

The Four Foundations of Lifelong Learning



Preparing Your Little Ones
for School

by Anne Elliott



The Four Foundations of Lifelong Learning: Preparing Your Little Ones for School

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“Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them”
(Matthew 7:12).

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Getting Ready for School

Chapter 1

How long do you have until your children are old enough to go to school? Are they ready? You probably already realize that you have an enormous task ahead of you. Maybe you've visited your local library, and have read many "how-to" and "don't-do-this" books for parents. You've been surfing the Internet, signing up for newsletters to arrive by E-mail, and chatting on various message boards.

My husband and I have been there! We decided to homeschool when our oldest son was just a tiny baby. My husband was studying secondary education in college, and we enjoyed discussing educational philosophy on weekends. (I know, we aren't the most interesting people, are we?) We were new and excited parents, bursting with studies and statistics. We learned about the benefits of homeschooling, and we couldn't wait until our son turned five and we could begin!



That's when we began checking out stacks of library books and researching our options on the Internet. We visited a homeschooling convention and met other homeschooling parents. We began developing a unique family philosophy of education. We began to set goals for teaching our children.

Our choice to homeschool may be different than the educational route your family is taking. However, if you're like us, you've begun to realize that homeschooling is a lifestyle, a way of living in which learning takes place at any time and at all times. We discovered that "school" wasn't something that would start in September after our oldest son turned five. Rather, we needed to be teaching him a million and one things right away! "School" would simply be a continuation of everything we should already be doing with him.

So what should we be teaching him *before* he turned five? What skills did he need to master so that learning would be enjoyable and effective when his formal schooling began? And in our case, how could we ensure that we would be successful teaching our own son? How would we even define "success"?

"These words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates."
Deuteronomy 6:4-9

Whether accomplished at home or in a traditional school setting, we discovered that learning requires several key abilities.

First, a child must have the ability to pay attention. I first noticed this when I volunteered in my church's nursery. I watched as an adult spoke to one small girl. She willingly turned her head upward and looked the adult in the eyes. On the other hand, I noticed a toddler boy who had the amazing ability to tune out all adult voices, whenever and however long he chose.

My husband noticed that high school students in the classroom were often unable to follow directions, simply because they couldn't remember more than one or two commands at a time. The students chose to only pay attention to the most interesting stimuli at the moment. In other



words, if a subject or teacher was “boring,” the students chose to pay attention to a friend or to daydream instead.

Learning to pay attention is a skill that must be planted and cultivated when a child is young. But if a child can focus his attention on whatever he is learning, he will be able to absorb much more about the topic.

Another ability children need to learn is curiosity and a love for learning. Most children seem to be born with this desire. A baby will spend an hour maneuvering across the living room floor so that she can see what the shiny object on the other side is. The trouble comes when the baby’s curiosity leads her places that are dangerous or inappropriate for her.

So yet another ability is needed: the ability to live peaceably within boundaries. We all want our children to have a healthy desire to learn, a strong urge to discover *why*. Yet, if our children do not also learn to exist within boundaries that others have set, they will begin to rebel against their parent’s or teacher’s authority, crossing boundaries and getting into trouble.

But what about the child who has a healthy curiosity, tempered with self-control? This child must have the ability to remember what he is taught. His memory must be exercised and expanded so that it can fit yet more information into it. We’ve all heard about elderly people who could recite large portions of the Bible. How could they do it? By continuously exercising and using their minds.

Exercising... working... reciting... learning is starting to sound like hard work! Yes, it can be, even though each of us parents wants to make learning fun and exciting. No matter how many hands-on projects or field trips we participate in, sometimes the process of education requires the discipline to sit still and *work*. Therefore, the ability to do hard work without complaining or procrastinating is an essential skill our children need.

This also means there will be times when the homeschooling teacher-mother, like her classroom counterpart, must give commands to her student-children. She must give assignments, drill them on their multiplication facts, and require them to do extracurricular projects. Therefore, it is essential that children learn to respect and obey their teacher, even when they don’t feel like it.

Of course, while parents must prepare their children for school by teaching them these essential life skills, parents also have an obligation to keep some basic educational premises in mind. First, each child is unique and will have his or her own learning style. Even when the child’s learning style is the opposite of how the teacher learns, Mom and Dad must figure



out how to bridge those differences and effectively communicate to their little one.

Parents must also take into account the mental maturity of their child. Our oldest son didn't catch on to reading until he was seven, yet our daughter began to read when she was five. Our next son began to show an interest in sounding out words when he was three, yet our next daughter was still not speaking during her third year. If parents become too caught up in measuring and analyzing their children, comparing them to a neighbor's or relative's child or to a curriculum company's "standard", they may begin to pressure their children unnecessarily. God made each child unique, and we have to be willing to be patient with them.

In addition, each child has special interests. One of our boys loves to build indoors with Legos, while his brother is riding his bike outside. One daughter loves to cuddle with our animals, while her sister cries if the dog licks her too much. The wise parent will pay attention to the interests of her children and tailor their lessons accordingly.

With so many facets involved in parenting, not to mention schooling, how can a parent ever begin to prepare her children for school? The task seems overwhelming!

Don't worry! Many parents have walked this road ahead of us, and they offer us advice and reassurance. All of the things you need to teach your children can be grouped into four categories that, once mastered, will guide your child toward successful learning the rest of his life. Basically, you must be sure to provide an orderly home environment where learning can thrive, teach your children the essential qualities of respect for others, develop their attention-span skills as they grow, and be a good parental example to them.

We'll spend the rest of this book showing you specific ways to foster each of the essential skills your children will need. As you see your child blossom from his or her earliest days, you'll feel much more confident about school.

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