

Early education - every day

The frantic pace never lets up it seems. Multi-tasking is a way of life for every parent. The young children in our lives cannot be put on hold, however, and the gift of time and attention is precious and essential. How can you fit it all in?

Many parents, even those who are not working outside the home, often feel conflicted about the time spent with their children. Are we doing the right thing? How much teaching can we do and how? Do outside activities add up to a better prepared and "ready" to learn child?

The moment-to-moment, day-to-day contact with your baby and growing child does make a difference. The love and caring that we feel when we hold our new baby begins the secure bonding relationship and the responsibility to that child. Every interaction builds the architecture of your child's brain. Every touch and conversation contributes to the development of your child's self-confidence and independence. All of these many moments can be both pleasant and rewarding for you and your child.

Here is a series of interactions between a parent and child that captures the importance of these interactions:

It is a warm and bright October afternoon. Mom and three-year-old Abby need to pick up some basics for dinner, but also want to be outside so they decide to walk to the store. As they march down the street on the sidewalk the pumpkins on doorsteps grab their attention. "One Orange. Two Orange"... One Orange" chants Abby. Quickly Mom begins to help Abby count the pumpkins on way down. On the way home they count the BIG and little. Abby wants to keep going around the block to find more. Mom has reinforced Abby's natural curiosity and interest in the new decorations on her street. Abby is a counter and an active learner. Mom knows her child and takes great joy in her daughter's enthusiasm. A daily chore becomes absorbing for both.

Taking notice and reinforcing comes as naturally to a parent as curiosity does to a child. Your child will clamor for your attention during every waking moment. Babies build language from the moment of birth. Infants engage caring adults with their gaze and soon with their smile. They coo and babble and learn turn taking in conversation within the first three months of life. Young children are born ready to learn and are born equipped to stimulate responses from those around them. This relation-

ship building is the cornerstone of learning.

Daily interactions can frame an alert and properly wired brain in your growing child. As parents you are your child's first teacher. Keep in mind the important developmental guidelines "ages and stages". It is important to also rely on your knowledge of your own child to guide you.

Here are some reminders for how to stimulate the fun: Learning while living!

■ **Talk to your young child.** Conversation begins very young. Children have responses, stories, word practice and sound utterances and each of these cues language development. Listen and encourage your child to keep the words coming

■ **Why, Why,** Why is not always about wanting to know the answer. Asking why keeps the conversation going and children want to listen and to be heard

■ **Read to your child.** Read with intention. Point out signs and words everywhere you go. Children learn what reading is FOR and ABOUT if it is part of all of your activities

■ **Write with your child.** Writing lists for the store or notes to each other. Making cards and messages to put on the board or the refrigerator. Let them write beside you and with you and for you.

■ **Run and move with your child.** Physical activity is sorely lacking in most of our lives. Walk or run whenever you can. Children learn early how to use their bodies to interact and to experience the environment. Moving is healthy.

■ **Rest with your child.** Holding is the greatest gift we can give one another. Children seek out physical contact all day long. Respect the request as holding builds comfort and security. Holding allows the brain to blossom and grow as it provides an environment free of stress.

This list could go on and on. Once we take a breath, enjoy the pause and feel the pleasure of positive interactions we can create a natural and personal learning curriculum right at home. Treasure the moments and put the worries to rest.

Information for this article was provided by Early Learning New Hampshire. The organization is committed to ensure that all New Hampshire children have the opportunity to reach their full potential by expanding access to affordable quality child care and early education, supporting the child care industry; building public-private partnerships; and helping families balance work and family. www.earlylearningnh.org