

Early Years are Priceless

We all have a small window of time where we can build good education at home. It begins in infancy. Brain studies show that children's ability to learn depends largely on their experiences in the first years of life. In short, the more you talk and read to your children, the better they can learn.

Read to your children every day. Check out children's books from the public library, the ELP library, and buy books at yard sales and thrift shops. Spend less time watching TV and more time reading. Avoid putting TV sets in your children's bedrooms. Many TV programs contain adult content and violence, and watching TV can become a hard habit to break once children are old enough to have homework.

Limit time with computer games. There is no reason to introduce the computer to your child before the age of five. How many of us were computer literate before the age of five and we all know how to operate one now. There is plenty of time to teach those skills after other, more important life skills have begun developing. There are absolutely no social skills being developed through the use of the computer. Time is too short during these early years, so please use it wisely.

Talk with your children. Talk about what you're doing – diapering, eating, bathing, all the ordinary things you do every day. Talking to babies stimulates their brain connections. As children listen and respond, they learn words. More talk means children learn more words, and more words means children can think faster and better.

Respond to your children. Crying is the only way a baby can communicate at first. Respond with tenderness and care. Your responses help the baby build trust and feel secure.

Look into your baby's eyes, listen to the coos and babbles, repeat them, and encourage more talk.

"Children should be seen and not heard" is an old notion and adhering to it can actually harm your child's ability to learn.

As your child gets older, encourage questions. If you don't know the answers, look for them together. Invite your child to share feelings and opinions. This teaches children they have a right to be heard and that what they think and feel is important.

Give encouragement. Everything a child does starting at birth is about learning. Grasping objects, sleeping, rolling over, crawling, and walking are a child's way of exploring the world.

Get involved in the child's activity. Show delight and joy as your child learns to do new things. Provide a safe and orderly place to eat, sleep, and play.

Demand proper behavior. Teach rules of behavior by setting the example. Children imitate what you do. If you yell and hit, they will too. Set rules and explain the reasons for them.

Teach children to be responsible for their actions. Demand honesty and concern for others. Set routines for eating, sleeping, chores, and play so children know what to expect. Have high expectations: Say that you expect children to do well in school, go to college, and get a good job.

Remember, think long term. Training today gives long term success.