

**A**s a parent of three daughters and a grandparent of six granddaughters, I reflect with great satisfaction on their being successful in school, in their work, and in their life as marriage partners and parents. With hindsight, I know I made many mistakes along the way, but I've learned from the process. I hope this article will help parents understand and foster positive learning habits in their children—habits that will produce success in school, work, and life.

of life display certain characteristics or dispositions. I call them habits of mind. They are patterns of thinking and behaving in intelligent ways and are displayed when confronted with life's dilemmas and problems. We want our children to develop those habits that lead them to become lifelong learners, effective problem solvers and decision makers, able to communicate with a diverse population, and to understand how to live successfully in a rapidly changing, high-tech world.

Considerable research demonstrates that successful people in most any walk of life, suggest strategies for how you, as

## 1. PERSISTING

Most of the important things in the world have been accomplished by people who have kept on trying when there seemed to be no hope at all. Dale Carnegie

**P**ersistence contributes to success in solving problems. Efficient problem solvers persevere even when the solution to a problem or challenge is not readily apparent. They have learned, and can apply, a wide range of problem-solving strategies. Children often give up in despair when a task or the solution to a problem is not immediately known. You might hear them say, "I can't do this," or, "It's too hard," or, they just want to get the task over with as quickly as possible. They lack the ability to analyze a problem or to develop a system or strategy to accomplish their goal.

Children develop persistence by increasing their use of alternate strategies of problem solving. They collect evidence to indicate that their problem solving strategy is working, and if one strategy doesn't work, they know how to back up and try another. They realize that their strategy must be rejected and another employed. They have systematic methods of analyzing a problem, knowing ways to begin, and knowing what steps must be performed and what data need to be generated or collected.

Help your child by reminding him or her of previous successes with similar tasks or problems, that there are many strategies to try, and that they are effective thinkers and problem solvers. It is more helpful to learn three ways to solve one problem than to learn one way to solve three problems!

When you see examples of persistence by the characters in TV programs, motion pictures, or stories, call it to your child's attention and use the word, "persisting" as you discuss the behavior. Share with your child examples of how you persist to be successful in your work.

## 2. MANAGING IMPULSIVITY

The sign of intelligent people is their ability to control emotions by the application of reason. Marya Mannes

**S**uccessful people have a sense of deliberativeness. They know how to monitor their own impulses and resist jumping to conclusions. Often children blurt the first idea that comes to mind, shout out an answer, start to work without fully understanding directions, or make immediate value judgments about an idea—criticizing or praising it before considering its pros and cons. They may take the first suggestion given or accept the first idea that comes to mind rather than considering alternatives and consequences of several possible directions.

Help your children learn to manage their impulses by asking them to explain rules before beginning a task or game, talking over a plan for solving a problem, exploring alternative problem solving strategies, and considering consequences of actions before beginning.

## 3. LISTENING TO OTHERS WITH UNDERSTANDING AND EMPATHY

If there is any secret of success, it lies in the ability to get the other person's point of view and see things from his angle as well as from your own. Henry Ford

**S**uccessful people spend an immense amount of time and energy listening. They empathize with and strive to understand other people's points of view. Being able to paraphrase another person's ideas, detecting indicators of their feelings or emotions, accurately expressing another

Discuss with your child how thinking flexibly aids your success in your profession or career and describe how you handle situations when working with others who are not flexible.

#### 5. THINKING ABOUT THEIR THINKING (METACOGNITION)

I cannot always control what goes on outside. But I can always control what goes on inside. — Wayne Dyer

Successful people are aware of themselves— their own thoughts, actions, and values and their effects on others. They monitor their own thinking while they are working and modify their plans or actions as necessary. Often children are unaware of their own thinking while they are thinking. They seldom plan for, reflect on, or evaluate the quality of their on

## 8. APPLYING PAST KNOWLEDGE TO NEW SITUATIONS

ÒI want them to UNDERSTANDÉÓ

ÒIÕve never made a mistake. IÕve only  
learned from experience.Ó

Thomas A. Edison

**T**he ultimate purpose of learning is to profit from oneÕs experience. When successful people encounter problems or complex new challenges, one of the first things they ask themselves is ÒWhat do I already know about this?Ó ÒWhere have I encountered a problem like this before?Ó or ÒWhat strategies helped me in the past that I can apply to this new challenge?Ó Yet we find that while children can pass tests in school mathematics, for example, they often have difficulty deciding whether to buy six items for \$2.39 or seven for \$2.86 at the supermarket.

Too often children begin each new task as if it were being approached for the very first time. Parents are often dismayed when they invite their child to recall how they dealt with a similar challenge previously and the child doesnÕt remember. ItÕs as if they never heard of it before, even though they had the same type of task recently. It is as if each experience is a separate event that has no relationship to anything that came before or that comes afterward.

Children can be observed growing in this ability as they are heard to say, ÒThis reminds me of...Ó or ÒThis is just like the time when I...Ó They explain what they are doing now in making references to previous experiences. They call upon their store of knowledge and experience as sources of data to support theories to explain, or processes to respond to each new challenge.

When you observe your child using learnings from school to deal with opportunities, problems, or challenges at home, you know your child is applying new skills. For example, you may see increased interest in school, more planning in their use of time and finances, better organization of their room and their belongings, or the ability to use previously learned skills

immune, and oblivious to sensory stimuli.

You will observe your children using all their senses as they touch, smell, and listen to various objects in their environment. (You've most likely noticed how often young children try to put things in their mouth.) They will request a story or rhyme be read again and again. They will act out roles and be the thing: a father, a flatbed, or a fish. "Let me see, let me see," "I want to feel it," "Let me try it," "Let me hold it...", they will plead.

As they mature, you may observe them express many ways of thinking, producing, and solving problems by use of the senses: making observations, gathering data, experimenting, manipulating, scrutinizing, identifying variables, interviewing, visualizing, role playing, illustrating, or model building. Their expressions will use a range and variety of sensory words: "I FEEL like....." "It TOUCHES me." "I HEAR your idea." "It leaves a bad TASTE in my mouth." "Got the PICTURE?"

Help your children hone their powers of perception by engaging in such exercises as:

¥Sight:

our house? Why? Encourage your children to find and use alternate ways to present information or prepare project reports in school (for example, using art, music, video, or dance in addition to or even instead of written papers).

## 12. RESPONDING WITH WONDERMENT AND AWE

The most beautiful experience in the world is the experience of the mysterious.

Albert Einstein

Recently, a Dutch psychologist tried to figure out what separated chess masters and chess grandmasters. He subjected groups in each category to a battery of tests but found that the only difference was that grandmasters simply loved chess more. They had more passion and commitment to it. Passion may be the key to creativity. Stimulate your child's sense of awe and wonder with striking phenomena, intriguing situations, and jaw-dropping experiences. Surround them with beautiful scenes, technological marvels, and science fiction; let their imaginations take flight. Successful people find enjoyment, enthusiasm, and fascination in their work and world. Allow your children free range to explore whatever they are intrigued with— as long as they are experiencing the passion. Invite your children to share their interests— what electrifies and mystifies them. Create a safe home environment, where children feel free to share their fascination, their emotions and their exhilaration. Make it cool to be passionate about something. Share with your child your own fascinations. Allow them to see you enthralled and excited about a problem or discovery and compelled with your own work. You will want to see your children move not only from an "I CAN" attitude, but also towards an "I ENJOY" feeling. You will want them to request problems to solve, challenging projects in which to engage, and to seek creative challenges of their own on

which to work. Furthermore, you want them to work with increasing independence— without your help or intervention. Such statements as, "Don't tell me the answer, I can figure it out by myself," will indicate growing autonomy. We will see them willingly learning throughout a lifetime.

You may observe them communing with the world around them, reflecting on the changing formations of a cloud; being charmed by the opening of a bud; sensing the logical simplicity of mathematical order. They will find beauty in a sunset, intrigue in the geometrics of a spider web, and exhilaration in the iridescence of a hummingbird's wings. Their curiosity will become stronger as the problems they encounter become more complex. Their environment will attract their inquiry as their senses capture the rhythm, patterns, shapes, colors, and harmonies of the universe. They will display compassion toward other life forms as they are able to understand the need for protecting their environment; respecting the roles and values of other human beings; and perceiving the delicate worth, uniqueness, and relationships of everything and everyone they encounter. Wonderment, awesomeness, and passion: these are prerequisites for success.

## MODELING

Don't worry that children never listen to you; worry that they are always watching you.

Robert Fulghum

Imitation and emulation are the most basic forms of learning, and therefore parents realize the importance of their own display of these desirable dispositions in the presence of their children. Thus, in day-to-day family events when problems arise, your children must see you employing the same types of success-building behaviors.

## IN SUMMARY

This list of Habits of Success and the conditions that promote them are not meant to be complete.

There are many other habits such as displaying a sense of humor, thinking interdependently, and learning continuously.

As parents, we have great responsibility for instilling these dispositions or habits of mind in our children. We must teach them to value intelligent, creative, and rational action. To do so, however, we must provide the conditions that will nurture these habits. We must believe that ALL children can continue to grow in their ability to behave more intelligently. I believe that we must also have faith that all humans can become increasingly more gifted than they are presently capable of demonstrating! Finally, we must set an example by becoming models of these habits of success ourselves.

We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act but a habit. Aristotle

## RECOMMENDED READING

This article is drawn from the four-book series, *Habits of Mind*, by Arthur L. Costa and Bena Kallick, published in 2000 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (Alexandria, Virginia).

Dr. Arthur L. Costa is Professor Emeritus at California State University and Co-Founder of the Institute for Intelligent Behavior in El Dorado Hills, California. He is also a past president of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.