



Advice for Parents

**Helping your child succeed
in school—and life**

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What Kids Can Do

What Kids Can Do, Inc. (WKCD) is a national not-for-profit organization founded in 2001 for the purpose of making public the voices and views of adolescents. On its website (www.whatkidscando.org), WKCD documents young people's lives, learning, and work, and their partnerships with adults both in and out of school. WKCD also collaborates with students around the country on books, curricula, and research to expand current views of what constitutes challenging learning and achievement.

Our books *Fires in the Mind: What Kids Can Tell Us About Motivation and Mastery* by WKCD's senior writer Kathleen Cushman (Jossey-Bass, 2010) and *What We Can't Tell You: Teens Talk to the Adults in Their Lives* by Kathleen Cushman (Next Generation Press, 2005) are the source of many of the student voices, ideas, and exercises in this handbook. The student quotes that appear at the top of each section are from our Just Listen video series. (We have also gathered ideas and tips from articles and "experts" available through Internet and credit these sources where we can.)

MetLife Foundation

MetLife Foundation is committed to building a secure future for individuals and communities worldwide, through a focus on empowering older adults, preparing young people and building livable communities. In education, it seeks to strengthen public schools through effective teaching and collaborative leadership, and to prepare students for access to and success in higher education, particularly during the crucial first year. The Foundation's grantmaking is informed by findings from the annual *MetLife Survey of the American Teacher*. More information is available at www.metlife.org.

How to use this guide

This guide is best used, we believe, as part of an organized outreach to parents that engages them in discussion and learning about how they can help their children do their best, in school and beyond. The target audience is parents of students in grades 7 to 9, though we certainly can imagine this handbook being used in the older high school years. By "parents," we mean all adults who are deeply committed to nurturing the children under their care.

A note to parents

For more than ten years, What Kids Can Do (WKCD) has gathered the voices and stories of middle and high school age students nationwide. These youth have told us about their desire to do well in school, go to college, improve their community. They want to raise a loving family, right the wrongs they see around them, and much more.

When asked what gives them hope, so many of these youth point to a parent (and to mothers most of all) as their rock and inspiration.

“Everybody needs one person in their life who thinks they’re great, no matter what,” Alice, then 16, told us years ago.

We have confidence that you care deeply about your child’s success, in school and beyond. We’re sure that your life is a workout, often exhausting. We know that you have little time to read a booklet like this, let alone put the ideas into practice. We realize that the suggestions we offer are not simple.

Still, we hope you’ll give these tips a good look. We believe you’ll find it worth the investment.

Thank you!

Barbara Cervone, Ed.D., President of What Kids Can Do

P.S. We use the word “parent” loosely. You could be a guardian, a grandparent, an aunt or uncle — we’re speaking to all adults who care for children with all they’ve got.

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Introduction

Parents are a child's first teachers. The habits that we help our children form will last a lifetime, shaping their success in school, at work, and in the community.

But which are the most important of the many skills they will need? And how can families help children practice those things, with everything else they have to do?

This short guide, we believe, has some fresh answers.

"Monitor your child's homework" typically tops the advice for parents. It sounds simple, but it's not. Getting homework "done," we have learned, requires more than mastering math facts or punctuation. It requires organizing what has to be done, sticking to a task, and managing time. It requires listening and asking questions when teachers assign the work. Parents can help their children develop these skills, all agree.

The advice continues: "Make sure your child has enough sleep, a nutritious diet, and exercise." We try to do that, even though it's hard as children grow older. We care about our children's health, in and out of school.

But good study habits and hygiene aren't enough to get ahead. The experts say young people must develop "character strengths," too. Educators often call this "social emotional learning": the skills that don't show up on standardized tests.

Our children need to learn self-control and how to manage stress. They need to be able to learn from failure. The more curious and resourceful our children are, the better. They need self-confidence—the belief that they can succeed in spite of obstacles.



The habits that start in childhood last a lifetime—from academic smarts to persistence.

Starting points

Our potential is not fixed at birth

“Maria is a quick learner.” “Sean is poor at math.” “Aravis is well organized.” “TJ is lazy like his brother.” We speak of these traits as if they were fixed at birth. But scientists who study the brain and how we learn have reached a different conclusion. In fact, all of us can grow strong and meet challenges if we work hard and stick with it. Inborn talent and predispositions (like laziness or shyness) are just the starting point.

Effective practice makes the difference

What is the secret to developing our abilities, no matter what level we start at? Not surprisingly, the answer lies in practice. Getting good at a particular sport, we all know, takes hours of practice. Ditto for playing a musical instrument—or cooking or dancing or public speaking. Developing the skills to succeed in school, work, and life is no different: it takes practice, one step at a time.

How we practice makes all the difference in learning to do something well, the scientists also say. This handbook, we hope, shows you how to help your children practice in ways that get results.

Habits, like abilities, are also developed through practice

Managing stress. Developing self-control. Keeping at it. Being curious and resourceful. Feeling self-confident. Getting a handle in these areas—like keeping anger under wrap—challenges all of us, regardless of our age. The latest research suggests that these social and emotional skills are as important as academic skills in laying the foundation for student success—and can be taught and learned. As a parent, you can help your child develop both strong abilities and lasting habits.

Success builds on success

The more your children achieve, the more they will want to achieve. You are setting up a circle: when your children work hard and get good results, they’ll want to work harder still.



Abilities are not fixed at birth—they can be developed through dedication and hard work.

Homework

“Sometimes I slack in school. I mean, I’m a teenager. That’s what we do, but I try to keep my grades at a steady pace, try to pass, try to do all my work. And, uh, that’s usually what I do. Sometimes I slack. I sleep in class sometimes. I mean, it happens, but I try not to do it as often as possible. I try to stay on top of my work so I don’t fall behind.” - Kenneth

Homework can feel like a heavy burden to kids, at the end of a long day of effort.

But doing well at school will actually bring them pleasure. Their most important step is believing that they can do well, with practice. They need to hear that message from you, again and again.

Without this commitment, homework is one of the first places many kids fall behind.

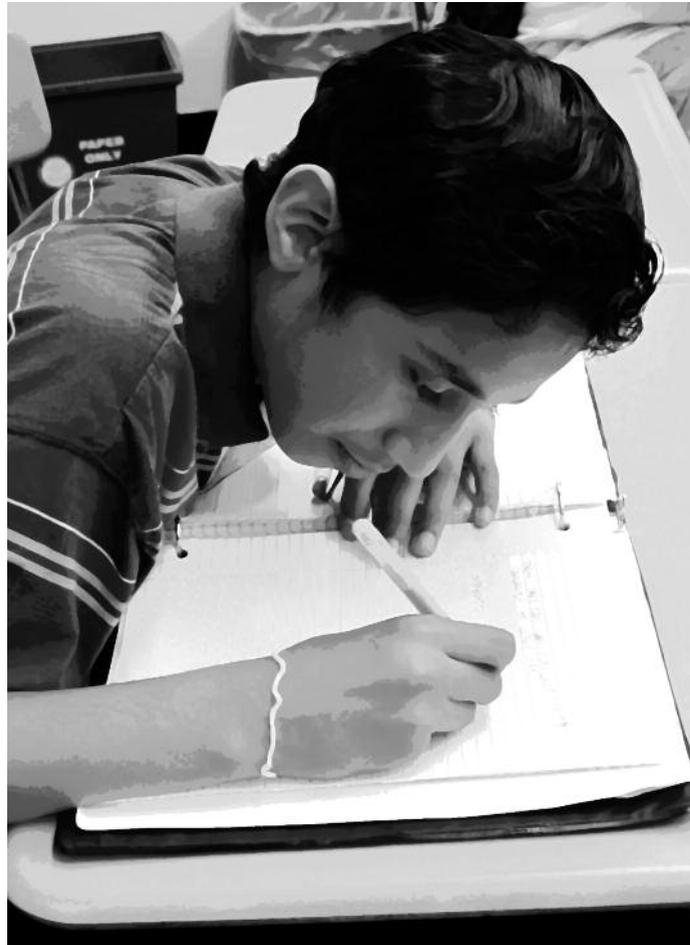
Too much of the homework that schools assign is “busy work.” Rarely is it tailored to individual students, providing specific practice in what each one needs to know and be able to do at that point. Schools can do a lot to make homework less boring and more productive.

Your challenge as a parent is to help your child get the most out of homework, even when it’s boring.

You can begin your training as a homework “coach” by quietly observing how your child completes assignments. Notice how they are spending their time— are they getting up and down, working hard, daydreaming?

You can reward progress, even when it’s small. Ask your child to set a weekly goal—for example, turning in all that week’s assignments on time. Let the child suggest a way to celebrate success. With homework, as with most things, incentives work better than punishment.

If nothing you do seems to help, schedule a meeting with one or more of your child’s teachers and see what they suggest.



Your child can do well in school—and practice helps. Homework gives kids that practice, along with confidence.

Homework tips

YOUR GOAL: To help your child develop good homework habits.

To get the most out of homework, kids need practice communicating with their teacher. You can help them learn to

- Let the teacher know they want to do well
- Ask questions if the assignment is unclear
- Tell the teacher how long a homework task took
- Tell the teacher what was difficult about a homework task
- Tell the teacher when personal circumstances affect homework completion

Homework takes organization. You can help your child learn to

- Keep a “homework notebook” with all assignments and deadlines
- Make a quiet space and time for homework
- Gather materials needed for the homework task
- Get completed homework back to school

Homework also requires focus and persistence. You can help your child

- Commit to getting the homework done
- Give up distractions during homework time
- Problem-solve what gets in the way
- Do first the homework
- Get up and take a short break when frustrated

Homework demands time management. You can help your child learn to

- Prioritize homework tasks by importance and deadline
- Set reasonable time limits for homework
- Balance homework with chores, athletics, and family commitments

NOTES TO YOURSELF: _____

When kids put their minds to homework, they are also learning habits that will help them in college and beyond.

“Deliberate practice”

Ideally, homework should be what scientists call “deliberate practice.” It should target the individual areas of need and push each student to a new place just within reach. Ten to twenty minutes of deliberate practice, experts say, can be worth an hour of aimless practice.

But students tell us it rarely works that way. For example:

- Deliberate practice always **has an express purpose**, but students say they usually don’t know the point of most homework assignments.
- Deliberate practice is **geared to the individual**, but typically everyone gets the same homework tasks, no matter what they need to work on.
- Deliberate practice **involves attention and focus**, but kids say they usually do their homework without thinking.
- Deliberate practice **requires repetition or rehearsal**, but often kids say that they are repeating something just to get it over with, not to perfect and remember it.
- Timing is important** in deliberate practice, yet homework often takes more time than kids have for it.
- Finally, although deliberate practice **should lead to new skills**, students say they don’t use it for anything after it’s done.

What would it take to turn homework into the kind of practice that would help students strengthen their skills and knowledge in academic subjects?

Perhaps the most powerful steps in that direction would occur when teachers, parents, and students think of homework as “getting good” at something—much like practice in athletics or the arts.

NOTES TO YOURSELF: _____

Effective practice focuses on what the child needs most.

Managing stress

“Through writing I learned a lot about myself . . . it’s a really good coping skill to let go of stress. Dealing with stress with my mom and my brother . . . I just really opened up and thought, ‘Wow. I was wrong on this aspect, and this is why my mother made this decision.’ Or, ‘This is why my brother got in an argument with me.’ I opened up so much more. Like I don’t know how to explain it. It’s crazy . . . how closed-minded I was at a certain amount of time. And I just thought, ‘Oh, I’m always gonna think this way. This is just how it is.’ But it’s not always that way, because there’s so much more than just your perception of things.” - Elijah

It may seem strange to find “managing stress” high on our list for how parents can help children do their best. But according to a recent survey, 43 percent of 13- to 14-year-olds say they feel stressed every single day. By ages 15 to 17, the number rises to 59 percent (American Psychological Association, *Stress in America Findings*, 2010).

In today’s world, none of us can escape stress, whether we are adults or children. The challenge is to manage it.

We experience stress when we perceive a situation as dangerous, difficult, or painful and we do not have the resources to cope. Our minds and bodies gear up to “fight” or “flee”: our heart and breathing speed up, more blood flows to the muscles in our arms and legs. In short bursts, this chemical reaction can be helpful, even save our lives. Yet over time, it drains the body and can leave us on edge, tired, angry, or depressed.

New research shows a direct link between student stress (measured by chemical levels in the body) and school performance. Chronic stress harms students’ ability to think clearly and control their emotions.

When stress closes us down, we lose our ability to think straight. When the stress lifts, it feels like our minds open up.



Chronic stress harms our ability to reason clearly and manage our emotions. It sets kids up for failure.

Tips for managing stress

Stress may be causing a serious problem if a young person . . .

- Has lost interest in things he or she once enjoyed
- Doesn't sleep or eat well
- Wants to be alone and avoids friends and family
- Daydreams and doesn't want to do things
- Experiences a sudden drop off in their grades
- Grieves for an abnormally long time after a death
- Feels guilty or not worth anything
- Shows extreme anger and/or sadness and overreacts to many things
- Worries constantly about appearance and/or physical problems
- Gets frequent headaches and stomachaches
- Cannot make decisions or concentrate well
- Turns to drugs or alcohol
- Eats (or diets) way too much
- Exercises obsessively
- Takes extreme risks

YOUR GOALS: To recognize when and why children feel stress and to help your child learn how to manage it.

What raises stress in kids?

- School demands and frustrations
- Negative feelings and thoughts about themselves
- Changes in their bodies
- Problems with friends or peers at school
- Problems in the family or chronic illness
- Financial strains
- Unsafe living environment or neighborhood
- Death of a family member, relative, or close friend
- Moving or changing schools
- Taking on too much or having too high expectations

The same switch that turns on the stress response can also turn it off. As soon as we decide that a situation is no longer threatening, changes occur in our minds and bodies to help us calm down.

We can't eliminate stress, and a little of it can even be good. But we need to know when it becomes too much.

You can help your children in these ways

- ✓ Monitor, as best you can, their health, behavior, thoughts, or feelings.
- ✓ Watch for overloading. Ask how they're doing (don't lecture) and listen hard to what they say.
- ✓ Learn and model stress management skills yourself.
- ✓ Point your child — in reasonable amounts — to mood-boosting activities like sports, music and art, volunteer opportunities.

These strategies help kids reduce their stress

- ✓ Exercise and eat regularly.
- ✓ Avoid excess caffeine (and soda with caffeine), illegal drugs, alcohol, tobacco.
- ✓ Learn relaxation exercises (such as abdominal breathing).
- ✓ Build a circle of friends who can provide positive support.
- ✓ Rehearse situations that cause stress and practice positive responses.
- ✓ Break a large task into smaller, more attainable tasks.
- ✓ Turn negative "self-talk" into positive. Negative: "I can't do this." Positive: "I'll do the best I can."
- ✓ Learn to feel okay about doing a "good enough" job — don't insist on perfection, from yourself or others.
- ✓ Take a stress break! Listen to music, talk to a friend, read, stretch.

Source: American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry

ABDOMINAL BREATHING

Step 1: Straighten the front of the body. You may sit up, or lie down facing up. Relax any tension that you may feel at the moment: belly, shoulders, jaw, and face.

Step 2: Bring the awareness to your breath and notice if you are naturally breathing into your belly, or your chest, or both. Don't control it. Just observe.

Step 3: Deliberately draw the air into the bottom of your lungs on the inhale. Let the abdomen expand and extend out. Then, on the exhale, let the abdominal pressure release and, with minimal effort, slowly pull the belly in. The chest remains still the whole time. You may place your hand on the belly to feel the rhythmic movement of the abdomen.

Practice the abdominal breath as often as you like, whenever and wherever you like. Try it in a stressful situation. In just a few abdominal breaths, you'll feel a significant difference.

Source: www.yogalifestylecoach.com

The key to stress reduction is identifying strategies that work for you.

Self-control

"I started becoming an upright citizen when I reached high school. That's when I started getting the most—I wouldn't say praise, but that's when I started getting the most confidence. Like, 'Michecarly, oh my God you've changed.' 'Oh my God you're so behaved.' Like, the whole high school year, I've never been to the principal's office—unless I'm visiting the principal, telling my principal 'What's up? How's your son?' I don't know how to phrase it. It's something within myself. I was just, like, I have to change because this is gonna be for myself. I just want my kids to be like, 'Yo, my dad is the best.'" - Michecarly

Managing anger is an important part of self-control. Angry kids need to learn to stop themselves before they harm themselves or others.

Just as important is being able to put off an immediate reward in order to gain a better reward later. Experts call this "delayed gratification."

Have you ever heard of the marshmallow test? Here's how it works: Tell kids they can either have one marshmallow now—or they can wait and have two in 15 minutes. According to a famous study, young children's ability to wait (or not) says a lot about how well they'll do in school, with friends, and with family. Waiting for that extra marshmallow can even predict their success as adults—in work and relationships.

Is your child the "I want the marshmallow now!" type? You can help. All children can learn ways to improve their self-discipline skills. But remember: the part of the brain that controls everything from reasoning to emotions takes a long time to develop. You'll start seeing positive changes in adolescence, but those skills don't fully develop until your children reach their early 20s.

Self-control also involves self-awareness: the ability to notice what you're feeling and thinking, and why.

Learning self-control often grows out of conflict. The next time you find yourself in an argument with your child, remember that it's a perfect teaching moment.



All children can learn ways to regulate their own behavior.

Tips for developing self-control

YOUR GOAL: To help your child learn to think long-term, control anger, and become more self-aware.

Help your child think long-term

The experts call this “delayed gratification”: the ability to put off an immediate reward in order to gain a better reward later. Help your child see what’s gained by waiting or working hard for the better reward.

Lay out expectations

Some kids react poorly when they don’t know what to expect in a situation—or what will be expected of them. Fill them in ahead of time: “This Sunday I need you to watch your sister until one o’clock. After that, you’re free.”

The 4 WHATS

When something goes wrong and negative emotions fill your child, try this exercise. Ask: “What did you do?” “What happened when you did that?” “What could you have done instead?” “What would have happened if you had done that?” Listen closely, show you understand, and hold back judgment.

Model self-control

This demands real commitment from a parent, but it’s worth it. If your children see you exercising self-control, they are more likely to do it themselves. Can’t find your wallet and now you’re late? Take a breath and ask out loud where you left it last.

Take a break

When children seem out of control, encourage them to take a break. A snack, a walk around the block, shooting hoops, closing one’s eyes and breathing deeply—changing the scene like this can work wonders. Sometimes all it takes is a brief distraction.

Reinforce the positive

Let your children know when you see them demonstrate self-control (for example, turning down loud music when you ask). Help them think of themselves as people who can successfully control their behavior. You might say: “I know you wanted to go out. But look, you finished practicing and found a way to see your friends tomorrow.”

NOTES TO YOURSELF

One of the best ways to teach your child self-control is to model it yourself.

Motivation and challenge

“Right now it’s fourth quarter and we have a class to help us come up with a proposal for our senior project. In one hour I figured out what I wanted to do, what I wanted it be about, how I’m gonna do it, what form it’s gonna be in—and it’s not just gonna be a paper! It’s gonna be like a 3D pop-up book and it’s gonna be about art and architecture and all the places I’ve lived in. And like I was just going on. I was writing down all my ideas. I was talking about it. And then I was late to my next class. I was like, ‘Um . . . the hour didn’t . . . it’s not up yet!’” - Arielle

In WKCD’s research called the Practice Project, we invited students to look into what motivates them. How do they pick a skill or activity they want to master? What makes them keep working at it, even when it’s hard?

Few students said they had started their chosen activity because they had “natural talent.”

Instead, they picked up something because they valued it somehow. Maybe it looked like fun or they wanted to be with others who were doing it. Maybe someone gave them a chance or encouraged them to try it. All those reasons can give kids a reason to care.

Students also said that the activity needed to be within their grasp—the *right amount* of challenge. If it was too easy, it got boring. If it was too hard, it got discouraging.

Our student researchers learned that motivation comes from those two conditions:

- When people **value** what they’re trying to master *and*
- When they **believe** there’s a reasonable chance they will succeed.

That combination is what makes all of us want to start something and want to keep at it when it gets hard. Scientists who study learning have reached the same conclusion.



We feel motivated when we value what we’re trying to learn . . . and when we believe we can succeed if we try.

Tips for motivation and challenge

An Exercise

Ask your child to pick something he or she enjoys doing and wants to get better at. What got them interested? Talk together about the answers.

It looked like fun

- It seemed like something you could probably do
- It involved people you wanted to be with
- Success didn't all depend on you
- No one would be judging you, so the stakes were low
- You wanted to do something you'd never done before.

Someone supported and encouraged you from the start

- They broke it down into steps
- They did it with you
- They praised your small successes
- They showed you how to do better

The activity had an audience that mattered to you

- At work or school
- Among friends or family
- In a public place

You had a personal interest in getting good at it

- To express yourself
- To grown into who you want to be
- To feel the pleasure of mastering new challenges

How would you rate your confidence that if you practice hard, you'll succeed at the activity you named? Pick a number from 1 to 5, with 1 "not at all confident" and 5 "fully confident."

You can't "make" your children motivated. But you can help them to find interests and take on new challenges.

Keeping at it

“Last year, I had a lot of challenges coming, since I came halfway through the first quarter. I really didn’t care. . . . I fell into the hole, my life hole, and I really couldn’t get out of it. And then towards the end of the year when I was failing all my classes they had this program, I think it was called Club 10—every day after school until 5 o’clock you have to stay after and work. And it was like this big challenge for me because it wasn’t just one class, it was most of my classes, so having to do all that work every day and having to stay after with teachers and redo essays and trying to get myself out of staying back and trying to get out of summer school. . . . I felt like I gave it my all, and passing most of my classes and flunking just one is the biggest challenge I overcame.” - Carla

Persistence means that you keep going, even when it’s hard and you feel like quitting. Completing a long and tough project for school. Becoming better at a favorite sport or musical instrument. Learning how to cool down when you feel like exploding. Sticking with a challenge when it’s a stretch to meet it. Progress in these areas often means a half step backward for every step forward.

It takes persistence.

Practice is part of persistence. No one likes doing the same thing over and over again until you get it right.

But if you practice with a clear goal, with focus, and with encouraging feedback, you’ll see results.

And when you see results, you’ll probably keep at it!

Making mistakes — failing — is an important part of learning. Of course, that doesn’t make failing any easier. Our children are growing up in a society that pressures them to be perfect, and we may reinforce this expectation at home. The opposite is true, too: our society writes off too many kids as failures without ever giving them the opportunity to develop their abilities. We call that the “opportunity gap.”

Despite the opportunity gap, defeat is often only a temporary condition. Giving up is what makes it permanent.



Help your child practice with purpose. Shorter periods of focused practice help more than longer practice without focus.

Tips for keeping at it

Praise more, correct less

Praise your children when they tackle something difficult! But remember to praise their *effort*, not their *talent*. Focusing on talent actually makes kids less likely to persist when challenged. But praising children for effort makes them want to work harder.

Point out that it's worth the trouble

Help your children notice the positives that are coming from their learning. When they accomplish a next step, ask them how it makes them feel. Imagine, together, what it would be like if they didn't persist, if they gave up.

Lay down the law, selectively

"I like when my mother gets in my business when it comes to college, because I'm a slacker," Carmen told us. "There's certain deadlines that need to be met, and so she stays on top of that. The other stuff, it's my business, but the college stuff, she's good."

FORMING THE PERSISTENCE HABIT

- **Measure yourself.** Figure out how long you can work effectively. Measure how long it takes before you slow down or give up.
- **Do an extra 20 percent.** When you feel like quitting, go an extra 20 percent. If you've been working hard for an hour and a half and want to stop, try another 30 minutes before taking a break.
- **Run a burnout day.** Try working longer for one day, following it with a shorter day. By stretching your focus for longer periods once in a while, you can boost your persistence for normal days.

FORMING THE FOCUS HABIT

- **Timebox.** Give yourself 60 minutes to work on a particular task, without resting or engaging in any distractions.
- **Accelerate.** It can take anywhere from 10 to 30 minutes to build up a concentrated focus. Give yourself time to accelerate into a focused state.
- **Cut distractions.** Practice the habit of turning off all outside noise: phones, television, chatting with family or friends.

FORMING THE 'DO IT NOW' HABIT

- **Do it now for 30 days.** For the next 30 days, define periods of your day you want to devote to work or personal projects. During those times, remind yourself to "do it now" whenever you feel the urge to procrastinate.

Source: www.lifehack.org

Part of "keeping at it" is learning from mistakes—figuring out what you'll do differently next time.

Curiosity and resourcefulness

"Last quarter I took a module class about fueling the car of tomorrow. It's basically 'cause New York taxis wanna go green 'cause we're running out of oil. It really didn't interest me at the beginning 'cause I didn't care about cars. But once we started to learn that mostly everything we use uses oil and we're at some time gonna run out, I got interested. What fuel was better and what fuel's gonna work and how's the economy gonna be affected and how's everybody else gonna be affected? When I first entered, I just saw it is as, 'Oh. I'm learning about cars.' But it was a really good course and I enjoyed it. I've talked about it with my father because he's into cars, and he was kind of in shock that I knew what I was talking about, 'cause he never saw me as a car type of person. But now he sees and he's like, 'Okay. You outsmarted me, but okay.'" - Amanda

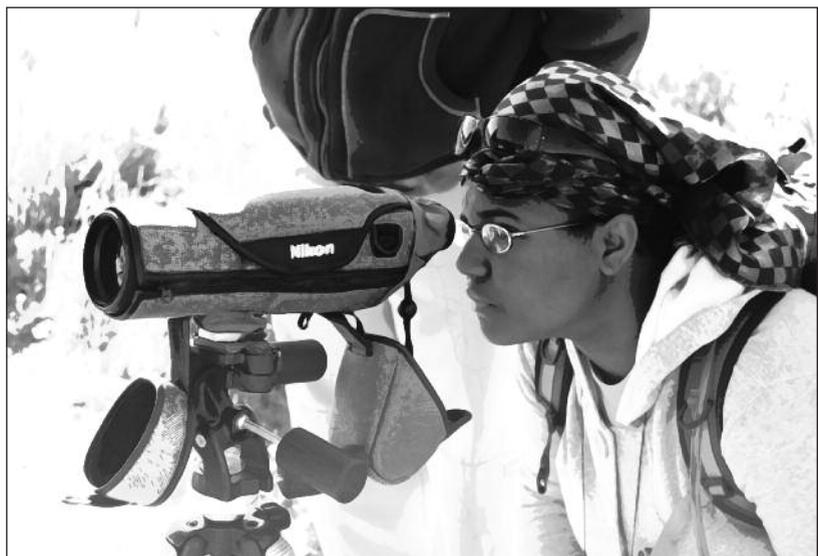
We are born curious and we are meant to stay that way. Some experts say that curiosity is even more important than intelligence, when it is combined with motivation to learn. Why is curiosity so important to your children's development?

■ **It makes the mind active instead of passive.** Curious people ask questions and seek answers. Like a muscle, the mind becomes stronger with use — so mental exercise builds brain power.

■ **It prepares the mind for new ideas.** When you are curious about something, your mind expects and anticipates new ideas related to it. Without curiosity, how many great ideas might pass unnoticed?

■ **It opens up new worlds.** Curiosity helps you see possibilities that often hide below the surface. The lives of curious people are rarely boring — new things are always drawing their attention.

■ **Resourcefulness goes hand in hand with curiosity.** Resourceful people deal well with new or difficult situations. They can find information on their own and make do with what they have. As a parent, you encourage resourcefulness when you avoid the instinct to rescue your child, to "do for them" or second-guess their efforts.



Encourage your child to explore the world, ask questions, and think, "What if . . .?"

Tips for developing curiosity— in yourself and your child

Keep an open mind

Be open to learning, unlearning, and relearning. Don't take things for granted.

YOUR GOAL: To help your child develop an open mind and become more self-reliant.

Ask lots of questions

What, why, when, who, where, and how? Curious people use these words all the time.

Forget "boring"

When you label something "boring," you close the door on learning more about it.

See learning as fun

If you think of learning as something fun, you will naturally want to dig deeper.

Dip your toe in other worlds

Head to a neighborhood where the people, food, and street life are different. Read a book about growing up in another country. Watch television programs like National Geographic.

Source: www.lifehack.org

Tips for developing resourcefulness

Teach everyday skills

For kids who often take a parent's place, knowing everyday skills comes with the territory. But for families that don't count so much on their children's contributions, household tasks (like doing laundry or grocery shopping) make ideal ways to teach how to be self-reliant and resourceful.

Help your child practice gathering information

Many children are experts in Facebook and YouTube, but far fewer know how to search the Internet effectively or which sources to trust for reliable information. If your child's school hasn't taught these skills, make it your assignment. Begin by going online and entering, "best Internet search tips."

Encourage problem-solving

- ✓ Is there another way to get what I want?
- ✓ Is the desired result really the best result?
- ✓ Who has information that might help me?
- ✓ What is one more thing I can try?

Encourage your child to be self-reliant and resourceful—to seek out information, to problem-solve.

Self-confidence

"I think parents are like your number one go-to person. I feel like my mom or my stepdad are like the people that I trust more than anything. I feel like I have that role where they're there for you always. They help you get through life and teach you until you go off on your own. They play everything a teacher, a parent, a friend." - Carla

We all want our children to have self-confidence—the belief that they have what it takes to succeed, to deal with and overcome what holds them back.

Some children seem born more confident than others. "I never give much thought to whether I'll make it," fourteen-year-old Luke says. "I just always assume I will." Ernest, on the other hand, says he usually expects to fail. "They tell me I need more confidence."

How do you build your children's confidence when they need more?

If you've read through this handbook and tried out some of the suggestions, you're already on the way.

You've begun to help your children gain the confidence to try new things, tolerate failure, keep at it, get results, and feel satisfied.

We'll just add one more thing to our advice. **Be the biggest and steadiest fan of your child's efforts.**

"I admire my mom the most," says Amadeo, "because even though she didn't go that far in school, she always has my back. She always encourages me. When I don't feel like I want to do my work or I don't know why I'm in school, she's always there to support me and tell me to do better than what she did because she wasn't able to get the education that I'm able to get right now."



Be the biggest and steadiest fan of your child's efforts.

Tips for building self-confidence

YOUR GOAL: To show that you believe in your child — by praising effort, every time.

Attend your child's events

"I can hear my mama no matter what race I'm doing — if it's a 400 or an 800 [meter], she yells the whole time. And I can hear her, and only her, the whole time — she's literally the loudest person in the whole place. It really helps out." - Carmela

Spend time with your child

"For every birthday or special occasion that came up, my mom would take me to a play. Like we saw 'Phantom of the Opera,' 'Rent,' 'Beauty and the Beast,' and a whole bunch of stuff like that. And that's just our time that we spend with each other. When she's away from my father and my brother, she's like a whole different person, so it's easier to get along with her." - Patricia

Make small gestures that show you care

"I like it when they cook a full meal after a long day at school. See, I like to eat, I'm a growing girl!" - Andrea

"It's not always the material things that teenagers want, it's the affection." - Shannon

Be generous with your praise

"I miss that praise I used to get: 'Oh my gosh, you can tie your shoe!'" - Liliana

"Parents can't keep us from making mistakes. But when we don't make a mistake or we do something well, give us a little pat on the back." - Justine

Let kids know you're a permanent part of their lives

"I know if I was ever in trouble they would always be there for me. I know they will eventually forgive me. They can't hate me for the rest of my life!" - Shannon

"My mom always says, 'I'm going to be your parent forever. You're stuck with me.'" - Justine

"When they tell me that they love me — when they actually tell me that, you know — it's so reassuring to me. When they defend me and are willing to literally give their life for me. If someone were going to shoot me, my dad is willing to get in front of them. He told me that once, and it made me glad." - Moses

Source: *What We Can't Tell You: Teenagers Talk to the Adults in Their Lives*, by Kathleen Cushman (Next Generation Press, 2005)

We all want our children to have self-confidence—the belief that they have what it takes to succeed.



**“Am I the best in the world?
No. The question is:
Am I the best I can be?”**

– Edward James Olmos, actor