

## CULTIVATING AN ENVIRONMENT OF EXPLORATION AND CURIOSITY

Parents are their children's first and most important teachers. The atmosphere or culture of the home give them the best opportunity to fan the flames of interest and learning. The elementary age child has an insatiable curiosity and there are often not enough hours at school, or even in the day to explore and learn about all of the things they are curious to know. That's o.k. sometimes the wondering and guessing and coming up with the many possible answers is more beneficial for brain development than simply finding an answer quickly. We want to encourage those questions as well as the ability to find the answers, which naturally lead to more questions.

Below is a list of recommendations for you to help feed your child's growing imagination and curiosity. Some are things to have on hand, others are things you can do or avoid doing. Your guide can also share observations with you about your particular child and things that they may enjoy as well. This is a starting point, the options, along with their questions, are unlimited.

An atlas and a globe. - Look up places regularly that are mentioned. If your child asks about a place, show them how to look up where it is, read further to include capital cities, or interesting features, such a mountain ranges. Ask questions you may have aloud such as "I wonder what kind of products they make, or crops they grow, or food they eat etc... if you child has any interest follow this up.

Dictionaries - Have a physical dictionary appropriate for your child's reading level as well as an adult dictionary for you to assist with looking up words that are not in the children's version. Don't hesitate to use vocabulary that your child might not know yet. Encourage the exploration of words. When your child asks what a word means, don't just give the meaning, - rather say "Let's look that up." Until they have built up good dictionary skills - you look the word up as they look on, talking aloud as you go ("Well that starts with a T, the second letter is e which comes after d, third letter.....")

Encyclopedia - Have an age appropriate set of encyclopedias available as a tool for your child to explore their interests. Show them how to look up things they are curious about. Second hand sets are usually available at reduced cost. Using the internet as a research tool is valuable for older children. At this age it important to encourage them to learn to use books as powerful tools for learning.

A thesaurus - As they get better at writing, they will need to be shown how to make their writing more interesting, by using synonyms. It is always a great help for poetry writing. Again it is helpful for them to see you using this to make your writing better.

Field guides - Have some good guides at home to look up and identify things found in nature, such as birds, butterflies, tree, amphibians, etc...

A calendar - Fill in or help your child fill in their schedule and activities as well as holidays and special occasions or events. Refer to the calendar regularly. Ask questions such as: "what is the date today? How many weeks until vacation? How many days until Grandpa's birthday? What day of the week is your birthday on this year? If we are going to the park on the 12<sup>th</sup>, how many days until we go?

Analogue clocks. Telling time and time management is obviously an important and necessary skill. Yes we give lessons in class but real life applications and practice are absolutely key to mastering this. (Try to avoid digital clocks or cover them up until your child has learned how to tell time on an analogue clock.) Helping to build time skills is a very easy thing to incorporate in everyday activities. You automatically use these skills constantly an easy way to start with your child is to simply verbalize what you do. For example when you check the clock to see how much time you have, talk you way through what you are doing..... “We need to be at school at 8:00, it takes 15 minutes so we need to leave at 7:45.” The next level is asking your child to tell you the time. Then move on to asking questions such as If we need to leave at 7:45 and it is 7:30 how many minutes do we have to get ready? With a little effort you can easily work this into your life and your child will become quite good at it quickly. For managing time, begin by recognizing how long certain tasks take. Ask your child to help you figure out how much time a task takes by timing it. Keep track of it for a while and for older children get an average time. (third years have had simple averaging – not necessarily decimal fractions so round off to the nearest whole minute) increasing an awareness of how long things take is the first step in learning to manage time effectively.

Letters - An address book, lined writing paper, envelopes, and stamps. Encourage writing thank you notes, birthday cards and letters to friends and family.

Supplies - A box or drawer organized with supplies such as scissors, glue, pencils, colored pencils, sharpeners, rulers, a variety of papers etc...

Art and Craft Supplies - Have an organized space to keep these and a place to work on projects. Following their current interest.

Money - A box or jar of coins to practice counting and adding money and learning how to make change. See list of ways to help your child with these basic skills. As they understand the value of United States currency introduce money from foreign places and trips it will spark a new interest, or a book about how money is made.

Flash cards - Keep on hand some or make your own. Also have some other creative ways to practice math facts. Variety is what the elementary child craves.

Games - Don't underestimate the benefit from games that require concentration, memory, logic and strategy. Chess is one of the very best, but there are also many card games and even board games that are helpful.

Library card - Regular trips to the library for good fiction and to find books to follow interests are a must! Your child should have their own library card. Write the due dates of books on their calendar. Help them learn to check when things are due and return them on time to avoid late fees.

Trips to a museum - Make regular trips to museums and other places of interest around town.

Live performances - Explore local opportunities for plays and music performed live

Cooking – Cooking with your children not only gives them skills they need, it is a wonderful opportunity to introduce food from other cultures, taste new things, and even learn about the science behind what baking soda does, or salt, or yeast etc...

Gardening – Having even a small planter can give your child the opportunity to grow vegetables, or flowers of their choosing. It teaches responsibility of caring for something and provides tangible rewards.

Prepare a place for homework – Include a comfortable well lit reading chair or sofa in an area **free from distractions** and a table and chair for writing, art work or projects.

Tell stories – Children of this age love to hear stories of your childhood and experiences. Make sure these stories include times you struggled as well as your successes.

Introduce related things - Suggest things related to what they talk about – If they come home interested in China – find some books with stories that take place in China, or cook some Chinese food, look up geographical features, pictures in travel books, kinds of housing, clothing, spiritual practices, music, etc....

Model a life-long passion for learning- Your children are watching and listening even when you think they are not. When you read something interesting or discover something new tell them. “Guess what I just learned?” Take up a new hobby or practice to get better at something. They will see that you are still learning, and exploring and practicing to improve your skills.

Make mistakes – Don’t hide your mistakes, make them in front of them and show them how to deal with fixing an error, learning from trying, failing and trying again.

### **Things to avoid**

Quizzing – Explore with your child by asking questions like “I wonder what the capital of Uganda is?” Feeling like you are being asked to perform or are expected to know can change something from a fun and exciting discovery, to pressure to impress and please a parent.

Knowing all the answers – When children ask you questions most of the time it is best to say “Let’s find out.” And look up an answer together. Your child already thinks you are wonderful and know everything. Let them see that they can also find out for themselves, and learn how to answer their own questions, by seeing how you find the answers. By all means, when you don’t know share that you are not sure or forgot, this will make them feel much more comfortable when they don’t know something. It also shows them a positive model of finding out what they want to learn.