



## Back to School

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How can it be time to go back to school already? Summer flew by. Kids would choose another six months of summer. So would we ...

Or would we? Many parents and kids are ready to pull on a sweater, have a schedule, see friends they haven't connected with over the summer, and get back at it.

The "it" for our children and youth is school and studying. The "it" for parents might be engendering a lifelong love of learning. Outstanding schools and excellent teachers will have impact on this, but it is parents who set the tone, model a love of learning, and invite all children to see themselves as competent learners. Where do we begin?

First, let's remove some of the obstacles. What gets in the way of loving learning?

For some, it is because they learn in a different way than the teacher usually teaches. We all learn by what we see, what we hear, and/or what we experience with our whole body. Most have a preference for visual, auditory or kinesthetic learning. Most teachers teach the way they prefer to learn. They are not trying to keep your child from learning. From observation, trial and error, parents often know how their child learns. Trust what you know and have observed and intuit. Share that with the child's teacher. Virtually all teachers will vary the learning activities to accommodate all of their students.

Some children deal with a learning disability. Parents may be the first to know because we closely and frequently observe the child. One of my children is colorblind. Teachers didn't pick up on it, but I saw the same colors mixed up on kindergarten assignments, week after week, and wondered out loud with our pediatrician. Sure enough. And sometimes parents are the last to know, concerned that our child not get labeled, left behind, or teased. Now we know that all children can learn, and early diagnosis of learning disabilities helps children get the support and modifications that help them to love learning, be competent, and achieve. The alternative is that they fall behind and feel that they aren't bright enough to learn. Educators know so much about how to support all of our children to learn.

Some children appear not even to try or they are brutally hard on themselves, engaging in negative and defeating self-talk. These are our perfectionists, who get stuck, because they want everything to be perfect, polished and accomplished. They need us to affirm effort and improvement and predict that they will soon learn to do it well.

Education need not become a deadly serious, forced march, with treats and negative comparisons to siblings and other kids. We need to encourage our children, give them courage to try new and hard things.

Instill a love of learning by making it a joyful thing. Model a love of learning. Share delight in something new we have learned. Create a place that is well lighted and quiet for studying. (Yes, I know they'll soon fill it with media noise!) Make opportunities for kids to pursue an interest or passion. Let them slow down, explore lots of things, and be curious. Make education a priority. Celebrate learning, not just grades.

When children struggle, celebrate effort, hard work, improvement, and little accomplishments. Remind them of past successes, accomplishments, and mastery. Share with them times you have been challenged.

In the end, we will help our children to be all God has created them to be. That is what we are called as parents to do. Here are some ways to enjoy it:

### FAMILY ACTIVITIES

1. Have a teaching-fest. Begin by asking, "What is one thing you'd like to teach another person?" and have them teach it!
2. Learn something new together – a game, a song, a dance, an art form, a story, a joke.
3. Light tea light candles, one for each teacher who shaped you. Thank God for the teachers in your lives.
4. Decorate the refrigerator, bulletin board or scrapbook to highlight family learning and accomplishments.
5. Before school begins, bless the backpacks, asking God to be especially present with the one who carries it, with their learning and their friendships.