

How STEM education prepares kids for successful futures

And how to talk about STEM so kids will listen

STEM PERMEATES EVERY aspect of our lives. And it will only increase in importance as we continue to move toward a global, knowledge-based economy. “Science, technology, engineering and math are central to understanding a world that is changing as quickly as ours,” says Johanna Busch, Toronto-based education specialist for Let’s Talk Science. The Canadian charitable organization helps kids prepare for the future by supporting STEM learning. “We all need a basic level of understanding of STEM concepts to make sense of everything from pandemics to climate change. STEM is crucial to our ability to be informed citizens and to meet challenges in our careers and beyond.”

“All jobs are being reshaped by technology, and STEM innovation will define many future jobs—including ones that don’t even exist yet,” adds Let’s Talk Science President and Founder Bonnie Schmidt.

It’s important for kids to get excited about STEM from an early age—not only so they can pursue STEM careers for their own success, but to meet the changing needs of our world. And it’s particularly critical for underrepresented groups like girls and people of colour to receive the support they need to succeed in STEM fields.

So how do we engage young people in STEM?

START WITH YOUR KIDS’ INTERESTS

“Ask kids what they are interested in and follow their lead,” says Busch. “Kids come alive when they realize that STEM provides them with the tools and frameworks to explore topics that they are already curious about.” Help them figure out how STEM plays a role in things they care about—whether it’s the coding of their favourite video game or the mathematical aspects of music, such as tempo and rhythm—then explore how STEM can further these interests.



MODEL JOY IN STEM EXPLORATION

“Kids are innately interested in their world,” says Schmidt. “Adults who show a genuine interest in exploring, asking questions and playing (including gardening, meal prep and building) are the most effective STEM role models.” Include your kids in hands-on activities you’re already doing. It’s a great way to build interest and excitement. “Showcase fun STEM-related things as you go about your regular day,” suggests Schmidt. “Marvel at the technology at the grocery store check-out, mention how water and light form beautiful rainbows or discuss chemical reactions needed to make a cake.” These conversations help kids see the STEM concepts that surround them in everyday life.

SHARE STEM STORIES

Talk about STEM innovations, how they help us and who created them. Pay attention to the role models you share because, historically, STEM stories have mainly focused on white men. Avoid language that reinforces stereotypes of who can work in STEM. All kids need to be able to see themselves represented in what they are learning.

It’s never too soon to get kids excited about STEM. Looking for resources? Find free hands-on activities and interactive summer programs for your child on letstalkscience.ca.