

ABCs of Being Smart... L is for Learning

Dr. Joanne Foster

This is the twelfth in a series of articles from A to Z. One might expect “*L is for Learning*” to be the likely headline for a list of L words about encouraging children’s abilities. However, let’s look at *load*—that is, what matters a little or a lot, and when to tread lightly or leap liberally.



Think “Lightly”

Labels – don’t emphasize them (“gifted” or other). And, it’s better to label programs rather than children. Try and look past any label and pay attention to the *child*, and the specific needs he might have in one or more areas.

Lean – children may be inclined to rely on their parents when difficulties arise. The extent of their dependence will differ at various age levels, and in relation to context and circumstance. Reliance is OK, to a point. Help children forge their own pathways toward resiliency and autonomy.

Lead – those pathways will be less onerous if you share the lead, providing it sometimes, and knowing when to relinquish it—as your child demonstrates that he can take responsibility for and by himself.

Layer – learning is not lickety-split. It’s a process that involves building on what one already knows, layer upon layer upon layer. This requires time and hard work.

Luck – sometimes things fall into place—like the right learning opportunity at just the right time, or the perfect constellation of factors that enables you to solve a tough problem. If luck isn’t on your side, then be proactive, reflective, and smart. (Don’t rely on a horse-shoe or a four leaf clover.)

Laurels and Lollipops – it’s not prudent to overload kids with accolades or indulge them with rewards. It’s far more productive to offer genuine praise for their efforts, when earned.

Lagniappe –a small gift or “something extra” that someone acquires every once in a while, often unexpectedly, and for good measure. It can be motivating, and like the 13th donut, it can be a treat.

Links – there are endless online learning possibilities and resources. Use them but do so prudently.

Lock-step – children don't develop in lock-step with one another. This is true even among those who seem very much alike. No two kids are the same—and thus parenting is neither predictable nor routine. Be prepared to deviate, and show a little give and take.

Loosen – release the safety net, a bit at a time. Give kids liberties as they develop the ability to handle them. Be lenient but not so laid-back as to be lax or liable to compromise their well-being.



Think “Lots”

Love – unconditionally.

Listen – be available whenever children want to share their thoughts, concerns, achievements, aspirations, or anything else.

Labor – success demands work. Model it. Encourage it. Support it. Reinforce it.

Lessons – all manner of experiences teach us to understand things, and how to be better at living our lives. Lessons can happen anytime, anywhere.

Look – seek out and take advantage of local and long-range liaisons and leads for learning.

Laugh – a smile is universal, and so is laughter. Give freely.

Likability – do what you like, like what you do, and encourage children to do likewise.

Literacy/Language –the basis for developing communication skills, and the foundation for knowledge acquisition—*so* important for lifelong learning.

Logic – necessary in order to make sense of the world, and function effectively within it. (Starting in infancy, and continuing on from there.)

Latitude/Leniency – show tolerance, patience, and broadmindedness—all of which will pay great dividends as children learn these traits, and exhibit them, too.

Luxury – cherish the time you spend with your child, and make the moments count. Kids grow up so fast! Don't smother them, but do convey that you're there for them.

Last but not Least... Liveliness – it's that dynamic, energetic “joie de vivre” that can spark *and* invigorate learning—all across the lifespan.

Author's Note

Joanne Foster, EdD is co-author (with Dona Matthews) of the award-winning book *Being Smart About Gifted Education* (2009, Great Potential Press), and *Beyond Intelligence: Secrets for Raising Happily Productive Kids* (in press, House of Anansi). She is a parent, teacher, consultant, researcher, and education specialist. Dr. Foster has more than 30 years of experience working in the field of gifted education. She has written extensively about high-level development and has presented on a wide range of topics at conferences and learning venues all across North America. She teaches educational psychology and gifted education at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto. She can be reached at joanne.foster@utoronto.ca or visit her website at www.beyondintelligence.net