my child would not just look at the card. I know families who have come from Shimoga and Chitradurga who have taken loans of 20 lakhs just to avail therapies for their children. They enrol in multiple places. Every place you go to you have to shell out a minimum of 1.5 lacks for 11 months. This lady from Shimoga had rented a room in Bangalore just so that her child could undergo therapy. We are made to feel it is critical, we are made to feel vulnerable, since we don't know any better.*

*If someone like me, would have told me - THIS WILL PASS, SOMETHING BETTER WILL HAPPEN, DON'T WORRY. That is all I needed to hear. THE SYSTEM ALWAYS TELL YOU WHAT IS THE PROBLEM THAT YOU ARE GOING TO ENCOUNTER so that they can get their pound of flesh*





## WHAT SHE FEELS ABOUT INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT



*Schools normally have a test or an interview that filters out these children. The government schools especially the anganwadis are extremely good at handling the spectrum of children since they are very considerate. Their way of looking at a child is - he is a child. At preschools- they expect the child to have all the prerequisites - he is supposed to know the alphabet and the numbers. So then what is their job - to find flaws in the child and point out what he is not doing right? At the anganwadi - when they don't come with any preconceived notions - they just try with an open mind and if they don't find success, they just say let's try it again tomorrow. **THEY GIVE THE CHILD TIME.** As compared to that preschool teachers who are aware of the child's problem will put a lot of pressure on the child and expect him to perform. They might yell or hold her hand and make her right. The teacher would be stressed and that stress would carry forward to the child. The principal would ask the teacher - has the child started writing, why not and if you are not able to deliver, let's move you to another class. **THE TEACHER IS UNDER PRESSURE SINCE THERE IS A LABEL IN FRONT OF THE TEACHER AND NOT THE CHILD.** The child has been flagged off as having a learning disability. While admitting the child - the management would have made lofty promises to parents - you've come to the right place, your child will thrive, we have the best teachers etc.*



Process art - focus on enjoying the process rather than creating beautiful output.



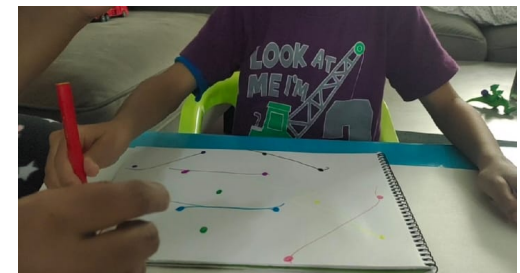


## HAPPY LEARNING MOMENTS

**Happy learning moments are the ones that do not involve the power and authority of the person instructing.** She realised it is not the nature of the activity that determines whether something is work or play, since she was even executing the follow-up therapy work at home in a very serious way.



*I would not have forced him into anything. I would have played more people games with him - inky pinky or tickling or hide and seek. That way we both would have interacted with each other rather than me being the constant instructor in his life. Now his association with Amma is serious work*





She has begun to realise the importance of **CHOICE** and allows him to explore. Her experience as an educator has sensitised her to the fact that sensory stimulation helps children with special needs. **Also the less structured and rigid the environment the better it is for the self-esteem of the child.** For instance, giving the child a colouring sheet and asking him to colour within the lines, if the child is given a sheet and asked to scribble and then the adult creates a shape out of his scribbles, that motivates the child a lot.

She has also observed and understood that her child likes to explore and hence asks him to find a coloured object in the room rather than teaching him colours through instructions or expecting him to memorise. **She knows that she needs to change the activities every now and then for the child's interest to be sustained.**



*I keep things in a room and let him go and explore and pick up what he wants to do. When he picks up something, I can go and sit and do some parallel play. So he learns by **OBSERVING AND NOT THROUGH INSTRUCTIONS.***

*I used to keep all the things out of his reach so that he was forced to say. I also used the hula hoop and told him - to stand IN. I used to read on Google and implement these things. You need to not only be with the child but also act like them else you cannot connect with the child. Swing balls in some direction to increase his focus.*

## IN A NUT SHELL

There is very little information that she was initially empowered with. Instead, everyone around her only emphasised the problems and that made her feel hopeless and increased the emotional distance between her child and her. She found very little information in the public domain about the achievements of autistic children. **Slowly she informed herself through her own research and started to focus on building her emotional relationship with her child by building on his strengths.**



Building emotional connect through play.



*We did not know whether there is anything beyond the black hole - **whether there is going to be a stage when the seed is going to sprout.***

*Instead of just asking us to go meet a specialist, the paediatricians could give us some early intervention suggestions - like asking the child to go away from the object and not point to it but try to verbalise it. He has to understand that he has communicated from where he is. Then we could start working on it asap. This would mitigate some of the frustration that the mother goes through. The worried parents instead of focusing on the solutions, start to focus on the problems - they join WhatsApp groups, start asking other parents what their child was doing at 2 years etc.*

USER PERSONA



# ANGANWADI WORKER



# Laxmi Aunty

Late 30s / Early 40s

Nuclear / Joint family

## ORIGINALLY FROM :

Jaipur / Lucknow / Chennai /  
Kolkatta

“

*I have tried to get so many people admitted to schools through the RTI quota especially if I come across bright children. Though it is not part of my job it gives me a great deal of satisfaction.*

*Their whole life they have to live by the rules (niyam-kanoon). This is the only age when they can play freely and that really impacts how they develop over the years.*

*Children, who are raised by parents, prefer to stay aloof and stay inactive in class, whereas, children who are raised in a joint family and are taken care of by their grandparents would be curious, very friendly and active in class.*



## HER CONTEXT AND CONCERNS

Has been working in the community for close to 15 years and hence feels a strong sense of connection. Also, has **earned respect for herself due to her prolonged association and the spirit with which she does her work.** She is interested in the welfare of the children who come to the centre and **often goes beyond the call-of-duty** of making sure their learning continues in a good school if they are past the anganwadi age.



## HER CONTEXT AND CONCERNS

The children who come to the centre to learn come from mostly poor families (kachhi basti). There are few who come from nuclear families with both parents working. Mostly it is the grandparents who pick up and drop off children. She **observes that children who live in joint families have a different pace of mental development from those who live in nuclear families.** Anganwadis and preschools serve the purpose that was once fulfilled by families. By and large, since there are only 1- 2 kids in a family, parents are conscious of raising kids well.

The ubiquitous visual aid at the anganwadi



*These kids come from very poor families - kachhi basti mein rehtein hain. There is a mix of joint and nuclear families. The father could have his thela (vegetable cart) or could be a rickshaw driver.*



*If the family is around then that is very good for a child's mental development. That is very casual learning. The family members might engage the child in some way or the other - go fetch me this, what is that? Someone or the other keeps talking to the child all day. In my nuclear family where mothers are working - there is a need for playgroups for this reason. When there were joint families there was no need for a pre-school. Whatever they were supposed to learn at a preschool, they would learn at home.*





## SUPPORT AND INFLUENCE OFFERED TO MOTHERS



Books and learning kits given to children at home



She supports working mothers by letting kids stay at the anganwadi during the afternoons while she does her home visits. Sometimes she even picks up and drops children from home.

During her visits, she reinforces to the parents what they could teach the child at home. **Most mothers ask her questions about physical growth and nutrition. Very few ask about mental growth since they feel it would happen in due course anyway.**



*Parents are not educated but we teach them to explain to the children via play. For instance - teach them number counting by clapping. Itna to padha hi saktein hain parents. There is also a book available which we give to the parents and they then show their children pictures and explain names of animals etc. to them.*



## CHALLENGES / FRUSTRATIONS

Whether it is at home or outside - mothers work all day and the lack of time and patience is the biggest challenge that a mother faces. **In her interactions with mothers, she often tells them not to prioritise housework since that is never ending but instead to give time to their children.**

Though she tries to influence the mother towards learning, sometimes despite their best efforts families are resource constrained. Sometimes she **finds it frustrating dealing with fathers and when she is not able to make headway, she uses the authority of her supervisors to make her point.**



Mother observing how children learn at the anganwadi



*These days even children have access to mobile phones and something can be learnt. The good thing is that mothers can keep their kids occupied even when they are busy. But till they don't make an effort to orient their kids - they will not see results. Jab tak kaam nahin kareinge tab tak phal kaise milega.*



## ATTITUDE AND BEHAVIOUR W.R.T LEARNING

**Though she does follow a structure, there is very little pressure put on the child.** She teaches them the basic concepts of size, colour, language and math via visual aids (charts) and through stories and songs.

There are some who have not met their physical milestones and hence are lagging behind in learning, while others who are just 2.5 and are so curious and eager to learn that they tell their parents to drop them off at the anganwadi and she **encourages everyone to learn at their own pace and as per their interests. Her approach towards their development is holistic.**

She is aware that some of them hear foul language at home and tend to repeat the same and find ways and means to discourage it and instil good values in the children who come to the centre.

She believes **the child has high grasping power at this age and hence exposure more than writing/reading is critical.**

*We can't directly give a three-year-old child a pencil and a book. Khel se bachha jaldi seekh jaata hain. No one knows when the seed will sprout. Some sprout early, while some could sprout late.*

*We explain things to children using aids that they would relate to since not every child is the same. For instance, some kids are able to connect with a picture on the chart, for others, we have to show them physical vegetables. Sometimes we tell kids to form a train - by holding each other and while we are doing that we also get them to recite rhymes. Or we might ask them to pile up their hands one on top of another and while they are removing the hands, get them to count. Or we might play a game like chidiya udd (birds fly) - which teaches them about the names of birds and which things fly v/s which ones don't.*

*Mental growth has different trajectories - some children talk a lot, some children don't talk but think a lot hence it would be misleading for the parents to have a mental milestones chart.*





## WHY SHE FEELS JOINING SCHOOL EARLY IS CRITICAL?

Being a teacher she knows teaching her own child at home is difficult since kids do not take the mother seriously. The mother is also not able to keep the child's interest sustained.

In nuclear families with working mothers, they are reluctant to teach due to a lack of time and energy. In joint families sometimes the atmosphere is discouraging for parents to teach the child



Social interaction, collaboration and group play



*School main discipline Hota hai aur bachhe use follow bhi kartein hain. If children would take mothers at home seriously, then tuition ki zaroorat hi nahin hoti.*



*People with senior citizens staying with them are often discouraged from teaching their kids at home - they are told humne toh ghar pe nahin padhaya. Some people think that bachhe jaise jaise bade honge apne aap padh lenge - unko alagh se padhane ki zaroorat nahin hai.*



## WHAT CAN CREATE HAPPY LEARNING MOMENTS

She knows that learning at an early age should progress through games, songs and play.

Another important method of teaching the children anything is via **role modelling since they imitate what the teacher does, not what the teacher says.**

She feels that a **child's brain at that age is malleable and needs to grow** any kind of pressure on the child limits the growth of his brain

They like colours, drawing, and toys more than books. No child likes to read or write at that age.

She has been told especially during the pandemic, not to use any book and make the whole learning experience fun for the child so that they feel encouraged to attend the anganwadi.

It is challenging to teach a child when one imposes a lot of rules on learning. If the child is learning through fun and play, it is unlikely the mother/teacher would face any challenge.

She has on her own accord started saving videos and playing those for children while they are at the anganwadi.

**Learning at the centre also happens via peer interaction** - when one child asks a question, another child may scream Auntie - I know the answer.



## WHAT CAN CREATE HAPPY LEARNING MOMENTS

Bead chains for counting and colours



*Sometimes the mother asks us - should we start them off on tuition. We advise them - you should not start tuition at such a young age since this is the age to learn through play. Bachon ka dimaag komal hota hai aur viksit hone wala hota hai uspe tuition teacher pressure daalti hain aur unko development ruk jata hai. I also suggest the mothers don't give the kids the mobile but use it themselves.*

*Sometimes we teach them to count by giving knots on the dupatta of mothers and they learn to count from it.*



*A child can learn a lot through everyday conversations and interactions. We ask the children what did you eat yesterday for dinner, which colour was the vegetable etc.*

*These days we do not have songs through which we can learn. Earlier the film songs themselves taught us so much. Dadi dadi amma maan jao - nothing can teach a child to be mindful of everyone in the family like that song. This is a gap that is not being filled by anything today.*

*We show them an audiovisual with names of birds and ask them to identify the bird, the child who knows the answer would answer and get excited when we play the audio, the child would know if he/she answered correctly, and the child who doesn't know about the name of the bird would also try to answer and in this process, the children learn faster.*

## PRE LEARNING SKILLS THAT CHILDREN LEARN AT THE ANGANWADI



### FORMALISING THE IDEA OF LEARNING.

When a child first goes to an anganwadi, they have no idea about learning. They just learn to spend time away from home at first. It is only over time does the child realise what is learning



### TAKING INSTRUCTIONS FROM THE TEACHER

Taking instructions from the teacher is also an important skill to learn. A child who has not gone to an anganwadi before - if goes directly to a school will not know whether he is supposed to hear the teacher or write what the teacher says



### CONNECT THE NOVEL TO THE FAMILIAR

There are toys in every home, even in a slum. When children play they learn about life and correlate it to what they have seen in the real world.



*Yahan par aake bachhe seekhte hai ke seekhna bhi koi cheez hai.*

*As they have been not used to sitting in a place at home and they wouldn't know how to approach a teacher in class, according to the teacher is like a mother in school.*

*Kids come and tell us that I have seen the stethoscope at the doctor's clinic. The environment around their house has mounds of mud and they tend to make small houses using that mud. He would think - dekho maine bhi ghar bana liya, aise hi ghar bantein hain, then they keep their small toy animals in front of the house. They perhaps connect - Humara ghar bhi aise hi bana hoga.*

*If we teach them the crow is black, they keep repeating it all day and try to spot other things that are black in colour.*





## IN A NUT SHELL

She truly believes that children can rise about their circumstances if they spend time in a good environment and tried to influence them in a holistic way.

Though she is pulled into govt. duties not related to children, she comes across as optimistic, positive and unrelenting. Her focus is the child's development and she seems to have taken a sense of ownership about this aspect of her work rather than indulging in the blame game.

The day starts with a prayer



She is balanced in her approach w.r.t. dealing with children - patient, encouraging but also stern when the situation warrants her to be.



# An expert's point of view

ON EARLY CHILD CARE AND EDUCATION

# Dr. Gayatri Kiran

Director

Nidhi Foundation for Early Intervention.

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*The child at that age tends to please the adult so they will go beyond their capacity to perform - whether it is writing or something else. When we expect the child to do something that is developmentally inappropriate we are straining the entire system of the child. The logic given by the parent is that the child is writing happily. By the time the child has reached 3rd grade the child is completely put off since the child was doing it mechanically starting at an age when writing had no meaning since it was not a form or expression. By 4th grade, the child could be beaming with creative ideas but the child may not be interested in writing and hence would feel frustrated.*



## Sanjivani Chitre

Pre-primary education consultant, teacher trainer and curriculum planner.





## WHAT CREATES A STRONG FOUNDATION FOR LIFE LONG LEARNING

Skills that are considered important by experts at this stage of the child's life are a) **social-emotional development** which includes skills like separation from parents, mingling with other kids, following rules and regulation, sharing materials, waiting for turn b) **Language readiness** i.e. being able to receive communication and also express himself. Besides there are **school-readiness skills** - 20 skills that will enable a child to read, write, and do math.

Experts feel that if you allow the child to chart his course, and construct his own knowledge then the developmental sequence will go through in principle.

ENVIRONMENTAL PREPAREDNESS is an important component of that. Is the environment supporting the child with the material to take his skills to the next level? However **parental ambition often can and does come in the way of the natural course of development**, since parents have started to emphasise academic growth over social-emotional development.



*These things happened a lot more organically many years ago - since there were larger families and mixed-age activities. Though now due to changes in the family and community structure - these have to be supplied to the child as interventions. To an extent even the preschool can be considered an intervention - trying to supply due to a changing environment what is not available at home.*



## PARENTAL EXPECTATION AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

There is a sensitive period in the child for every skill. Montessori says - children explode into reading and writing. **When the systems are mature in the child, but the environment is not stimulating, the skill will not develop or will get delayed.**

**Parents need to observe and provide the right stimulus.** Instead what parents often do is expect the child to conform to their own expectations and that limits the growth.



*We had a case of a very intelligent child whose mother had come complaining to the school about the child who had drawn an elephant a different colour. She complained that - my child is very intelligent and he knows that elephants are grey then why did the teacher not correct him? What are you teaching in your school? We got them to ask the child - and the child answered - I have different clothes with different designs - just like that I wanted the elephant to wear different clothes. The mother's response was - he doesn't even know that elephants don't wear clothes. I told them - do you even realise the imagination of the child?*



## CHALLENGES / FRUSTRATIONS FACED BY THE MOTHER

By 3 - 4 years - children develop a strong sense of identity. They rebel without understanding why. **Mothers react to what the child is doing wrong which leads to power play between mother and child.**

In many homes, the fathers do not do much to reinforce the worth of the mother in the child's eyes.

Though mothers are starting to teach their children, **the emphasise is more on the paper-pencil method rather than leveraging the ambient environment due to their own conditioning.**

Mothers may **not instinctively know what is age-appropriate** and that ends up frustrating the mother and child both.



*When an American baby looks at something - the mother actively engages the child and tries to label it and build vocabulary. But Indian mothers find it very unnatural to talk to a baby. Though the first 1000 days including the prenatal period is supposed to be the sensitive period for language development in a baby. Indian mothers though focus on physical development during that phase. It is a reflection of our child-rearing practices, our resources and the way we grew up.*



## ROLE OF THE CARE GIVER

1. Being able to observe and understand what the child is ready to learn and start teaching that.
2. The complete unconditional acceptance of how the child is
3. The time and the patience to teach

Teaching a child at home is more a function of the caregiver's mindset than skill or ability or economic resources.



*A child under 6 can easily be taught at home. What they would miss out on is the peer interaction. By 2- 3 - they are starting to look at other children and by 5 odd years they actively need to be with other children and that cannot be replaced by the parent.*





## WHAT IS MISSING IN THE SYSTEM TODAY?

- Emotional & social needs are not part of any school syllabus.
- Gross motor is also very under-emphasised by parents and the school systems.
- The anganwadis do the language stimulation quite well through stories and songs. **It is the thinking skills, questioning, curiosity, and innovation skills are the ones they do not have the bandwidth to cover.**
- A glaring gap in the system is that everyone is passing the buck. the teacher says it is the responsibility of the parent, the parent blames the teacher and the govt. says I have created a system and now all other stakeholders have to execute it. **With this football approach, ultimately it is the child who suffers.**



*Things start to go awry when we have to show numbers and deliverables and the performance of the children creates the pressure. The nature of the pressure is such that it would keep pushing downwards and at the bottom of the chain is the child.*

*Every anganwadi that is doing very well - has a community that is very hands-on whether to just peep in and see what is happening or whether to get a leak in the roof fixed. This happens due to the effort of the anganwadi worker who takes the anganwadi out to the people and the people into the anganwadi. And so have we found this with the govt. primary schools. Where the community is active, we see the school infrastructure being good, teachers coming on time, the principal being good and the children thriving. It may not be grand looking - but it is spic and span and teaching is happening and learning is happening. This is what I mean by saying - let's not play football.*



## POSSIBLE SOURCES OF SUPPORT

There is a lot of information on the internet but there isn't a systematic resource that addresses the needs of the parent. Sensitising mothers to :

- Understand what the child needs at this age w.r.t. mental development
- What can be used in their environment to teach the child
- WHY an activity is important



## WHAT CAN CREATE HAPPY LEARNING MOMENTS

- SENSORY, MOTOR AND SOCIAL INTERACTION is how they are wired to learn.
- Visuals have a deep impact on the mind of a child.
- Children that age have a strong urge to EXPLORE and that can be channelized into learning. Instead of teaching numbers, the child needs to be asked to go and fetch two objects.



## WHAT CAN CREATE HAPPY LEARNING MOMENTS



- A positive emotional experience with the person teaching helps children stay interested. This is why, children like the patience and warmth of the anganwadi teacher or a grandparent teaching them.
- When the child is not conscious of the learning experience, it becomes enjoyable
- One of the most effective and indirect ways of teaching a child is via stories.

*Children like to see and learn, hear and learn, manipulate things, move things and learn. You can't lecture a child and teach them anything. They learn only by doing.*

*Storytelling is getting lost out - the oral tradition - due to the instant gratification from media. This is one method that would address the development in all areas - physical, socio-emotional, language and imagination - storytelling would have been the natural way to foster all of those things which we are losing out on. There is no way you can actually experience everything on this earth. Whether it is by way of danger or problem-solving or exciting things or happy things. It is also the way you can learn and widen your horizon. Beginning with stories and later on reading. It will help the child imagine and hence build up the cognitive aspects too.*



## MEMORY

- Memorisation is important since it has assimilation included in it. It also has communication and expression included in it.
- Memory skill building is very easy to incorporate through everyday conversations. It does not have to be able memorising rhymes or tables.



*A toy could be hidden away and the mom could ask the child to describe - what is missing, which one are you talking about? So that the child recalls what he had seen before. Children could be encouraged to tell stories about everyday incidents - what happened when you went out? What were they talking about etc.? Who was in the story - the names of the characters. The mom could draw a picture of a face where something is missing - and ask the child to recall what is missing. Or rhymes that are commonly known - the mother could just show the gestures that the child is used to and say I forgot this line - do you remember what it is.*



## OBSERVATION

- Free-flowing open-ended conversations help a child exercise his / her thinking.
- Rather than ask a child a pointed question - conversations that encourage the child to observe and talk about what they see can be gratifying and also help build their communication and cognitive skills.
- For instance - pointing to a flower and saying - how do they look? We have just seen the seeds. What is the colour... doesn't it look so delicate. That prompts the child to talk more, rather than asking the child a pointed question or giving the child all the information about the flower.



## CREATIVITY

- Creativity can be nurtured by doing everyday things differently.
- Children are naturally creative which reflects very often in the way they draw, colour, imagine or talk about things. Adults in the environment often try to 'correct' them to fit into what is commonly perceived to be right or wrong.
- For instance, a child could draw a cat with three legs or colour a fruit the colour blue.



## PRETEND PLAY

- Pretend play helps in cognitive development. In pretend play the symbol is used instead of the actual object.
- The skill of deducing abstract from concrete or vice versa creates the foundation for learning subjects like algebra or chemistry - which use symbols instead of actual objects.

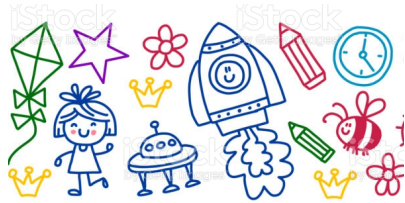


*Every time I need to understand the concept of 1/2 I don't need to cut an apple. I should be able to visualise it in my head and that begins with pretend play - the child takes a pen and pretends that he/she is talking on the phone.*




## RELATING NOVEL TO FAMILIAR

- The brain realises when the child sees something and reflects back at what the child could have seen before. For instance, if the child looks at a glass - he would remember from a past experience that he has seen that object before and it is called a 'glass'.
- Also, they should be able to relate an idea to the world around them. If there is a discussion about rain, the child would then remember when he has experienced it. When the child starts learning subjects many are interrelated - these skills help the child make connections and the context should be right.



# THANK YOU





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