



Metro Lutheran
Positive Parenting
September 2008

LOVE LEARNING

It's September. To families with children living at home, it means one thing ... back to school.

For some kids, there is eager anticipation – calling friends they've missed over the summer, assembling school supplies, packing and repacking a school bag, and choosing an outfit to wear the first day of school.

These kids are easy to support. Join them in the process of getting ready. Delight with them. Be present. Affirm their effort, not just their results. Watch for the inevitable butterflies that appear for even the most self-confident child before they tackle the new school year. Listen. Empathize (without either minimizing or catastrophizing). Reassure. Let them know that you love them. Period. Not based on their performance.

But, for other kids, this is the time they dread. School is hard for them. They don't understand what is being asked of them. They've had a past experience of being ashamed or embarrassed. They are new to the school. They don't learn the same way other kids do. They don't have a close friend to share lunch, the bus ride, recess, or after school plans.

How can parents support these more hesitant learners? Point out the things they do really well. Remind them of all they have already learned. Tell a story about a past learning challenge that they mastered. Reassure them that you know they can tackle this year and do well. Promise your presence and support.

As a child, my son had anxiety about school and learned differently than many of his peers. I learned more about education from him than from all the graduate school education classes I ever took! Here are some of his lessons:

- Let it be summer, until it's not. (Don't start talking about the return to school in July – clothes, school supplies, activities. It's okay to do that planning, just not in your child's presence.)
- Remind your child of past successes, in school and outside school.
- Give opportunities outside of school to learn, explore interests, wonder, and master new things.
- Celebrate learning and effort, as well as achievement.
- Listen, listen, listen, especially to the hard stuff. Take it seriously.
- Use the word "courage" to describe what it takes for your child to tackle school. It does! Be proud of that.
- Write a letter introducing your child to the new teacher. Describe interests, competencies, anxiety about learning, coping mechanisms or behavior, how the child learns best, and what is supportive to your child. Meet the teacher(s), if possible.
- At home, be supportive of your child's learning, but don't make home into "the other school." Remember that your child needs time to play and recharge.

For all children as they get ready for school, affirm your unconditional love for them. Bless the child's backpack or book bag, reminding them that Jesus goes with them, wherever they are. Pray with and for them.

When your child gets home, listen, love, affirm, and celebrate another step as your child becoming a lifelong learner.

FAMILY ACTIVITIES

1. When you are together as a family (in the car, washing dishes, eating a meal, on a walk), share one thing each learned today.
2. Invite children to teach you something they know how to do.
3. Read aloud together every day.
4. When someone asks a question, don't settle for, "I don't know." Look it up ... on the internet, in an encyclopedia or book on the topic, go to the library, or call a friend or professional who might know.
5. Let your kids "catch you" being a lifelong learner. You'll make it contagious!