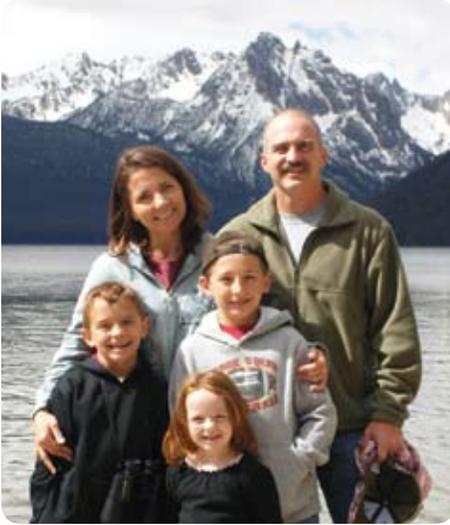


7 Essentials that Inspire Your Children to Learn



1. Be Excited About Learning

All children have role models, not the least of which are their parents!

Parents get to impart their knowledge, wisdom, values, and beliefs to their children. They get to influence their children's decisions, actions, and behaviors. If you've been a parent for very long, you know how awesome the responsibility of parenting is.

The first essential that will inspire your children to learn is for you to be excited about learning. If you're not excited, how can you expect your children to be excited?

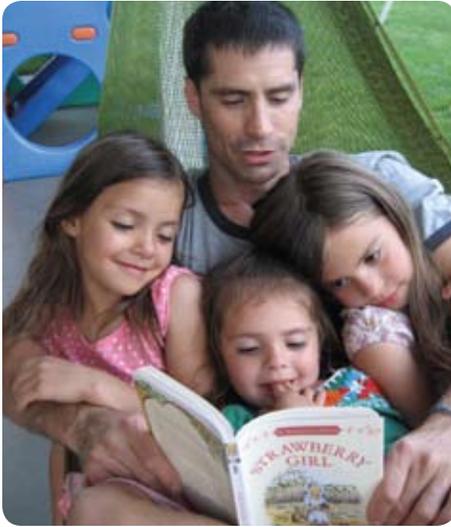
Your children look up to you. They watch your every move. They listen to every word you speak. (OK. Maybe not *every* word ... but they do listen more than you think.)

The point? How you act largely determines how your children will act.

If you're happy, chances are your children will be happy, too. If you read a lot, they'll want to read, too. If you're excited about learning, they'll be excited, too.

Do you see how this works?

Being excited about learning is the first essential that will inspire your children to learn. So if you're serious about raising knowledge-hungry kids, get excited!



2. Read Books Aloud to Your Children

It's no secret that parents have gotten busier in the last 50 years. And given all their obligations, it's no wonder that so many don't make time to read books aloud to their children.

But children, by and large, haven't changed. They still love to hear a good story, especially one that's read to them by their parents.

Didn't you love it when your mom or dad read a book to you? Can you remember how much you looked forward to those special times?

Guess what? Your children will love those times, too.

So start today. Pick up a book that your children will really enjoy. And read it to them.

At first, your children may act like they don't want you to read to them, especially if you've never read to them before. Just give them time, though. It won't be long before they literally beg you to read to them!



3. Let Your Children be Themselves

When you read to your children, you'll find they behave very differently from each other. One wants to snuggle right up next to you so she can see the pictures. Another one wants to play with his Legos on the floor. And yet another wants to sit upside-down with his head dangling off the couch and his legs resting against the cushion back.

In a scenario like the one above, it's natural to think that the only one listening to you read is the one sitting right next to you ... but that's simply not true.

Each one of your kids has a different style of learning. One may learn primarily through visual means. Another through auditory means. And a third through kinesthetic (motion-oriented) means.

Because of these learning differences, it's important to allow your children to be themselves ... to let them learn the way they learn best, even if it seems like they're not listening.

Of course, there should be a few rules. For instance, your children should be quiet, except when asking questions about the story you're reading. And they should be polite.

But outside of these rules, you should give them freedom for their personalities. It really does work!



4. Encourage Your Children to Pursue What Interests Them

Just like you, your children have unique interests that motivate and excite them. And one of the best ways to inspire them to learn is to encourage them to pursue their interests.

Your children will get excited about learning if you encourage them to pursue those things they actually *want* to learn.

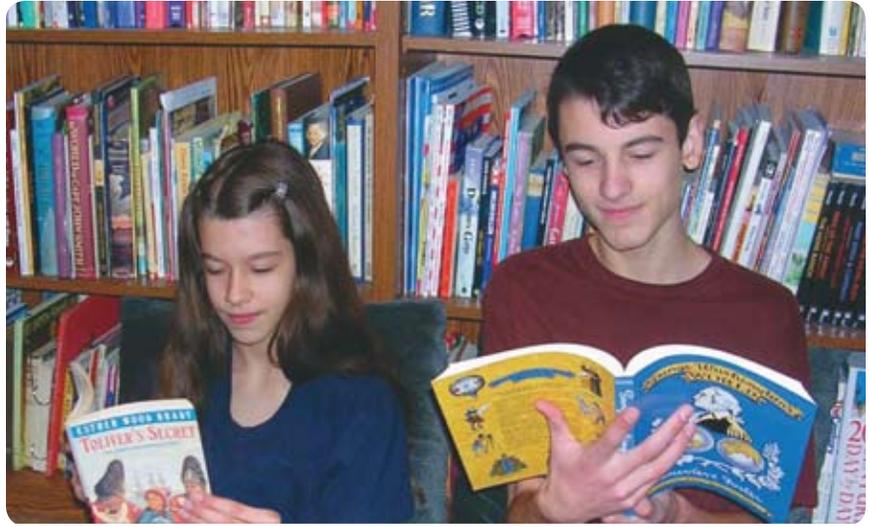
If it's electricity, encourage him to learn about electricity. If it's airplanes, encourage him to learn about airplanes. If it's acting, encourage him to learn about acting.

And if you want to go the extra mile, consider learning with your child. Model for him how he should go about learning.

Maybe you grab the encyclopedia, look up the topic of interest, and read the article with him. Or maybe you search for his topic of interest on the internet. Or maybe you go to the library together and look for related books and educational videos.

To really inspire your children to learn, you need to get them excited about learning. Then, and only then, will they develop a lifelong love for learning, so they'll keep learning whether you're with them or not.

So in the spirit of action, consider this question: What are your children interested in? How will you help them pursue those interests?



5. Take Frequent Trips to the Library

While it's important that you encourage your children's interests, it's just as important to give your children the resources they need to pursue their interests.

That's where the library comes in.

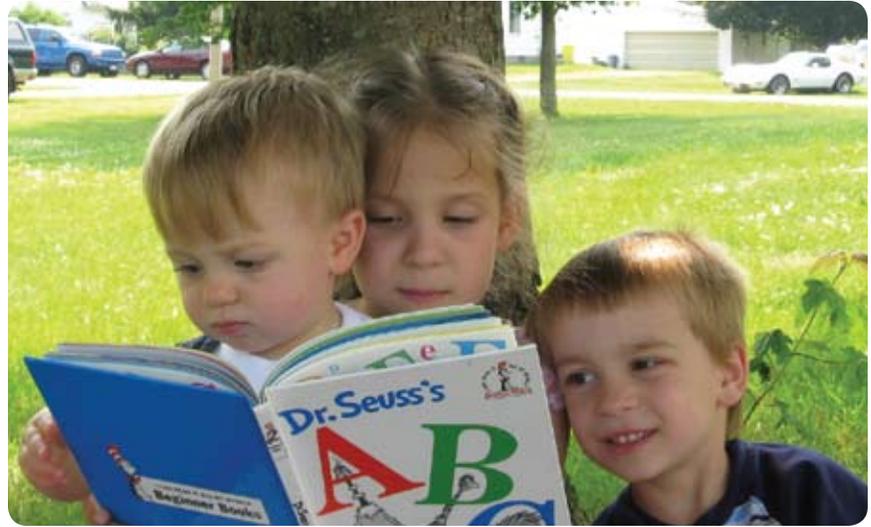
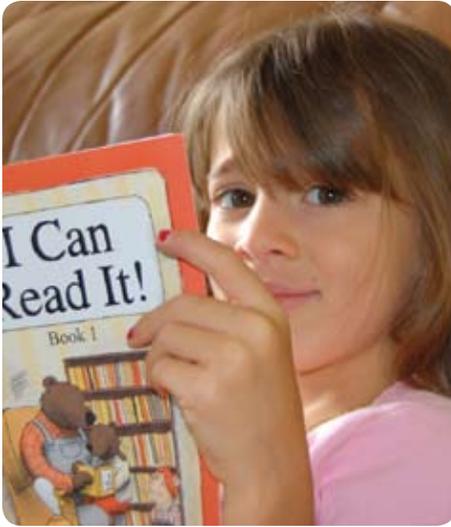
Obviously, libraries are one of the best sources of books. But did you know that most libraries also house a large number of periodicals and videos? Or that most libraries offer free internet access?

Between the books, periodicals, video, and internet, the library gives your children all the tools they'll need to dig deeper into the things that interest them most.

Here's another benefit of taking frequent trips to the library: your children will discover all kinds of new interests, simply by browsing!

The curiosity of children is insatiable. So take advantage of it. Cut them loose in a library and just watch how excited they get as they become interested in a whole bunch of new and different things.

What are you waiting for? Pack up your kids and get going!



6. Give Your Children Books that are Easy to Read

Yes. You did read that right. Give your children books that are easy to read.

This sixth essential is highly counter-intuitive given most parents' desire to see their kids excel. They think they need to challenge their children ... to give them books to read that are “difficult” and “challenging.”

But while this seems logical on the surface, it's actually highly counterproductive – *if* your children haven't yet developed a strong love of learning.

If your children love to learn, they'll put forth the effort to get through difficult and challenging books. But if they don't love to learn, then you're only throwing water on a weak flame.

People (children included) don't like to do things they do poorly because it makes them feel inadequate. On the other hand, people love to do things they do well because it makes them feel capable.

That's why it's so important to give your children books that are just a step or two below their current reading levels. If you've chosen good books, your children will not only enjoy the stories they're reading; they'll also feel good about their reading abilities, which will inspire them to read more.

The idea of giving your children books that are easy to read is similar to how you feed an infant: first you give a baby milk. Only much later, after the infant has grown teeth and developed the ability to chew, do you give a baby meat and potatoes.



7. Use the “Unit Study” Approach to Learning

A unit study is an in-depth study in which you examine every dimension of a particular topic.

For instance, if you did a unit study on mountains, you'd study how mountains were made. You'd also learn about mountain wildlife, alpine recreation, areas major mountain ranges are located, and various mountain climates. You'd read books set in the mountains: maybe *Mountain Born* by Elizabeth Yates or *Daughter of the Mountains* by Louise Rankin. Rather than memorizing lists of names, places, and dates, unit study learning becomes a vivid experience. Children actually retain more using a unit study approach because they have the context in which to place all the facts. And they have stories surrounding the facts that make them more memorable.

So the question for you is, “How do I use a unit study approach with my children?”

Talk to your children and find out what interests them. Then watch for newspaper articles, activities, and books that relate to what they're learning and approach the topic from different angles. Think about how you could reveal to them another facet of their study. In this way, you introduce new stories and information that create the context your children need to learn effectively.

Starting in Core 3, Sonlight's Core and Language Arts programs use a unit study approach by tying History, Readers, Read-Alouds, and Creative Writing assignments together. The Study Guides in our Core Instructor's Guides give parents opportunities to discuss and discover their students' interests. For older students, our Instructor's Guides provide web sites and movie suggestions for further study.

With the exception of Science, Sonlight doesn't incorporate lots of hands-on activities, but many students are so inspired by the books in Sonlight Curriculum that they come up with their own activities.

Karen K. wrote: “We recently read *Titanic: Lost and Found* and after my two sons finished their watermelon at lunch, they used the rinds as ‘boats’ to re-enact the rescue of the Titanic survivors. ‘Here comes the Carpathia to rescue the lifeboats!’ they said.”

If you enjoyed these “7 Essentials” and would like access to more learning ideas for your children, take advantage of a free 30-day trial of the Sonlight Forums. You'll find a helpful community of homeschoolers and Sonlight staff who understand the concerns and challenges parents face – people like you who care about their child's education. Just visit www.sonlight.com/forumtrial.html.