

52 Ways to Help Your Child Learn

Introduction

Parents are teachers, too. Many parents, however, believe that "real" learning is done only in school. Granted, much of the basic knowledge a child must absorb to continue learning is received during the school day. But young children learn as naturally as they breathe. Each day of their lives they observe and explore the world around them.

Become a partner with your schools in teaching your child. You can work along with the teacher to spark curiosity, energy, and enthusiasm for learning.

Choose those suggestions from this publication which best fit your child's age and interests. If you have questions about the suggestions, discuss them with your child's teacher whose opinions may strengthen your own efforts.

Reading

1. Read to your child often. Make a pleasant experience of the event, making sure the session is relaxed and unhurried. Let your child choose a favorite story and explain pictures and answer questions about it. As time goes by you can stop in the middle of a familiar story and ask what happens next. This encourages memory skills and reinforces the material in the text.
2. Begin talking to your child from infancy. Make sounds, call attention to sounds and connect them with objects and events. Talk to the child and explain activities as you perform them. Listen and encourage conversation with you. Answer questions patiently and as promptly as possible. Play listening games with your child. A good bedtime game is to listen quietly and identify as many sounds as possible – heartbeats, breathing, and traffic. Listening attentively is essential in learning.
3. When your child is learning to read, try "labeling" household objects with the object's name printed in bold letters on masking tape; encourage the reading of signs, posters – everything.
4. Besides regular children's materials, read aloud from ordinary books, magazines, newspapers, advertisements. Your child will begin to recognize the fact that the printed word is a part of everyday life that conveys useful, interesting and amusing information. Set a good example by reading to yourself in the child's

presence, thus establishing the idea that reading is an enjoyable and rewarding activity.

5. Introduce your child to the wonders of the public library at an early age. During shopping trips, browse through the library answering questions about various books and other printed materials. As soon as possible, allow your child to apply for a library card and choose books. Encourage frequent use of the school library. Read and discuss books brought home for possible school projects or during family sharing periods. Subscribe to a children's magazine. Children love the idea of having their very own periodical.
6. Make certain the reading area is comfortable and well-lighted. Take special note of any signs of reading difficulty that may be caused by poor eyesight. If such problems are noted, take prompt action – see your physician to determine whether the child needs glasses.
7. Search out the better television programs for children. Public television, especially, provides a wealth of interesting and educational programming. Take the opportunity to watch some of the productions along with your child. Discuss the programs. Note comments and try to answer questions. When words are shown, ask that they be read to you or read them to the child.
8. Before you select books for birthday or Christmas, ask the teacher's advice. Books tailored for the child's age-group and skill in reading, as well as those that dovetail with topics and times being studied in school, will make the book more readable and therefore more enjoyable. Also, when selecting books for gifts, choose those of "special" interest to the child.
9. When your child is writing a school report, show that information from several sources is better than relying on just one book. This way the child will get acquainted with the wide world of sources available on any given topic.
10. Hang up a large chalkboard on which to write messages. Have a family bulletin board, too, and occasionally pin up cartoons and short magazine articles you think your child will enjoy.
11. Encourage the writing and addressing of personal greeting cards, invitations and thank you notes, writing grocery lists and putting names in an address book. Suggest a backyard "mailbox" for exchanging regular letters with the child next door. Write notes and letters to your children. Encourage a written reply. Give praise for all efforts in writing.
12. Word games like "Scrabble" can help increase your child's vocabulary and improve spelling. There are many games that have junior versions. Ask a salesperson for assistance.
13. If at any age your child seems "turned off" by reading, don't make an issue of it. Casually leave "irresistible" books around -- books you have about subjects that interest the child.

Mathematics

14. Give your child practical experience using mathematics at home. Mention the size of containers, such as pints of cream and half gallons of milk. Encourage help when you bake, lay carpet or tile, or seed or fertilize the lawn. Allow your child to measure ingredients, areas or quantities of material. Use the metric system of measurement to increase the child's knowledge of and proficiency in the use of the metric system.
15. Before a shopping trip, have your child read newspaper ads and price the cost of items to be purchased. Encourage comparison of prices and quantities marked on containers to determine the best buys. Allow the child to purchase an item and figure out the change to be received. Other ways to help children apply their growing knowledge of mathematics to practical situations are: letting them double check the addition on grocery tapes, manage an allowance, read thermometers, barometers or even stop watches. Let them calculate age, weight, height and dimensions, or figure gas purchases and mileage, tolls and other trip expenses. Encourage the use of the metric system.
16. Bingo, dominoes, toy telephones, card games, board games, calendars and clocks with large numbers all can help familiarize your child with the world of numbers.
17. Put your preschool child's counting ability to work. In preparation for meals, let the child count out forks for the table, dinner napkins, pieces of cake, or any other quantity.
18. If your child is having difficulty with multiplication tables, buy or make flash cards and use them on a regular basis. Children will enjoy giving answers they know and will earn more complex problems through drill. Let your child explain the math papers brought home from school, and take time to help with correction and understanding of mistakes.
19. Above all, ask and listen to your child's daily experiences. Communication is the key to successful learning.

Creative Arts

Creative arts become interesting and exciting when they stimulate thinking and encourage creativity.

20. Keep your child supplied with sheets of paper, crayons, finger paints, modeling clay, burlap, paste, marking pens, scraps of cloth, styrofoam, yarn, scraps of wood and water colors. Provide work space for the child and encourage the creation of works of art.

21. Proudly display your child's best creations on the wall, door, and bulletin board. Give frequent opportunities for the expression of artistic ability – making valentine and greeting cards. For example, encourage help with holiday decorations.
22. Encourage musical activity in the home or on family trips. Family songs are fun for everyone. Let your child make up songs. Let the child be a music maker as well as a listener. A toy piano, drum, tonette, tuned bells, or mouth organ can help teach the rudiments of rhythm and tone.
23. If your child plays an instrument, help budget practice time and make uninterrupted practice time available. Listen to those tunes the child thinks are good. Encourage your child to perform. Genuine praise does wonders.
24. Allow your child to observe forms of art in nature and his/her surroundings. Observation and experimentation opens up the doors to confidence. Be positive about the child's attempts and encourage development of interests. Help your child to really "see" the subtle variations in nature. Point out differences in intensity of colors.
25. To encourage creative writing jot down stories your child tells, songs "made up." Show them to the child later. Suggest they be illustrated and "published" for grandparents or other relatives at Christmas.
26. Be subtle in helping your child learn. Keep things light-hearted and fun, never grim or tense. Make learning fun, for both of you. And, remember, listen to your child. Don't stifle curiosity. Don't brush off questions, or after a while, you won't be asked.

Bilingual Education

If your child studies English as a second language:

27. Provide the opportunity to listen to songs, poems, stories, or plays in English through the use of tapes, television and radio.
28. Read to your child in the home language. Doing so will help prepare them to learn to read in English.

If your child is learning a foreign language:

29. Ask the local bookstore clerk if there are games or flash cards in that language. Borrow simple foreign-language tapes (recommended by the teacher) from the public library.
30. Encourage your child to acquire a "pen pal" in a country or from another school district which is of particular interest to the child or the language being studied.

Social Studies

31. Help your child learn all that is possible about the natural world in which we live. Encourage curiosity in the area of geography, land formations, climate and weather. Try to answer questions when your child is young and, when older, how to find the answers. Discuss current events, encourage the reading of newspapers and periodicals and the watching of local and national news telecasts.
32. Provide your child with social studies research material, including a dictionary, atlas, globe and almanac. A map of the city and gasoline road maps are excellent for plotting trips and helping the child understand geographic relationships. Keep the research items conveniently close to the TV set for use during news and documentary programs.
33. Widen your child's horizons with visits to the airport, the docks, the courthouse, the museum, a historic landmark, a factory, a newspaper – whatever is available in your community. Some television stations and local newspapers schedule guided tours.
34. On trips, provide your youngster with a notebook and pencil. Encourage the child to draw pictures and make notes of things of interest along the way. Help with a collection of samples to take back to the classroom.
35. Map puzzles are good "learn as you play" items for youngsters. Distinctive shapes of states, countries and continents form pictures in the child's mind to help your child learn and remember.
36. Discuss the world of work with your child, including the demands of various jobs and professions and the work and training necessary to qualify. Stress the idea that training can begin at an early age and that attention to school work is vital for future success. Feel out notions about future career plans, including personal preferences, inclinations, and natural skills.
37. Teach your child the importance of being a good citizen by discussing at the dinner table local candidates for public office, issues and problems of the community. Help with the judgment of each person individually rather than by race, creed, color, by curbing unthinking remarks about others. Give books that reflect the diversity of American culture. Don't be afraid to guide your teenagers into the fascinating realm of ideas. Junior high and high school students love "rap sessions" on serious topics.

Science

38. Stimulate your child to make use of all senses in discovering the surrounding world. Encourage curiosity about the feel of textures and materials, characteristic

- smells, sounds, tastes, weight and sizes of things. Train the child to look carefully and to see beyond the surface appearance of the environment.
39. Children are normally curious and should be encouraged to find answers to questions by patient observation and through the use of references, either at home or in libraries and museums. Let the child manipulate and learn about familiar objects: a dripping faucet, the household water system, a nutcracker, an old doorbell, discarded appliances, locks and door hinges, household plants and gardens. When making household repairs, servicing the family car or other domestic equipment, include your child as an observer. Natural scientific and mechanical skills can be discovered and developed in this way, and many scientific principles can be demonstrated in firsthand and practical ways.
 40. Make certain that you teach your child rules of safety in the handling of electrical, mechanical and chemical equipment. In this modern scientific era, a whole range of educationally approved toys and games are on sale for gift-giving to the budding young scientist in your home. Consider giving a subscription radio earphone set, general science kit, an ant farm or toy farm that grows real crops, binoculars, an aquarium or terrarium, a chemistry set, a model airplane, a biography of an inventor, a microscope, a telescope or a magnifying glass.
 41. Work with your child on projects such as making bird feeders, caring for pets, setting up a home weather station, observing the night sky and preparing a family vegetable or flower garden. Take the opportunity to confer with the child's science teachers. They welcome such parental interest and can give many useful tips to help you reinforce your child's formal science training.
 42. Encourage your child to be a "collector." Provide a place for collections, even if it is a dresser drawer, a soapbox, or a shelf in the bookcase. An upended orange crate provides shelves for "display" of rocks, insects, leaves, stamps, shells. A dime-store picture frame can display summer collections of flowers, leaves or even insects.

Health, Safety and Physical Education

43. Your child's health is reflected in most areas of schooling and should be cared for by you and your physicians and dentist. Any condition of a serious nature should be reported to the school. You should continue to emphasize personal hygiene and cleanliness. Diet is of prime importance. Begin each day with a good breakfast. Follow through on eye and ear screenings and routine immunizations. Consult your child's physical education teacher concerning physical development and coordination and how you may assist.
44. See to it that your child has enough sleep each day and is properly dressed for weather conditions. The child should be kept home from school if definite signs of illness such as a rise in temperature, a suspicious rash or a severe cough are noted. Send a note to explain the absence when the child returns to school. Be alert for

signs of poor vision, such as squinting, frowning or red, watery eyes. Faulty hearing can be indicated by ear aches, chronic inattention, or too frequent requests that statements be repeated.

45. Encourage the habit of vigorous daily activity. Active play builds strong muscles, which are basic to good health and posture. Join your child in active games and stress good sportsmanship. Encourage participation in creative activities and individual and team sports.
46. Children should be taught their full name, address and telephone number at an early age. Select the safest, most direct walking route to school and check to see that your child uses it. Explain any traffic hazards along the way. Teach your child to stop at the curb or at the side of the road; to look both directions to be sure there is no traffic or that traffic has stopped before crossing; to WALK across the road in the crosswalk; and to obey a student patrol or adult crossing guard if there is one. Warn your child never to get in a car or accept a ride with a stranger.
47. If your child has to travel to and from school on a bus, teach him or her the fundamentals of bus safety – to stand well back from the road while waiting for the bus; to remain seated while the bus is moving; and to keep his or her head and arms inside the bus at all times. When it is necessary to cross the street to board the bus, teach your child to STOP, LOOK, LISTEN, and then WALK across the street to the bus only after the bus driver has signaled that it is safe. Children learn very quickly from experience. Why not ride a bus with your child and demonstrate the fundamentals of bus safety? If your child is permitted to ride a bicycle to school, be sure the child knows and obeys bicycle laws. The bicycle should be checked frequently to be sure the brakes are working properly and that the handlebars and seat are not loose.
48. Does your child "hate" a certain subject? Find out why. Your child may need extra help. Maybe your own aversion to a certain subject has caused it. Seek the reason behind the dislike, then enlist the teacher's help so that you can work together to conquer it.
49. Learn as much as you can from the school principal and staff about classes, teaching methods, club activities. Then you can give your child help that fits into everyday learning programs.

Developing Your Child's Ability to Think Clearly

50. When your child asks unusual or divergent questions, ask, "What made you think of that?" Does your child automatically accept whatever answer or information is offered to him? Encourage him to question it. Encourage your child to think of alternative options and the reasons that support such options or answers.

51. To solve problems, children need strategies — systematic ways of thinking. Help your child to develop and use such strategies as: breaking a problem into small manageable chunks, to think from other people's viewpoints, question how the problem was approached and a solution attempted. For example: How did you solve that problem? Could you have done it a quicker way? What are your assumptions? What makes you think the way you do? Successful problem solvers check for accuracy, learn from mistakes, are persistent and confident.
52. When your children leave the house to go to school, send them off with a smile; when you next see them, give them hugs. In this small way, you may maintain a positive relationship with them — one that is so important in these days of social turbulence. Your support and encouragement will help guide your children toward successful futures and will give you the satisfaction of knowing that you have done your best as a parent.

REMEMBER! Listen with interest, encourage and ask questions, be generous with praise, enthusiasm and sympathy. You can bridge the gap between home and school and make learning fun for both of you.