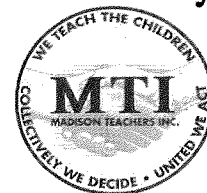


Shaping *your child's* Success

Funded by



A monthly column to supercharge families for educational success

Listen to your child

When your child is talking to you, give them time to make connections to what they have learned or what they are interested in. Even though it takes time, this allows them to express themselves.

As you talk with your child, pay attention to what they like to talk about. If they keep telling you, "I like this . . ." or if they ask "Can we go to . . . some time?" this is a sign of an interest. If you are not listening to and valuing what is being said, you will miss those signs. You can also ask your child "is this something you like?" The answer will be a clear indication of their interest.

Travel with your child

Traveling is a great way to expose children to new cultures, people and ideas, and can help them identify their interests. If money is an obstacle, help your child experience these things through books. The world has exploded with wonderful stories and beautiful pictures in books that feature African American writers and subjects.

Khadir Nelson is a wonderful illustrator in many children's books that I have in my classroom. There is almost no experience written without African Americans as role models. You can ask your child "what kind of books would you like to read?" If you can't afford to buy books, go to the library and do a search for that subject, or ask the librarian to help you find books on that topic. Provide your child with a lot of books – five books aren't enough. Make a weekly trip to the library. That in itself is a good experience.

You can use television as a resource for your child. However, instead of using it just for entertainment, turn to certain channels, like PBS or the travel channel if you have cable, and watch educational programming. With the right television programming, you don't have to spend a fortune on a vacation to expose your child to different places.

When a child says, "Read it again!" that is a definite clue that they are interested in the message behind the story. As you start to

notice certain books your child likes to read, you can build on the experiences in the book. For instance, if your child likes *Green Eggs and Ham*, by Dr. Seuss, you can do some things to let them experience the book themselves. You could buy some green food coloring, which is not expensive, and make green eggs for them to eat one day. Then talk about experiments, change, visual judgments versus reality.

You can also make an original book with your child, as a way to build creativity and to see how they write about their own interests.

Nurturing your child's strengths

Interview with Stephanie Bernard, 1st grade teacher, Midvale Elementary School

Shaping Success column funded by Madison Teachers Inc.

Connect your child's strengths to learning

When you read books like Marie Bradby's, *More Than Anything Else*, about Booker T. Washington, ask your child, "do you see how much he wanted to learn? Do you see how his desire for education helped him become excellent?" When you read books about successful people, focus on how they had to develop their skill. They had to practice their skill a lot, even though they had natural talent. Stress that talents have to be nurtured. Talk about the value of education. At a very young age, tell your child that you expect them to go to college. Plant the seed early.

Parents should purposefully make a big deal about any talent their child possesses. Tell them what you notice and connect their skill to a future career. For example, if your child is often the first to help someone who is hurt, tell her "you are very caring and quick to respond to someone who is hurt. Those are skills that nurses, doctors, fire fighters and teachers have. You would make a great doctor or nurse or firefighter or teacher."

When you are driving around town and see important educational sites like MATC, Edgewood or UW-Madison, talk about it with your kids. Talk about the learning that happens in certain buildings. When you pass Engineering Hall, tell her "This is the engineering building. You can go here to learn about how to build bridges."

Let children help others

If you notice that your child has a specific academic strength, encourage them to use it to help others. Families can support this by directing sisters, brothers or even cousins to help each other. Tell them "you are the science expert. You know a lot about that topic. Please help your cousin." This will help build confidence because it values what they know and makes them feel powerful about what they can do to help others. Build the expectation that siblings and friends can share with each other by telling your child "share with them and let them help you."

Develop natural talents

Create opportunities for your child to practice their talents. If they like to sing, put them in a choir, either at church, in the school or in the community. If they like to take things apart, get them involved in activities at the fabulous Wisconsin Institute of Discovery, the Children's Museum, the African American Ethnic Academy science camp or after-school programs at neighborhood centers. Get them involved in activities that strengthen their talents. They are dependent on you to open up opportunities for them. If you can't afford lessons, try to find scholarships or discounted lessons. Don't be afraid to ask.

Show them that you believe in them

Most importantly, affirm your child's strengths and talents with a kind word. Show them that you believe in them. It can be as simple as "that was good thinking." Or "I like how you did that. You're really good at that." You can find activities and programs in the community to strengthen their talents or further develop their interests.