

MAKING
LEARNING

fun

Become a family that celebrates
the joy of learning



Parent-proven strategies for making learning come alive for your child

by Ann Douglas

Remember how eager your child was to learn about his world when he was a baby? His love of learning was so strong that it was sometimes almost impossible to get him to take a nap. There were places to go and people to see. Who had time for sleep?

Imagine what it would be like to re-ignite that very same passion for learning in your school-aged child—to see your ten-year-old son so caught up in a book that he could hardly stand putting it down long enough to eat his dinner. Well, believe it or not, it is possible to re-ignite the love of learning that served your child so well during his

younger years. Your child has been hardwired with a desire to learn. All you have to do is figure out how to flip the switch.

Here are a few ideas.

BECOME A WALKING ADVERTISEMENT FOR THE JOY OF LEARNING. The experts agree that one of the most effective ways of encouraging a love of learning is to model that very same excitement yourself. Try to create “a culture of learning” in the home by showing rather than telling their kids that learning is exciting. Let them catch you reading the newspaper at the breakfast table or tuning into a TV documentary on a

topic of particular interest to you. With any luck, they’ll get the message that learning can be fun.

TEACH YOUR KIDS THAT LEARNING CAN HAPPEN ANYWHERE, ANYTIME. You want them to get the message that it’s something that happens outside the classroom and around the clock. Encourage your kids to ask questions and show them how to do further digging on issues that are of particular interest to them—like why we can’t see the stars during the day or why people have different colored hair, eyes, and skin.

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ENCOURAGE YOUR CHILD TO DEVELOP HOBBIES AND INTERESTS OUTSIDE OF SCHOOL. Plant a butterfly garden to capitalize on your children's interests in butterflies. Make treks to a museum to allow your kids to indulge their passion for pioneers, dinosaurs, or bats. Just don't be surprised if your child changes his interests as often—or even more often!—than he changes his underwear. Simply celebrate the fact that your child has developed a new interest.

HELP YOUR CHILD TO SEE THE RELEVANCE OF WHAT HE'S LEARNING IN SCHOOL. It's one thing to get kids excited about chasing butterflies or visiting a bat cave. It's quite another to get them excited about doing homework. The secret is to show them the real-world relevance of what they're learning at school—connections that may not be immediately obvious to them. The more kids see such connections between what they are learning in the classroom and what they are experiencing in real life, the more meaningful their schoolwork will be, and the more motivated they will be to do their homework and to focus in class. In other words, geometry becomes a whole lot more interesting once you find out that engineers use those abstract mathematical principles while designing sports stadiums and amusement parks.

FIND CREATIVE WAYS TO EXTEND THE SCHOOL CURRICULUM AT HOME. If your child is doing a unit on

the solar system, allow him to stay up past his bedtime to check out the wonders of the night sky. And if he's studying the great explorers in history class, offer to serve up an explorer-style dinner complete with rock-hard tea biscuits and meat that's positively swimming in salt. Of course, if there's someone else in your child's life who can help to provide these sorts of out-of-classroom enrichment opportunities for your child, all the better. It can be handy to have a chef, biologist, or architect living on your block.

TREAT LEARNING LIKE A GAME. Organize a multi-generational spelling bee. Challenge your kids to use the family "word of the week" at least once a day. Or toss some math brain-teasers their way. Hint: They'll be more likely to buy into the game if there's some sort of prize involved—a half-hour bedtime extension, "dibs" on the channel-changer, or the right to have an extra story at bedtime.

HELP YOUR CHILD TO GET ORGANIZED. Your child is more likely to be motivated to learn if school is a positive experience for him, so anything you can do to help him develop important behind-the-scenes learning skills like organization will reap big dividends in the classroom. If he's inclined to forget his running shoes on gym day and his recorder on music day, help him to create a checklist that will remind him which materials he needs to

bring to school on which days—and then reward him at the end of the week for getting his act together.

GET INVOLVED IN YOUR CHILD'S SCHOOL. You don't have to offer to head up the parent-teacher association or to bake brownies for each and every bake sale, but you should at least make an effort to get to know your kids' teachers and to find out what they are learning at school. It's an important way to reinforce the fact that you value education. Besides, your involvement can make a world of difference. Research shows that when parents are involved in their children's education, children do better.

As you can see, you don't have to be Einstein (or Einstein's mother) to make learning come alive for your child. You simply need to have a passion for learning and a willingness to leave your child with a last legacy—a lifelong love of learning.

Read The Mother of All Parenting Books by Ann Douglas for more great tips!

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