

Talking With Parents about GEMS

As a GEMS leader, set aside time to interact with parents as much as you can, even if it is just through handouts you send home. Parents want the best for their children, but may not realize the importance of what you are trying to accomplish in GEMS.

Parents are one of the most important influences on their daughters' career plans. Do not underestimate this influence, and work with it. Fathers are even more important than mothers when it comes to developing a girl's self-image. So, you need to provide resources and model appropriate behavior for them with the help of the information on the GEMS Web site.

Some of the first things I discuss with parents:

- Turn off the TV and computer—get your daughter **doing** things rather than watching things.
- If you want to spend money, buy an inexpensive digital camera. This taps right into girls' creativity and social strengths, but opens the doors to deeper technology use.
- Let your daughter break things and take things apart. Let her use tools. How can she understand or even wonder how things work if she never gets to touch them?
- Go to yard sales and buy old sets of LEGO®, K'nex™, and blocks. Make space so she can use them and build with them. Build with her.
- Let her get dirty. Let her dig by the creek or in the playground. Let her plant seeds and grow them in her room or in your yard.
- Let her **DO** the math, science, and technology. Don't fall into the trap of canned answers and programs. Use the words "I wonder," -- why you got that answer, why that happened, what would happen if, why this didn't happen.
- Watch very carefully what you say and do about math and science. Mothers who let fathers do all the family finances, fix things and solve problems send powerfully negative messages to their daughters. Telling a daughter to "go get your brother" when the computer malfunctions shows girls that technology is a male domain. Women who joke about never getting their checkbook to balance also tell girls that math is hard and not a "girl thing." On the other hand, just quietly running the family finances does not seem to have a positive effect—parents need to do more than model—they need to vocally and actively advocate for women in STEM.
- Allow your daughter to fail. It is ok to fail—it is very important for girls to take risks and learn from their mistakes. So, she wants to try the Science Fair, but you know she won't win? Well, you can help her learn all she can from participating, and maybe next time she will win. And if she never wins, she will still learn and enjoy the experience.
- Work on developing her spatial skills. See ***Spatial Skills*** in the Handbook or the website.

- Find role models in everyday life. If given the opportunity to choose a new doctor, choose a woman. Ask the female pharmacist (in front of your daughter) about her education. Ask the neighbor who is a computer engineer to tell your daughter about her job, or to take her to work for a day. Look for opportunities for mentoring.
- Give her opportunities to learn and grow in non-traditional fields—encourage her to participate in LEGO® Robotic classes, computer programming, math clubs, etc.
- Allow her to experience STEM fields in ways that are not competitive. Not every girl wants to be on a team, and unfortunately, many STEM opportunities are contests or competitive. Many of these competitions have teams that are too large for every member to fully participate, and girls can be shunted off into the more traditionally female roles such as poster-maker or secretary. Help her to find ways to learn and create without feeling she has to win.