

# ***Manipulation: A Negatively Viewed Word Turned Positive***

When we hear the word *manipulation*, it usually sounds negative. But when it comes to development, manipulation is actually a ***beautiful*** thing.

- Manipulation is exploration.
- Exploration leads to learning.
- Learning leads to growth.
- And that's what we want our children to do, GROW!

Think about a time you recently manipulated something. Here's mine... It's Christmas! I had to "*manipulate*" or move my furniture so that the Christmas tree could fit in my living room. Not so negative anymore, right? 😊

## **Manipulation Starts From Day One**

It may not seem like it at first, but learning through *manipulation* begins the moment your baby is born. That very first exploration happens through touch. Skin-to-skin helps babies learn about warmth, comfort, and connection. EVERY day after that, your baby is learning by interacting with the world around them!

## **Sensory Manipulation in Infants**

As babies continue to grow, *manipulation* shows up everyday. Infants explore by:



- Touching different textures
- Making sounds and discovering their voices
- Watching faces and tracking movement

We as parents provide our kids with soft toys, board books, and even **safe** household items to help them learn. You don't always need toys... Sometimes a wooden ladle or a crinkly package is just as exciting. These "*manipulative*" moments are building the foundation for their future.

## **Toy Manipulation in *Early* Toddlers**

As some say, **now the fun really begins!** During early toddlerhood, *manipulation* becomes more purposeful. Toddlers start to understand cause and effect, and toys begin to act as learning tools.



- **Stacking blocks** teach balance and spatial awareness
- **Shape sorters** build problem-solving skills & perseverance
- **Puzzles** help develop patience and fine motor strength

These toys, and many more, can support academic and social-emotional skills kids need. ALL of this while having FUN!

## Toy-to-Tool Manipulation in Toddlers

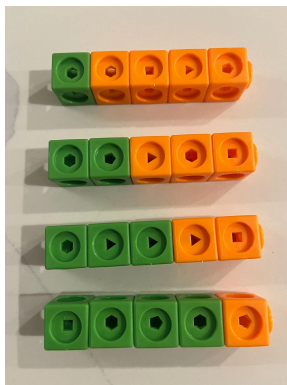
As your toddler continues to grow, *manipulation* gets more creative. They start combining toys and ideas, with a purpose, in new ways:

- Building with blocks,
- Using crayons, markers, and paint
- Pretend play with kitchen set, dolls, animals, or vehicles
- Playing with play dough, sand, or water

These hands-on activities not only encourage independence, but also help to develop early literacy and math skills. Play becomes their “work” and *manipulation* is their tool to get the job done!

## Tool Manipulation in School-Aged Kids

*How are you in school already? Didn't I just have you?* Every moment your child spent exploring and *manipulating* things will show over time. *Manipulation* for school-aged children extends beyond toys and into tools. “*These are tools not toys*” – a phrase many children hear often when transitioning to school. But it's not a bad thing! They're just exploring and figuring out what these new tools can do. Once that understanding is there, children *manipulate* these tools to explain thinking. Here are just some of the common ones children will see and use:



- Math manipulatives (counters, unifix cubes, ten-frame)
- Reading tools (highlighter tape, elkonin boxes)
- Science tools and experiments (magnifying glass, robots)
- Technology integration (Chromebooks, Smartboards)

At school, kids use *manipulation* to help understand new learning and think abstractly. *Manipulation*, or moving objects help kids to make more sense of things.

## **Manipulation in Adults**

Think about the question I asked before. What is something you recently manipulated? We, as adults, are manipulating things everyday!

- How we pose for a photo
- Cooking our meals
- Packing our suitcases
- Wrapping a present

We are lifelong manipulators. Exploration never truly ends.

## **So Why Manipulation?**

When children are given the opportunity to manipulate, they gain more than academic skills. They develop:

- Problem-solving skills
- Persistence
- Creativity
- A growth mindset

Manipulation teaches children that learning is an active process. It allows them to explore, question, and persevere. So start early! Encourage *manipulation*. Because when children learn through *manipulation*, they aren't just playing—they're learning!

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