

How to Create the Next Generation of Scientists

(Family Features) It's never too early to introduce children to science. In fact, [research](#) from the University of Pennsylvania shows that an early childhood filled with mental stimulation from educational tools results in more highly developed cognitive skills by the child's teen years.



While young children receive science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) education in school, it's up to parents to enhance their exposure to these subjects outside the classroom. Whether they are creating bridges with plastic bendy straws or conducting messy science projects involving baking soda and a plastic bag, here are some resources parents can turn toward to help cultivate a new generation of scientific thinkers:

Look to Your Community. Find local after-school programs or clubs that focus on STEM education. Many of these extracurricular programs are led by qualified instructors and offer hands-on experience in several STEM fields, such as computer programming, biology or chemistry. Additionally, after-school programs are excellent opportunities for children to socialize with others and make friends with similar interests.

Turn to Technology. Spark imaginative learning by integrating technology into your child's education. Tablets and other smart devices offer thousands of gaming applications that repurpose information in a fun and engaging way, captivating children with quizzes, puzzles, 3-D gaming and more – all in the name of science. Television shows, such as “Bill Nye the Science Guy” and others featured on educational children's networks, can also open your child's eyes to the many fascinating and remarkable areas of STEM subjects.

Create Your Own Science Lab. Get creative and browse Pinterest for crafty do-it-yourself STEM projects for kids. Incorporate one of your child's favorite activities into a project that you can work on together, like creating a scientific model of their favorite animal. Additionally, these moments spent together will allow you to learn alongside your children, ultimately creating a bonding experience as you help them expand their minds.

Enter Into a Science Competition Encourage your child to enter a local or national science fair, such as the Toshiba/National Science Teachers Association ExploraVision program, the only STEM-related competition of its kind that allows kids to create ideas for new technological innovations in response to current real-world issues. Sponsored by Toshiba and administered by the National Science Teachers Association, the hands-on, creative learning experience helps K-12 students grow their problem-solving, creativity, critical thinking and collaboration skills. To enter into this year's competition and learn more about the program, visit exploravision.org.