

School Doesn't Have to Be a Drag: Ways to Encourage Your Children to Love Learning

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In school or not, humans are constantly learning. From the moment we are born until we draw our last breaths, we are always engaged in a process of observing, adapting, and evaluating information and our surroundings. But sometimes, after kids enter school, they can become disenchanted with the idea of learning, especially as they begin to associate learning with school. For some children, the educational system exposes them to experiences that are less than exciting, especially for those who struggle to succeed on par with their peers, or even to socialize.

By the time many kids enter middle school, some begin to disengage. These children may be passed from one grade to the next but they flounder and become disinterested in their classes. And by freshman year of high school, they are suddenly pressured to work towards earning credits to graduate. It's no wonder why many students simply stop

showing up midway through high school, never earning the chance to walk proudly at commencement.

As a parent, you may be wondering how to prevent your child from following a similar path as they grow older and school becomes less about play, and more about hard work. Fortunately, there are many ways to get your child motivated, and to be happier at school. Let's discuss steps parents can take to make school enjoyable, while fostering their love for lifelong learning at home.

How to Love School and Studying

While there is no one way to make your child love school, there are steps parents can take to ensure that it is as positive an experience as possible. First and foremost, parents should strive to help children feel cared for and supported, in both good and challenging times. To do this, try the following tips:

- Be curious: talk to kids about school every day

Children are naturally inquisitive creatures, and they tend to ask a lot of questions! But as adults, it's easy to forget this innate curiosity as parents get bogged down with their own work and responsibilities. Take a page from your child's book and tap your inner curiosity when it comes to their day at school. Ask kids about it on the ride home from school, or at the dinner table. Don't just ask if it was "good" or "bad"! Rather, avoid asking yes or no questions to encourage your child to open up about his or her day.

For instance, ask a question like: "tell me about something fun you did at school today"? Also try a question such as: "what did you find tough about today"? You may be surprised what your child has to say! Questions like these force children to think deeply about their experiences, instead of simply answering yes or no. As a parent, you may also find that it helps to identify any potential issues, as well as reveal successes to praise. Be curious and attuned to your kids' education, including each and every school day.

- Identify learning styles

You might already be aware that everyone learns in their own unique way. Some of us learn best when offered visual representations, while others crave hands-on learning. In fact, there are at least four different types of learning styles including:

- Visual learners, or students who benefit from graphic depiction of concepts
- Auditory learners, or those who are most successful by listening or hearing information

- Reading/writing learners, who depend on text to learn
- Kinesthetic learners, who need tactile hands-on learning to internalize information

To help your child succeed when working independently at school, home in on their unique blend of learning styles, and find which works the best, while identifying the styles that fit the least. Once it is known which of the above learning styles best represents your little learner, use it to their advantage during homework or study sessions. Teach kids to learn how to use their learning style to grasp new concepts, and how they can use that style to their advantage at school when possible. For example, if your child is a reading/writing learner who is struggling with spelling tests, encourage her to create flash cards to study. For many concepts, auditory learners benefit from listening to rhymes or songs to memorize information.

- Nurture special interests

In school, kids are often exposed to a large swath of information, without being able to study specific topics in much depth before moving on to the next skill or concept. While this may seem discouraging for kids, instead teach them that school can serve as a springboard to exploring their interests further at home. Send children to school with a mission: to isolate the subjects and topics that they want to learn more about. They can then bring that information home with them to begin side projects or hobbies. When kids understand that school is just the starting place for learning, they can see it in a more positive light, becoming exciting to further their learning even outside of school!

- Teach children to see learning as a process and not about the product... or test!

In our nation, children begin taking standardized tests from a very young age. In many states, these high stakes tests start as early as the third grade! To make things even more complicated, many schools switch over from a standards-based grading system that is used in the early childhood years to a A-F grade-based system at around the second or third grade, as well. This shifts student's perspective of learning from one that is about discovery, to one that is more about earning points, letter grades, and passing scores.

This switch tends to have a detrimental effect on the learning process because students become more concerned about the product- a project, essay, or test- instead of the journey they took to study for or produce it. At this point, many kids simply lose interest in school because of the pressure involved, or the lack of discovery learning. To avoid this, teach children that learning is a process that they engage in, and help them resist the urge to worry about or stress over their grades and test scores.

- Normalize failure—and show kids how to learn from it!

For kids and adults alike, failure never feels good! Sometimes we struggle no matter how much we want to succeed, or how many hours we put in trying to master a skill. Even so, failure is a completely normal, and necessary component of success, because we learn from our mistakes! Help your child to have a happy day at school no matter what they are struggling with; reinforce the idea that failure need not be feared but is just another step towards learning. Help them to embrace their challenges so they can tackle and conquer them in no time!



Activating a Lifelong Love for Learning Starts at Home

Many of the most influential ways to stay happy at school starts at home. Believe it or not, parents model their own beliefs about learning and school in their interactions with their kids and family members at home. These perceptions come to light when parents are helping children with homework, or even by talking with family members and about their opinion of the school, homework, and teachers.

Try the following to help your child remain positive about school and learning:

- Lead by example- read and show off your own love for learning!

It's understandable that busy parents may not always have the time to sit down and enjoy a good book, or research something that interests them. However, this also models to children that these activities are not prioritized or important. That's why it's so important to model the type of learner you wish your child to be. Don't be afraid to let your kid catch you reading a book. In fact, set aside a time, perhaps before bed, to read, just as was the routine when the children were younger. Take turns reading to each other, or simply lay next to your child reading your book as he reads his. Do this regularly to show children that reading and learning matters and is enjoyable; after all, our actions speak louder than the words we speak.

- Create a consistent, predictable homework routine

Kids thrive under a structured routine where their day and/or evening is predictable. Moreover, when parents make a set homework time, it sends a signal that lets children know that it is important and a priority. While most students don't love completing homework, having a consistent time set aside to complete it takes away from the chaos or stress they may feel if they return to school unprepared the next day. Lessen the stress with a solid routine to make the following morning run smoothly and begin on a positive note!

- Don't give up homemade experiments and learning experiences!

As mentioned above, school is merely a starting point for learning! Continue nurturing your child's curiosity and enthusiasm for the subjects/topics she loves the best by continuing to learn at home using homemade science experiments, or by traveling to museums or landmarks. Foster a sense of continued learning through your actions and activities at home! Teach your children to be happy in school and to form a deep, lifelong love for learning using the advice found above, and don't forget to model your own love of learning, too!

