
BRAIN POWER NEWS

PARENT NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 1, NUMBER 1

Introducing the NIDA Junior Scientists Program

Your child has been working on the first module of the *National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) Junior Scientists Program*. Geared to students in kindergarten and first grade, the program discusses the following topics:

- Different kinds of scientists and the characteristics they all share;
- The research of specific scientists;
- The different functions of the brain;
- How to keep the brain healthy; and
- How to protect the brain.

The overall purpose of the program is to introduce young students to two key concepts—who scientists are and why their work is important, and the many functions of the brain. At the end of the program, students learn about the differences between helpful medicines and harmful substances. This background lays the foundation for a more in-depth study, during second through fifth grades, of the brain and how harmful drugs can affect it.

Although these children are very young, it is not too soon to begin educating them about drugs. Research has shown that having a foundation in the early grades helps children be better prepared to make good decisions when they are older. You will find that your child will be fascinated with what he or she is learning and capable of absorbing the information because it is being presented in a fun, age-appropriate way.

This newsletter is designed to provide you with information so you can reinforce at home what your child has been learning in school. Each module has a parent newsletter that includes the following:

- The content of the module;
- Activities you can do at home; and
- Additional resources.

We hope that you and your child enjoy working on the program together and that the knowledge gained now will serve your family well in the future.



What Do Scientists Do?

In this first module, students drew pictures of scientists and then discussed their ideas about them. Through this activity, students realized that scientists aren't always white men who work in a laboratory, like Albert Einstein or the "mad" scientists shown in cartoons. Rather, scientists can be men and women from any ethnic group working in a variety of places—in the ocean, in the field, in brain imaging labs, and even in outer space. But all scientists share two key characteristics: curiosity and a desire to find answers to their questions about the world.

This activity aligns with a standard identified in the National Science Education Standards, "history and nature of science." These guidelines were developed in 1996 by the National Academy of Sciences to help schools know what information should be covered in kindergarten through high school. The standards stress the importance of teaching students that science encompasses many disciplines, but scientists in all areas develop questions and then strive to find the answers to them.

Science at Home

How many different kinds of scientists can you name? Try to think of as many as you can with your child. Examples include: psychologist, biologist, chemist, neuroscientist, physicist, geologist, seismologist, oceanographer, and astronomer. Ask your friends for more examples. See how long your list can be!

What Does Your Child Think?

Help your child write or draw his or her ideas about scientists and how those ideas have changed as a result of working on this activity.

Additional Resources

National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) — www.drugabuse.gov
301-443-1124

This Web site contains information about drug abuse and a section designed specifically for parents, teachers, and students. Publications and other materials are available free of charge.

National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information (NCADI) — www.health.org
1-800-729-6686

NCADI is the world's largest resource for information and materials concerning substance abuse. Many free publications are available here.

