

Teamwork

Signe Moa Duff

WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS

Teamwork is something we all engage in. Adults may collaborate at work, perhaps relying on others to reach a common goal, and children often work together in schools where they may work on group projects. Playing sports in teams requires collaborative skills, but daily activities like having conversations and recalling past events together rely on the same skills.

Chances are that before children start school, they would have had some experiences with teamwork. It is important for children's development, and as social beings, we consider these important life skills. We incorporate them into many learning experiences in the hopes of preparing children for later life.

“Help or Hinder”

The research is currently divided on whether collaboration is a help or a hinderance for children. Currently, this topic is researched in both Psychology and Education. Psychology research in this area with children as participants is limited but findings mostly seem to indicate that teamwork is a hindrance, while Education has found many positive outcomes.

“When it works”

We do see some similar trends emerge in research where children working together leads to positive outcomes. When children are in environments where they frequently work together (such as classrooms) and when they work on tasks that are relevant to them (such as group projects) collaboration seems to benefit them. When children are asked to collaborate in settings they are not familiar or on tasks that they generally do not collaborate on they seem to perform quite poorly.

“Friends vs. strangers”

While research with children in Psychology research is limited in this area, research with adults is more plentiful, and the results here seem to vary depending on who we are in a team with. This research with adults has found that when we work together with people we feel like we know well, we perform better than if we work with someone we don't feel like we know well. Knowing someone well means we may be more aware of the knowledge they possess to help reach the goal.

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

Teamwork may appear to come more naturally to some than others, but it is a skill that can be honed and practiced:

- Practice collaborative problem solving – this can help the child develop strategies for working with others through communication and learning behaviours such as cooperation and listening. This can include things like completing bigger puzzles together and playing games, but also working together on for example homework.
- Encourage team sport participation – If you are a parent, encourage your child to partake in team sports to help develop their teamwork skills. If you are an educator, encouraging physical activities in groups can benefit teamwork (Bonus: incorporating physical activity into the school day can boost children's attention and learning)
- Engage children in every-day activities – by allowing children to participate in conversations and activities such as cooking dinner, children can further develop skills like following instructions and taking turns which are important for teamwork skills.



FURTHER READING

- “Let’s Work Together” – Better Kids Care, Penn State <https://extension.psu.edu/programs/betterkidcare/knowledge-areas/environment-curriculum/activities/all-activities/let2019s-work-together>
- “Move it, move it: how physical activity at school helps the mind (as well as the body)” – The Conversation <https://theconversation.com/move-it-move-it-how-physical-activity-at-school-helps-the-mind-as-well-as-the-body-100175>
- “How To Teach Your Child Teamwork” - <https://www.theschoolrun.com/the-importance-of-teaching-your-child-teamwork>
- “Developing Life Skills Through Sports” <https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/developing-life-skills-through-sports>

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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Signe has a background in Developmental Psychology and Primary education with an interest in Educational Psychology and the impact of collaboration on children’s learning. Her master level thesis focused on collaborative benefits for children’s performance on a practical mathematics task, and her PhD will focus on the effect of collaboration on spatial reasoning performance.

FIND OUT MORE

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