

Preparing Your Child For School

**Western Quebec
School Board
Family Literacy
Project**



Commission scolaire Western Québec
Western Québec School Board

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January 21, 1998

Dear parents,

The Family Literacy Project of the Western Quebec School Board is pleased to offer you this informative booklet entitled: "**Preparing your child for school**".

If you are new to parenting and have a baby or a pre-schooler at home, you will appreciate the information it offers.

As a parent, we have a very important role to play in our child's education. Your help and encouragement are needed to develop your child's reading, writing and language skills.

The success of your child's early school years will last a lifetime.

Sincerely,

Robert Ledoux
Project Coordinator

This project has been made possible by a financial contribution from both the provincial and the federal governments (I.F.P.C.A.)

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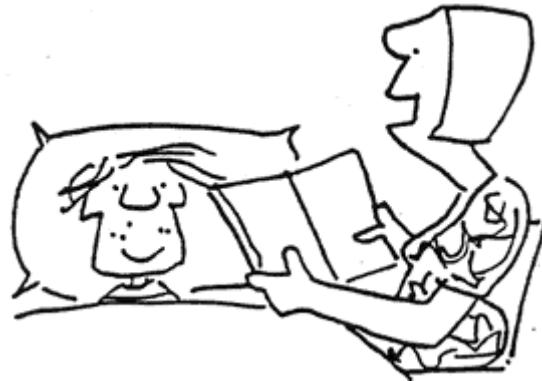
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11

ways
to help
your children
become better readers

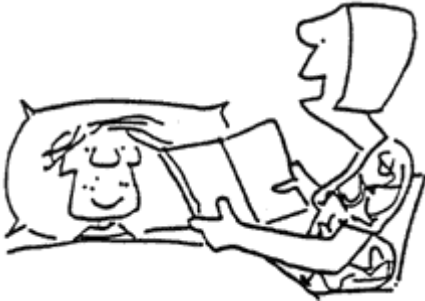


Cartoons courtesy of **Ben Wicks**
from his book **Born to Read.**

presented by
The family Literacy Interest Group

1

Read aloud to your children.



This is the most important thing you can do. Stop and talk with your child during the story.

Let them:

- point out the letters
- talk about the story
- ask about the meaning of the words
- read some of the words

3

Help your children learn about things.



Take your children to:

- the beach
- the park
- the zoo
- the laundromat
- the store

Talk With them about what they see. They need this kind of information to understand stories.

2

Be a good example.



Read newspapers, magazines and books when your children are around.

4

Talk with your children about their experiences.



This helps them to:

- learn new words

They will:

- watch what you do
- learn from what you do
- copy what you do

- understand what these new words mean
- learn from their experiences

5

Encourage your children to think and talk about events



This helps them to:

- give good descriptions
- use new words
- remember the order of events
- tell complete stories

Your children will learn how stories are written and better understand what they are reading.

7

Decide how much TV your children watch.



Think about this:

- are your children watching so much TV that they are not doing other things
- up to 10 hours per week is reasonable
- more than 10 hours per week may cause problems for your children's school work

6

Give your children writing materials.



Children often want to learn how to write.

You can help by:

- having paper, pencils and crayons in your home

When your children are too young to hold a pencil or crayon you can:

- use materials, like magnetic boards and letters, to help them learn about letters and words

8

Know what programs your children watch.



You can help them:

- choose good programs
- learn from TV programs by asking questions
- by talking about what they watch

9

Find out what's happening at your children's school.



You can:

- visit your children's teachers
- help out in the classroom
- find out about reading programs in their schools
- take part in home-school programs

11

Babies like books too!



You can:

- sing and talk to your baby
- give your baby a board book as a toy and talk about the pictures
- read nursery rhymes to your baby

10

Encourage your children to read.

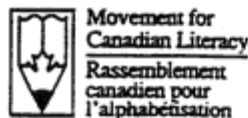


You can help them read more by:

- having books in your home
- using books With tapes
- making time to go to the library

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National Literacy Secretariat



Preparing Your Child for School Through Multi-Sensory Play



by Thomas Armstrong, Ph.D.

Young children learn best when they can experience new things with all of their senses. Pre-schoolers need to see, hear, feel, touch, smell, and sometimes even taste a learning material in order to really understand it fully. Here are some suggestions for building multi-sensory experiences into your child's play at home in a way that will prepare her for the academic world:

- Buy touch and feel books or scratch and sniff for her first reading material.
- Mix up pudding or other creamy foods to use as finger paint in writing numbers and words. Or help her create letters out of bread dough.
- Use Cheerios, raisins, or peanuts as counters for doing simple math activities.
- Help awaken early scientific exploration through natural multi-sensory experiences, such as cooking, building dams and forts, and water play.
- Encourage language experiences through drama and dress-up activities.
- Finally, provide lots of art supplies including clay, paints, and paste-up materials, so that your child can unfold her deeper creative capacities.

In each of these ways, you'll be helping to prepare your child for the world of academics that's just around the corner.

Stimulating Your Pre-Schooler's Language Development



by Thomas Armstrong, Ph.D.

Language is an important part of your pre-schooler's life. Without language, she'd be unable to communicate her needs, wants and desires to the outside world. Language development itself represents an important pre-requisite to other skills important to later academic success, such as reading.

Here are some suggestions for stimulating your pre-schooler's language development, so that she can maximize her ability to communicate effectively.

- Talk a lot with your child. Just the simple act of conversation provides your child with adult examples of spoken English she can incorporate into her own growing ability to express herself.
- Have fun with riddles, puns, tongue-twisters and other word games. These emphasize the playful aspects of language and teach your child important language skills, such as vocabulary, use of syntax, semantics and articulation.
- Let your child use a tape recorder to record her voice and hear it played back. This gives her instant feedback on how she's coming across.

Language is central to your child's development. Don't take it for granted, but nurture it along gently. You'll be glad you did!!

Improving Pre-Schoolers Thinking Skills At Home



by Evelyn Peters

Looking for some ideas for things to do at home that will help your pre-schooler improve his or her thinking skills? I don't mean "ABC" or flash card things, but real activities that make them figure things out and problem solve?

Hundreds of opportunities exist in your home for teaching these kinds of thinking skills. You will find teachable moments in every room inside, and outdoors as well. Remember that children enjoy and learn from SIMPLE things that we adults take for granted.

For example, when children help you sort and put away the groceries, they are practicing the skill of sorting or grouping. Some things go in the freezer or the refrigerator; talk about why. Some groceries will go in certain cupboards. Others go to different places in the house. Talk about how these things are alike or different.

When children practice and think about this kind of grouping they are beginning to use the math and science skills of categorizing and classifying. Sorting, matching and grouping socks, towels, buttons, earrings, shoes, bottle caps, keys, spoons and forks all help children practice mathematical thinking and problem solving.

When you let children help you prepare foods or recipes, many more skills are practiced. They will estimate, measure, and count. Ask them to observe and tell, compare and describe. Help them talk about the smells, colors and shapes of foods. They will wonder what will happen when something is cooked; they'll see the changes, and learn about cause and effect. They can even play store with kitchen cans and boxes to learn more about counting and money, even if you use paper dollars and pennies.

You can teach thinking skills at home in the kitchen, or with math and money games, or simple experiments, with creative "inventions," with recycled materials, and with "what if..." games. All you need is a little imagination and a desire to help your child learn.

Ms. Petersen's nationally syndicated parenting column is carried in over 200 newspapers twice each week. As a family/parenting consultant, early childhood educator, Head Start consultant, and host of a series of parent training audio and video tapes, Ms. Petersen employs an approach of providing hands-on, nuts and bolts advice to parents across the country. Her new book "A Practical Guide to Early Childhood Planning: The What Why and How of Lesson Plans" has just been released.

Programmed by: http://www.parentsplace.com/family/parenthood/articles/0,,500783_115852,00.html

Bedtime Routines



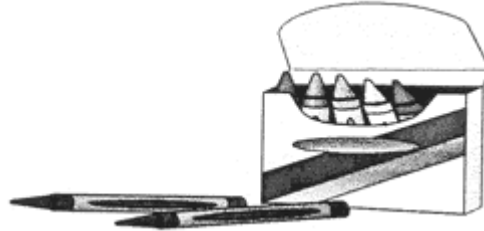
by Vicki Lansky

I'll bet you used a bedtime routine or ritual to help your baby get to sleep, a cuddle in a rocking chair, a lullaby, perhaps a gentle back rub. Well don't give up this lovely practice just because you think your child has outgrown it. Just a few minutes together every night can give you and your child the best quality time of all.

- Read, of course, even when kids are old enough to read to themselves. A nightly chapter of a long and interesting book is a favorite bedtime routine for my own kids. Or sometimes, listen together to a record or tape or some good music.
- Insure sweet dreams by decorating a jar or box and filling it with slips of paper on which you and the kids have written every good dream you can think of. The kids can draw a slip from the "dream jar" every night.
- Talk over the day's events; here's a great chance to compliment your child on a special accomplishment or a quality you admire.
- Let older kids take on some of the routines for younger ones; they can lead the bedtime parade and read the bedtime story too. And remember, even pre-teens like a good bedtime snuggle in your bed or theirs.

The Parenting Resource Center on the Web.
<http://www.parentsplace.com/>

Reading Activities With A Pre-Schooler



by Peter Neumeyer, Ph.D.

Here are some ideas for reading activities with your pre-schooler:

- Besides looking at illustrations together, or having the child repeat refrains, you can get wonderful, active participation by having him or her draw characters or scenes from the story, or draw or paint scenes in which the characters moved to other worlds or other stories which the child may want to tell you about.
- Always, always, always, keep paper, crayons, paint in the kitchen and in other rooms where the child may be. Wonderful, spontaneous little pictures come in odd moments.
- Do I have to stress that there is no one correct way for the child to paint or draw? The point is to encourage active, spontaneous participation, unhampered and uncensored. Activity is the purpose, not judgment.
- You can also encourage the child to tell you stories of his or her own, connected with characters from the book (such as, "Tell me why Peter Rabbit's father was put in a pie by Mr. MacGregor?").

Storytelling: A Powerful Learning Tool in the Home



by Thomas Armstrong, Ph.D.

Reading aloud to children is an enjoyable experience for many families. However, storytelling represents an even more powerful, though diminishing, experience in homes across the country. Children love it when adults can summon from within themselves a good story and tell it with verve and gusto. To prepare yourself for storytelling, follow these simple steps.

1. Read the story over to yourself thoroughly, or, if you are making it up, go over each of the details in your mind, so that you know it cold.
2. Practice telling the story in front of a mirror or use a tape recorder. If you can get feedback from another adult, do that as well.
3. Tell the story to your kids. Use gestures, facial expressions, and as much dramatic flair as you can muster in delivering the storyline. If possible, engage the kids in the story as well, providing dialogue they can repeat or gestures they can imitate that are important to the plot.

Storytelling is a fading art in our culture, but an important element in nurturing the imagination and a vital tool in transmitting joy and wisdom from one generation to another.

The Importance of Play in Your Pre-Schooler's Life



by Thomas Armstrong, Ph.D.

Many parents regard free play as rather trivial in the lives of their pre-schoolers and would much rather see their kids get involved in formal games, educational classes, and organized sports. However, research suggests that free play may be actually healthier for your children than these more structured activities.

- Pretend play allows kids to test their ideas about the world and modify them as they go along. It provides children with a way to work emotional conflicts in creative ways. Finally, it offers a miniature world within which they can learn about social interactions and interpersonal relationships.
- Parents need to give their kids plenty of room to play. That means being willing to put up with some loudness and horseplay, as long as it doesn't become destructive. It also means providing a few resources, such as old clothes for dress-up activities, blocks or other building materials, outdoor play equipment, and an indoor playhouse or similar enclosure for fantasy play.

Giving your child a chance to unleash her creative imagination provides her with some basic building blocks, important for success in later life.

How Your Pre-Schooler Learns



by Thomas Armstrong, Ph.D.

Every pre-schooler is an active learner. Your pre-schooler has a lot to be excited about with fantasy playing, nonstop monologues, social interactions, physical activity, and creative concerns taking up a large part of every day.

Make sure that she has the opportunity to really enjoy this precious time in her life by not forcing her too soon into academic work that's more appropriate to the elementary school years, and by providing her with resources that allow her experiences of competence and mastery. Suggestions include old clothes for dress up play, building materials, art supplies, a tape recorder, musical instruments, outdoor equipment, and a creative space for fantasy play (such as a playhouse).

Preschoolers need lots of time to explore their ideas about the world, so take care not to overly structure their days. Expose them to wonderful children's literature. Tell them stories. Sing to them, and share your enthusiasm and creativity in all things great and small. Answer their probing questions, and, above all, let them share their thoughts, products, and vitality with you without judgment and criticism.

The Parenting Resource Center on the Web.
<http://www.parentsplace.com/>

Kitchen Fun for You And Your Kids



by Evelyn Petersen

The kids/kitchen combo is not necessarily messy, and it's well worth the effort in terms of children's enjoyable learning. If they're unsupervised it is neither be wise or safe, but if you PLAN their involvement, there are many "unmessy" ways for them to help and to learn.

Think about the time it would save if they just snapped green beans or husked com, even if you have to take off the com silk. Children can also save you time by scrubbing raw vegetables, and they do it with zest and pride. 4 and 5 year olds can also pit cherries with a tool or hairpin. (Grandma's rule: If you want pie you have to pit.)

Children will learn good hygiene with your modeling and reminders to wash hands before they "cook". They will learn safety when you show them the proper way to use a potato peeler, or a safe knife to cut up vegetables. Make the first cut of rounded fruits or vegetables on the bread board yourself. Then children can hold the item securely, flat side down, for other cuts.

Cooking with adult guidance is one of the best ways for children to develop thinking skills. They practice estimating, measuring and counting; they make comparisons and develop conceptual skills about categories, changes, and cause and effect. They notice and talk about the smells, colors and shapes of foods.

If you let them help make healthy snacks, soups and stews, they will learn about good foods for their teeth and bodies. A bonus...kids almost always EAT what they help make. Let them help prepare foods from whole grain breads, nuts, fresh fruits and vegetables and dairy products.

Letting children help in the kitchen also gives them a way to contribute to the family, an important family value! Your children will learn what foods you prepare for special days and family events. This helps them appreciate your own family traditions, and gives you a way to introduce them to the traditions or cultures of others.

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Teaching Children an Appreciation of Reading



by Evelyn Petersen

Kids who watch videos, no matter how interesting, are more likely to turn into couch potatoes than good readers. Reading is what grows active readers; television grows spectators.

Frankly, I think that most children's videos are an excuse for parents to avoid the opportunity of talking, listening and reading to their children. Seating children in front of a picture tube that tells "Goldilocks and the Three Bears" is a very poor substitute for hearing that story (told with expression and voice changes) by a parent, especially while sitting in the parent's lap. Here are my tips for growing children who enjoy reading.

Talk with your children as they play, and as you do chores or go shopping. Ask and answer questions and teach them new words.

Read with your children every day. Ask them about the story and let them interrupt with comments so that they learn to read "between the lines" and know why characters do what they do.

Let them see you reading and enjoying what you read.

If you have older children in your home, encourage them to read to your younger children.

Get each child a library card and go to the library regularly. The librarian will help you pick out wonderful books, including wordless books that require your children to tell the story.

Find children books, magazines and pictures about their special interests...birds, horses, forests, the sea, etc.

Read things you see during the day...cereal boxes, cans, traffic and exit signs, and

signs in store windows and in grocery stores.

Plan mini walks and trips in your town to generate new experiences to talk about and new words. (Try your fire station or the airport.)



Try children's poetry books or tapes with rhymes and songs. Sing together as you ride in the car, take a walk, or do chores. Rhymes make children more aware of word sounds.

Children love it when you tell stories about yourself, the family or them, when they were "little". Write the stories in a scrapbook and let them draw the illustrations. Then let them tell the stories to you.

Let your children play dress up and act out stories. Its creative, it's fun, and it helps them practice new words and language skills.

Making Good Use of The Library



by Vicki Lansky

Learning to use the library is a true lifetime skill. Do start early. Get your child his or her own library card to be responsible for; it's a very adult thing to do.

- Help your child become acquainted with the librarian and the services offered by the library, such as reserving books, using computers, or other media opportunities. Encourage your child to join any reading programs that might be available through your public library.
- Show a child of eight or nine how to look up books by favorite authors and those on subjects of special interest. Teach your child to check the table of contents and the preface or introduction to a book to find out what's in it.
- Once you're home with these newly checked out library books, find a special shelf or other place to keep them, so they won't get mixed up with your child's own books. You might also use a special book bag just for this purpose.
- Teach responsibility for borrowed books by marking the due date on your calendar or posting a list of books and their due dates on your refrigerator; that way you can be sure on returning them on time.



The Parenting Resource Center on the Web.
<http://www.parentsplace.com/>

Reading Readiness Activities for Pre-Schoolers



by Thomas Armstrong, Ph.D.

While pre-schoolers should not be formally taught to read in my opinion, there are many different kinds of reading readiness activities you can provide around the house that will help encourage a book-positive attitude in your child.

First, and most importantly, you should yourself enjoy reading and let your child observe you engaged in reading activities of different kinds, so that she can see there's a purpose behind reading.

Second, you should spend time reading to your child. Just before bed is a good time to read your child her favorite story book. Soon, your child may learn to read along, although it's important not to try to teach your child anything at this point. Your child will do her own learning, through osmosis as it were.

Third, engage your child in lots of different language activities, including frequent conversations and periods where you can share jokes, riddles, songs, poems, tongue twisters, and other verbal games and experiences. These activities help your child develop auditory discrimination, vocabulary, sensitivity to syntax, and other skills important to later reading success.

Nurturing Creativity in Your Pre-Schooler



by Thomas Armstrong, Ph.D.

All young children are creative people. Nature seems to have endowed them with the ability to transform even the most commonplace circumstance into a novel event, full of joy and discovery.

- One important task for any parent is to work to keep that creativity alive. You can do this best by nurturing your own creativity as a parent. When your child comes up to you with a toy and tells you that it's a space monster, allow yourself to go along with the scene and find an appropriate role to play.
- Provide your child with resources for his creativity, but don't ply him with kits, games, and equipment. Remember that a child can be very creative with the simplest of things, such as a piece of bent twig or a paper napkin.
- Above all, make sure not to criticize or judge your child's creative products. If your child shows you a picture he's drawn, and it looks like scribbles to you, remember that to him it may represent the fruits of much creative effort, so ask him to tell you all about it rather than judging it or ignoring it. When you show interest in your child's creative labors, you reinforce his desire to want to continue discovering new things in his own way.

When You Are Considering A Co-Op Preschool



by Evelyn Petersen

Speaking from my experience as a co-op mom and also a co-op teacher/director, I think the co-operative preschool experience is well worth the extra effort, in terms of both your child's best long range interest and the quality of your parenting.

Nothing will teach you more about your child as a person than seeing and working with him and other children in a co-op preschool. Nothing will teach you more about how your child develops, how he learns, his learning style, his personality, or how he gets along with others. You will see him from a new perspective as a "team teacher," which is what you will be as a co-op volunteer.

In a co-op preschool, the teacher director is a paid, early childhood professional whose daily staff usually consists of 3 volunteer parents. Parents take turns, so after about three weeks, all parents have been assistants, and the rotation begins again. This provides an adult child ratio of about 1:4, which helps your child get an incredibly rich learning experience each day. Since parents make up the staff, serve on the board that runs the school, and have annual fund raising or social events, the cost of tuition for a preschool experience of exceptional quality is very low.

As a co-op parent, I learned things about my own children that made me a better, more informed parent for life, not just for those early years. As a teacher, it was the most rewarding work I have ever done, because so much more can be accomplished for every child when you work hand in hand with their parents every day. When parents are actively involved in their child's learning, as they are in co-op, that spirit of parent involvement continues throughout the child's school years, making a tremendous positive impact on the child's achievement and self esteem. Do give it a try.

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If Your Child Doesn't Want To Go To Pre-School...



by Thomas Armstrong, Ph.D.

If your child is four or older, then he or she should be able to spend some time in a preschool environment with other kids with no real problems. Assuming that the school is an enjoyable place with block play, sharing times, art experiences, and so forth. If it's more highly structured, with academic expectations, this could be at the root of the problem, and your child may need a school environment more closely tailored to their individual developmental needs. However, even then, some kids have more trouble making the transition from home to preschool environments, and for these kids, some sensitivity is called for.

First, consider scaling back the involvement in preschool. If a full day now, then a half day; if a half-day now, then a quarter of a day.

Second, help make the transition by spending some time with your child at the school to start with (perhaps you could volunteer a half hour at the start of each day). Then gradually phase out your involvement as they become more comfortable. Or, get to school early, and spend some time with your child in the classroom environment, helping them to feel comfortable in it. If they get upset, let them know you'll be outside the school when class begins, and if they need to talk with you, let them know that you'll be available. Gradually phase this out as they become more comfortable.

If your child continues the same level of crying, or even becomes more upset, then consider postponing for a year or so the involvement in school. This reaction may be telling you that this child is simply not ready for school.

Preparing Your Child For School

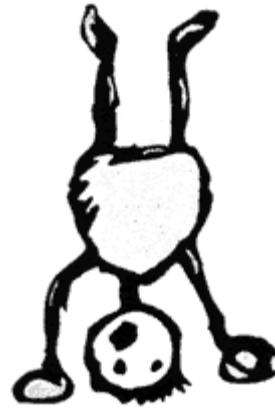


by Vicki Lansky

There are a few simple things you can do to make that first day of school easier for your child who's entering kindergarten or first grade. They're not hard to do, and they don't take much time, and they'll make your child's transition to the world of school much easier.

1. Try to visit school, your child's room, and the teacher before school if you can. Be sure your child has seen and used a public toilet.
2. If your child will be eating at school, introduce him or her to the idea of a serving line by eating at a cafeteria if you can.
3. Pick out new clothes, outfits, and a few new school supplies; it really heightens anticipation.
4. Walk to the school bus with your child or to school if your child will be walking, and point out landmarks along the way.
5. Be sure your child knows his or her full name, address, and phone number. Some kids feel more secure if they can carry a little card with this information written on it.
6. Be careful not to overemphasize the fun and games aspect of school; remember, this is serious business.

Helping the Physically Active Child Learn to Read



by Thomas Armstrong, Ph.D.

Highly energetic kids often have a hard time sitting still long enough to enjoy reading. For these kids, you need to provide reading assistance "on the run" as it were.

- Teach these kids the alphabet by having them run their letters. Go out to a large paved area, such as a driveway or playground and write the letters of the alphabet in chalk, so that they're several feet high. Then have him walk, hop, or run along the chalk lines of each letter.
- When he begins to read his first books, let him pick them up and walk around as he reads if he wants to. After he's read a while, suggest he get together with some other kids to put on a play.
- Let him act out sight words using pantomime. Assign body gestures to different vowel and consonant sounds and have him pronounce new words with his body.
- Let him write his own sentences, using large pieces of chalk on the driveway or playground surface, so that he can put his whole body into the activity.

By giving him permission to use his whole body in reading activities, you're helping him learn in his own way.

Discipline With Love



by Vicki Lansky

How can a parent correct or discipline without making a child belittled, as if he or she is a bad or worthless person? The answer is "very carefully." The important message is to first remember that you're trying to teach your child, not get back at him or her for misbehaving. Your choice of words can sometimes make all the difference. Do you start sentences with "I" or with "you"?

- "I" sentences state personal feelings ("I feel bad when you..." or "I get angry when you're late, and dinner gets cold.").
- "You" sentences tend to be accusatory, and we all get defensive when the finger' pointed at us ("You're late, and dinner's cold.").
- Try to avoid absolutes like "you always" or "you never." To a child, they often mean there's no hope for improvement, no chance of ever pleasing you, which is what kids really want to do.

Basically, I think talking to your child as you would talk to an adult solves a lot of problems. It comes down to showing respect for your child and concern for his or her feelings. You love the child; it's a particular action you don't like. Be sure your child understands that very clearly.

The Parenting Resource Center on the Web.
<http://www.parentsplace.com/>

Parents as a Child's Best Teacher



by Thomas Armstrong, Ph.D.

Parents are really a child's best teacher -- day care workers and pre-school teachers spend only a few hours a day, perhaps five days a week with your child, in a somewhat artificial setting.

You, on the other hand, have been with your child under the widest variety of circumstances -- from before the moment of birth to the present time -- often twenty-four hours a day! You've observed your child go through the most significant learning events of his life, from the first step, to the first spoken word, to the first scribble, and so forth. Hence, you have the qualifications to serve as the resident learning expert when it comes to the education of your child!

Acknowledge the expertise you possess and use your knowledge of your child's learning ability to help him progress further in his development. When he encounters a learning difficulty, think back to previous victories and try to provide the support and encouragement he needs to move through present obstacles.

When he achieves an important learning goal, celebrate this with your child in some significant way. Above all, trust your deepest intuitions about how best to teach your child. Very often you'll find they're the correct ones.

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