

PRINCIPLES OF Parenting

Helping Your Children Succeed at Learning



You want your children to be successful in school and in life. You can start right now giving your children a foundation for success. With each of the following ideas is a list of ways you can make the idea work for you. Put a check mark by the things you're already doing and an arrow in the margin beside the things you would like to start doing. Probably there is no parent that does all of these things. But it's good to pick a few things you can do with your children. You might even ask your children what they want to do. The key in all these activities is to make learning fun and interesting.



1. Make your home a learning place.

- ___ Show your children that you love to learn. Read books and magazines. Take continuing education classes.
- ___ Talk about things that interest you: gardening or building models or astronomy or whatever.
- ___ Sing songs together. Say rhymes. Learn poems.
- ___ Tell your children about new, interesting things you learn.
- ___ Ask them about the things they learn in school.
- ___ Have a set of encyclopedias in your home so you can look things up when someone has a question. Even an old, used set can answer most questions.
- ___ Keep many good books in your home. Some can be bought cheaply at used book stores or library sales.
- ___ Notice your children's interests and praise them for what they are learning.
- ___ Talk and ask questions about things you see on television.
- ___ Turn off the television and make quiet time for reading.
- ___ Limit the amount of television to allow for other learning activities, such as reading, talking, or exploring.
- ___ During meal times have family members talk about things they've learned recently.
- ___ Provide a special place for your children to keep their books.
- ___ Make a special area in your home for reading, maybe with pillows or a small desk.
- ___ Make reading together special by holding your young children close, allowing them to turn the pages, having them point at objects in the story, asking questions about what they expect to happen, or allowing them to tell part of the story.
- ___ Read and tell stories to your children. Invite them to tell you stories, rhymes, or tall tales.
- ___ Have your children read to you.
- ___ Put your children's drawings or school work on the refrigerator or wall.
- ___ Have a special box or treasure chest where your children can keep their special projects and papers.

2. Plan family learning activities.

- ___ Take your children to the library. Help them pick their own books. Help them get their own library cards.
- ___ Take your children to ordinary places with you and talk about what you see. Trips to the grocery store, hardware store, post office, and bank can all be learning opportunities.
- ___ Ask your children questions. "How do you feel about that?" "What do you think that means?" Listen carefully to what they say.
- ___ Take your children to special places with you and talk about what you see. Many places are free or inexpensive: children's museums, art museums, historic sites, planetariums, science exhibits. There are so many interesting places!
- ___ Have your children write letters. With very young children, let them tell you what they want to say, and write it for them. When they want to start writing, let them. Don't worry about misspellings unless children ask if a word is misspelled.
- ___ Help them write their own histories, telling about important events in their lives. Looking at family photographs may help them remember.
- ___ Encourage their hobbies that will help them learn and feel successful: building, cooking, drawing, collecting bugs, collecting stamps.
- ___ Provide a chalkboard with chalk.
- ___ Provide paper, crayons, and markers for drawing and writing.
- ___ Play games with your children at home, in the car, and while waiting in lines or in a doctor's office.
- ___ Set a special time each week when the family can get together to talk about their family heritage, play board-games, or just have fun together.
- ___ Play follow-the-leader with your children.

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- ___ Be explorers. Make a map of your neighborhood. Mark your house, school, and favorite places on the map. Explore new places.
 - ___ Use your imagination. Look at the clouds and let all the family members describe what they see.

3. Start early and adapt to the needs of your children.

Birth to two years:

- ___ Even when children are very small they enjoy having people talk to them lovingly and tell them stories. Help them learn the names for things.
- ___ Follow their lead. If they're looking at something, continue to talk about and explore what they're looking at rather than change the subject.
- ___ Use everyday routines to teach children. For example, while getting dressed, talk about the names of the body parts and the clothing.
- ___ Give your children lots of opportunities to explore the environment through their five senses. Give them things to play with that are not sharp, breakable, or in any way harmful.
- ___ Take walks together. Play together. Play pleasant music.
- ___ Begin to look at books together. Select books that have sturdy pages that children can turn.
- ___ Sing together. Read books with animals and make the animal sounds.

Two to four years:

- ___ Talk in simple sentences with your children. Listen to their ideas without criticizing their mistakes. Talk with them about things that interest them. Children at this age enjoy silly rhymes, guessing games, tongue-twisters, riddles, chants, and secrets. Enjoying language with them is important at this age.
- ___ Help children recognize symbols such as restaurant signs, store signs, and traffic signs. Talk with them about what the signs mean.
- ___ Notice and compliment your children's ideas. Say things like: "What a great idea." "I'm glad you thought of that." "I like your ideas."
- ___ Play games with your children where they listen to and follow directions. Games like "Simon says" are good.
- ___ When you're taking a walk together, take time to sit down, close your eyes, and listen to sounds. Talk about what you hear.

Four to six years:

- ___ Assist children in solving everyday problems. For example, instead of directing children on how to get ready for bed, ask them, "What do we need to do next to get ready for bed?"
- ___ Four- to six-year-olds enjoy imagining, talking about their ideas and feelings, and telling tall tales. Help them with reading and writing. Reading familiar stories with them may allow them to take part in the story. Let them tell parts or all of a story.
- ___ Provide children with writing materials and encourage them to make signs, to draw, to scribble, and to write.
- ___ Use everyday situations to help children understand math. Ask them to help you count. Play with adding and subtracting things, dividing things into groups, and other math concepts.
- ___ Act out familiar stories with children. Use dolls or stuffed animals to act out "Little Red Riding Hood," "The Three Bears," or some other favorite.
- ___ Provide the props for them to play dress-up or store.
- ___ Help your children learn to play with other children. They can learn about sharing, taking turns, and co-operating.
- ___ Make books together. You can write the words, and the children can draw the pictures. Let them write as much as they want to.

Six to eight years:

- ___ Use home materials to introduce your children to science and how things work.
- ___ Let your children help you plan, shop for, and prepare meals.
- ___ Let children write, produce, and present short skits for family gatherings and holidays.
- ___ Help your children explore nature, whether it's the backyard or a nearby park. Teach them about the environment they live in.
- ___ Give children small responsibilities. Put them in charge of recycling aluminum or feeding the pets.
- ___ Encourage your children to develop hobbies such as stamp collecting, drawing, or bird watching.
- ___ Teach children a craft like woodworking or sewing and encourage their creativity.
- ___ Take them on a short family trip where they can learn about their community through historic sites or about life by camping out.

As children get older, they can take more responsibility for their own learning. You can help them by asking questions, encouraging their explorations, and providing many learning opportunities.

4. Work with other people who will help your children learn and develop.

- ___ Build good relationships with your children's teachers. Ask the teachers things you can do at home to help your children succeed at school.
 - ___ Help your children be ready for the school day by being sure that they get enough sleep and a good breakfast before going to school. Try to make the morning routine happy so they'll go to school in good spirits.
 - ___ Create a good feeling about homework. Encourage them. Praise them for their efforts. Set a time and place for homework. Provide healthy snacks for breaks.
 - ___ Support your children in their school reports by helping them find and use resources, make models, and find interesting ways to complete assignments. Help them but don't do their work for them. Doing their work sends the message "I don't think you can do this."
 - ___ When you visit people with interesting stories, songs, or hobbies, take your children along. Don't stay so long that your children become bored. But allow them to see collections and workshops of all kinds.
- You can make a big difference in the attitudes your children have about learning. As you learn and involve your children in learning, they're likely to develop into successful students.

You can help your children by being understanding when they experience failures, too. Everyone makes mistakes. Everyone mispronounces a word. Everyone fails in something once in a while. It helps children when you offer understanding and support. It discourages them when you expect perfection.

In addition to the ideas listed above, you can help your children become successful by helping them become balanced, healthy people. Other publications in this series, *Principles Of Parenting*, can help you make the world a safe and caring place for your children.

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