

Learning to Love Learning

There is much that we can do as parents and families — just in the daily course of living — that sets a context that engenders a love of learning.

Educational researchers at the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory have come up with a variety of ways that parents can help stimulate their child's ability, capacity, and enthusiasm for learning. Here are some to think about.

- **Take a good look** at your family pet. With your child, follow the family pet around for a while. Chat about what each of you saw, that is, share observations. Get the discussion going with questions such as: Why do you think our cat did that? What do you think will happen next? Serious observation is an important part of science, and activities like this encourage a sense of exploration and adventure, and stimulate curiosity. Take a look around — there are many things to observe and speculate about.
- **Read** to and with your child at every opportunity — no matter what the age! Book clubs are flourishing around the country; maybe it's a good time to start your own family book club.
- **Write** messages to your child whenever possible, and put them where the child will discover them. (Looking for a little incentive to spur your child to write? Give "cool" pens, pencils, and stationery as gifts.)
- **Use** fractions when you ask what size food portions your child wants: Would you like half of a sandwich, or a fourth? How about a 16th of a big pizza?
- **Ask** questions! Children are accustomed to looking to adults for answers; asking them questions turns the tables to start them thinking. When you ask a question, give plenty of time for a response. Try not to ask questions with only yes-or-no answers. Encourage your children to explain what they are doing and why. Ask, What made you think that? or How did you get that answer?
- **Answer** questions (with questions)! When your child asks a question, respond with: That's a good question. What do you think? or How can we find out? Don't pretend to know the answer and don't feel badly about not knowing. Show your child how to go about finding an answer.
- **Play** games, such as Scrabble for word play and vocabulary building, or games that include counting, such as Yahtzee.
- **Enjoy** learning, with and for your child, and for yourself.

We *all* learn by making mistakes, and we improve by doing things not just once, but sometimes many, many times. Sometimes what we — and our children — don't "get" today, we suddenly understand next week, or next month. Patience, kindness, love, understanding and encouragement are key ingredients in helping our children to thrive academically, emotionally, and socially.

Source:

Column by Karen Blaha is provided as a public service by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, a nonprofit institution working with schools and communities in Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, and Washington.