



Explaining 21st Century Skills

Parenting articles often talk about the importance of ensuring our children gain 21st century skills. But what exactly are these skills that everyone seems to be referencing? And why are they so important?

In general, 21st century skills are the skills today's children need to thrive in school, in college and beyond. For example, for a child today technical literacy is a "must have," where just thirty years ago this would have been optional. And that's why knowing the current skill needs is so important: they change. One of the many challenges you face as a modern parent is keeping up with the current skill needs and making sure your child is up-to-date in the skills department.

Fortunately, the Partnership for 21st Century Skills has developed some guidelines to help parents and educators get a grip on all these skills. Here are some things to keep in mind to help your child navigate their world skillfully.

Beyond the 3 R's: Learning basic reading, writing and arithmetic is still a must. But it's not enough. Our children need additional cognitive skills in order to thrive in today's world. What else is there? Some additional skills include critical thinking and problem solving, technology and media literacy, and innovation and creativity. Modern children need to be able to synthesize information in context so that they can effectively communicate and collaborate with their fellow students and, eventually, their coworkers.

Gizmos and gadgets: Sure, most kids treat their cell phones like an extra appendage that they couldn't possibly live without. While that's a good start, there's a whole world of technology out there that children need to master. More often than not, schools do not have technology programs. Parents are left with the challenge of introducing their children to technology that goes beyond cell phones and the Internet. As you work with your child on their technology skills, encourage them to go beyond texting and social media. Help them learn to use technology as a tool to research, organize, collaborate, communicate and evaluate.

Media: As children go about their daily lives, media bombards them with messages through all that technology they are using. As a result, children need a degree of media savvy that was previously undreamed of. As a parent, you can help your child gain the information, media and technology skills they need to safely and successfully surf the information wave. Help your child to understand the purposes of different media. Discuss with them how media messages can be interpreted in different ways. Help your child to recognize the points of view and values expressed, and help your child discover the tools to evaluate these media messages.



Global awareness: We live in a global society which means that now, more than ever, awareness is key. In addition to what your child is learning at school, they need to develop a broader understanding of the world. This means helping your child understand global issues, such as environmental awareness. Your child will also need economic, financial and business awareness. And, you can help them grasp the importance of health and wellness awareness.

Life and career skills: Of course, content knowledge is imperative, but students also need to develop their personal skills. In addition to a solid education, colleges and employers also look for strong personal traits such as leadership, adaptability and self-direction. Given the global crises in both economics and the environment, traits like ethics, accountability and social responsibility are also high on many employers' lists. All of these are personal traits that, as a parent, you can help your child develop in school, in their extracurricular activities, and at home.

By working with your child, you can nurture the development of 21st century skills that will help them succeed in school and beyond.