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## SP487-D-Helping Children Succeed

The University of Tennessee Agricultural Extension Service

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# PRINCIPLES OF Parenting

## Helping Your Children Succeed at Learning



**Y**ou 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.



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## 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.

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## 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.

*This publication was originally written by H. Wallace Goddard, Extension Family and Child Development specialist, Auburn University, for the Alabama Cooperative Extension Service. It was adapted for use in Tennessee by Kathleen Rodgers, former Assistant Professor, Family Life.*



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