

# LIFE LEARNING FOR KIDS

*31 ways to empower your children to learn, grow  
and prosper - in school and out*



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# CONTENTS

|                                                                     |    |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| Contents .....                                                      | 1  |
| Intro .....                                                         | 3  |
| Your Child and Life .....                                           | 5  |
| Teach your child to master fear.....                                | 6  |
| Help your children make decisions.....                              | 9  |
| The power of 'why' .....                                            | 12 |
| Nine ways to nurture your child's dreams .....                      | 17 |
| 34 ways to motivate kids to learn.....                              | 20 |
| Help your kids own their life from the start .....                  | 24 |
| Talking about jobs with your children .....                         | 27 |
| How to teach your kids about money.....                             | 30 |
| Teaching our children respect and manners.....                      | 35 |
| Why your kids should play sport .....                               | 38 |
| How to help your child develop a healthy mind-body connection ..... | 42 |
| Talking about those birds and bees.....                             | 45 |
| Talking about God.....                                              | 48 |
| How other cultures can enrich your child's life .....               | 52 |
| Why you need a village to raise a child.....                        | 56 |
| Your child.....                                                     | 60 |
| Your Child and School.....                                          | 60 |

|                                                             |     |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| .....                                                       | 60  |
| Who is responsible for your child's education?.....         | 61  |
| The single best thing to help your child's education .....  | 63  |
| Learning is a process, not a result.....                    | 68  |
| Eight tips to help prepare your child for school.....       | 72  |
| Why good parent-teacher relationships matter .....          | 74  |
| Why I think homework should be banned.....                  | 79  |
| How to help your child with their homework.....             | 82  |
| How do you help your child with their nightly reader? ..... | 85  |
| Helping your kids share their news at school .....          | 88  |
| How healthy food helps kids learn.....                      | 92  |
| When is my child old enough to catch the bus?.....          | 95  |
| How to prevent bullying and what to do if it happens.....   | 98  |
| The pros and cons of being a sports star at school.....     | 101 |
| Ten ways to support your child's learning at home .....     | 103 |
| 20 truths I know about education .....                      | 106 |
| Resources .....                                             | 108 |
| <a href="#">About Caz</a> .....                             | 111 |

# INTRO

I do not have a doctorate in education or philosophy. Nor am I interested in one. My experiences and insights within this book come from experience.

Of being a mother. Of being a global traveler for 20 years – 9 of which my children have shared with me. Of being a lover of life and learning. And of being a teacher – 15 years' experience teaching in five countries around the world in various teaching positions and roles. From primary to high school; small instruction to whole class; ESL to specialist instruction; and leadership and management roles.

Can you believe the wealth of experience I had after returning from this travel lifestyle and these teaching experiences to my home country only to be told I could no longer teach in the Catholic System?

I trained at the Catholic Uni, and at the time, I completed a three-year degree. The fourth was optional. I opted for travel instead. Straight to London to teach in the worst area of the city. Welcome to teaching. It taught me more than University ever did. So did every travel, life and educational experience I had afterward.

The diversity of my experiences, learning how to adapt to new educational systems and cultures enriched the strength of my teaching. I knew how to speak to children beyond the walls of the classroom – sitting up straight, following the rules, and learning what was in the books to pass a test.

The system didn't want to know about that; they had changed the rules. You could now only teach if you had the four-year degree. No matter what you had learned out on the field in between. I don't believe that extra year at University would EVER teach me all I had learned through travel, and my teaching experiences.

It was the barrier and push I needed to do something different. I hated walking into the classroom every day participating in what the system was doing to the kids. Learning became about the results, about cramming in as much as you could to check off boxes that didn't make sense. The zest for life, curiosity for learning, and scope for imagination and creativity was gone.

I turned to my true love – travel. Slowly, along with my husband, Craig, we turned our passion for travel and helping others to do it more, into one of the world's biggest travel blogs.

The insights I share within this eBook come from my experiences of living multiple lives – a teacher, a mother, a traveler, and a homeschooler.

I've had two years' experience homeschooling my eldest daughter as we traveled around Australia. I've not just started homeschooling both my children as we begin our next travel journey road tripping across the USA.

I share with you those insights to help you become the best educator in your child's life. To help you understand how to empower your children to become creative, independent problem solvers, thinkers. To help them believe in their dreams and know they are a special gift to the planet.

I also want to give you ways you can make schooling the best experience you can for your children. It's a broken system, but it's the only one we've got at the moment. You can make the best of it. You can help your children thrive and grow within the system. (and many schools remain brilliant, but it can change at any moment so remain behind the wheel.) The most important foundation comes with the simple things you can do in the home.

Of course, I believe travel is one of the best ways to empower and educate your children – not just about themselves, but about the wider world – how they fit into it, and how they can help make it better.

Schooling only lasts 13 years, but education and living an empowered, and so fulfilled and happy life, lasts forever.

Learning can be meaningful and purposeful. Learning for life matters.

In 2013, I wrote a weekly column for the parenting website, Kidspot. It was called Learning Matters. This ebook is a compilation of those articles. I have split them into two sections: *Your Child and Life* and *Your Child and School*.

Thank you for reading this book and allowing me to reach past the bureaucracy that says I'm not good enough for the system. Thank you for understanding life experience tell a richer story.

Please continue to follow our journey on our blog. As a valued member of our VIP family travel tribe, you will receive our best content and tips on how to make family travel work, as well as further posts on how we continue to embrace life learning in our home and schooling on the road.

Don't forget to join our private [Family Travel Tribe Facebook group](#) and our [Family Travel Tribe Instagram](#). You can use the hashtag #FamilyTravelTribe to share your travel experiences. My personal Instagram is [CarolineMakepeace](#)



# YOUR CHILD AND LIFE



# TEACH YOUR CHILD TO MASTER FEAR

Think about something in your past right now that you regret NOT doing.

Why didn't you do it?

You were afraid, right? Afraid to make a mistake, afraid to look silly, afraid to take a risk, afraid of what others would think, afraid to fall, afraid to lose, afraid to win even.

I know. Understandable. We have been taught from an early age to be afraid of most things.

*Did your fear serve any purpose other than preventing you from doing what your heart wanted you to do?*

Of course not, which is why in hindsight you feel such regret.

Fear enters our lives in various disguises: not clever enough, too tired, no time, no money, no connections, not healthy enough and so on. It's rare that any of these are true, but what is true is that each of these disguises shares an underlying fear of not being capable enough. This fear prevents us from learning and growing and living that extraordinary life we were all born to live

Now ask yourself, is this what you want for your children? Thought not.

It is imperative that we teach our children the truth about fear: you can't run or hide from it, but you can learn to master it.

Here are some ways to do just that.

## GIVE YOUR CHILDREN OPPORTUNITIES TO CHALLENGE THEIR FEARS

Several months ago we went to the TreeTop Adventure Park, and I witnessed my daughter, Kalyra, mastering her fear of the junior obstacle course.

She started with smiles and enthusiasm, but after the handrail disappeared and she looked down, her quivering lip screamed, "I am terrified."

I wanted to jump up, unhook her and get her down immediately. But, what would this be teaching her?

Learning to walk, making new friends at school, learning to read and write, trying out for the netball or football team, joining the school musical or wowing the audience with a speech they spent all night writing.

Could you imagine all the things our children would miss out on if we taught them to run at the first sign of fear?

I held myself back from rescuing her and focused on what I knew to be true. The harness was secure; she had a guide close by to steer her through the rocky bits, Craig and I were below her for moral support, and she was capable of working this out herself.

I knew if her terror stretched to a traumatised point I would get her down, but I knew I had to first give her a chance to work through the fear.

I encouraged and steered her with my words: "You've got it. Just a few more steps. Hold on. Take a deep breath. Wow! Look how much fun you are having. You are so brave."

Her fear remained, but she pushed through it and continued one baby step after another. I worried that when she would hop off the final flying fox she would be a crumbling mess and I would have left permanent psychological damage. Instead, she jumped off the rope, smiled a huge smile and asked if she could do it again.

"Are you sure? You were a little scared."

"It's okay Mummy I can do it," she said racing back to the start of the course.

Her fear was still present, but not as strong this time. She relied less on the instructor's help and even gave us a wave and a grin at certain rest points.

Each time we encourage our children to confront their fears, they are learning how to master them. They are learning that it is okay to be afraid, but it is not okay to let the fear prevent growth from happening.

Give them the scaffold of support. Talk the fears through with them, let them know we believe in their ability to do it and encourage them with positive words.

"I'm so proud of you. Look at how you did that even though you were scared. You just made it through that section; there is only a small one to go. Do you think you can do it? Look at what you achieved because you were so brave."

## BE THE FEAR-CONQUERING ROLE MODEL

The single biggest way we can do to help our children master their fears, is to be the



person who masters our own.

Recently we visited Yangawah Cultural Centre on the Gold Coast. I asked Kalyra if she wanted to hold the carpet python or the baby alligator that greeted us on arrival. She shook her head, hid behind my legs and twisted her lips like she does when she is afraid.

I didn't want to hold the snake myself, but I knew it was a great opportunity for me to show her that fear shouldn't stop you from doing things.

"I'll hold the snake."

I carried baby Savannah and sat down on the stone wall. The ranger approached me, the snake's face wiggling in front of mine, and worse, Savannah's. It took all my strength not to scream and run with my baby. But, I reasoned with myself.

This snake is not poisonous; it is just like having a cat's face in front of me. Be brave.

I smiled. "Look at this beautiful snake, Savannah."

"Wait. I want to come too," Kalyra was running up the path.

She fed off my bravery and decided to overcome her fear so she could do something exciting, like holding a snake. We sat together cuddling the snake - followed by the alligator - and walked away smiling.

It's easy as parents for us to be frightened for our children. In fact, we never stop worrying about their safety. Often this is a priority, but mostly it is illogical and to the detriment of their growth.

Each day find ways to encourage your child to face their fears. Help them to see that it is okay to be afraid, but they can move beyond it if they want to. In turn, you'll soon see how much they'll be teaching you about mastering your fears to live the life you want. No regrets.

# HELP YOUR CHILDREN MAKE DECISIONS

It's not easy to let go of the reins and allow our children to make their own decisions. After all, we know what is good for them, right?

They're young, impressionable and still don't understand right from wrong.

Or do they?

By making all of their decisions for them, are we giving them the tools they need to develop into capable decision makers? After all, they are the ones who know what best suits their life.

## ALLOWING OUR CHILDREN TO MAKE DECISIONS

I recently found myself in a dilemma with my daughter, Kalyra.

Craig and I are vegetarians, well pescatarian really; we still eat seafood and the occasional wild land animal. Six years ago I decided this would be my new life path after reading a paper describing the environmental impact of farming. Giving up farmed meat would be the one small thing I could do to make a difference.

Kalyra spoke to me recently about wanting to one day try a sausage. I gave a "we'll see" sort of reply and changed the subject.

I just didn't know what to do.

I don't want her to eat meat, but I don't know if it's fair not to let her just because I choose not to eat it myself. I believe we all have our different ways of wanting to make a positive difference and maybe this is not her way.

But is she old enough to understand and make these choices herself?

I never want to raise children who make decisions just because others do. But if I am forcing my preferred eating lifestyle on to her, then isn't this exactly what I am doing?

I spoke to my friend Christie from [Childhood 101](#) about it.

"I don't think we give our children enough credit for how capable they are to make a decision. All you can do is explain the reasons why you have chosen not to eat meat and then see what she decides from there."

I know this to be true as a teacher. Sure there are moments during the school day that

you have to make a decision for a child, but the best way to empower the students is to allow them to take ownership of their choices.

*What do you think the class rules should be and why? What topics would you most like to learn next? Do you think it's wise to sit next to your friend? Why is this the best choice for you?*

What happens if we never teach our children to make the decision for themselves?

They don't know how to and constantly turn to others to make the decisions for them. They become paralysed by the choices they find around them and unable to move forward without someone directing them. They don't get the opportunity to evaluate outcomes of decisions made and learn how to reassess and gain confidence.

Not making a decision is a decision which can lead to a path that feels out of control and guided by unseen hands. Not exactly the situation we would like to find our teenager in, right?

## STEPS TO HELPING YOUR CHILD WITH DECISION-MAKING

Empowering our children to be independent thinkers starts from a very early age.

The following process is a good guide to teaching your children how to make a decision:

1. Gather all the facts together
2. Listen to other people's opinions if they would like to
3. Help them to see the possible consequences of each side of the decision
4. Help your child consider their interests and values and how their decision may fit in with these
5. Put it all together and decide
6. Show them how to use their gut to confirm – How does this decision make you feel? How does your tummy feel?
7. Re-evaluate the decision down the track and talk about how it worked out and in hindsight now do they think it was a good or bad decision.



I think the most powerful part to this is asking our children to think how their gut feels when making the final choice. After we gather all the information our logical mind likes, we should leave it to our gut (or intuition) to choose. It always speaks the truth.

Listening to and trusting our intuition helps when the decisions become more complicated and important.

(Of course, we have to provide scaffolding for our children, and if we know the decision they make is a bad one, like eating chocolate for dinner, we may need to talk to them further about their choices and step in and steer them in a new direction if necessary.)

## START WITH SMALL DECISIONS AT AN EARLY AGE

Start by helping them to make small decisions from an early age.

*What would you like to do, to eat, to play? Why? Do you think that is a good idea?*

Or get them to help you make a decision; this is an excellent opportunity to model the process.

*What do you think is the best choice? What do you think Mummy should do? And why?*

Having your child focus on the why is important, so they understand there is always a reason behind what we do. Ensure that you let your child know that ultimately you make the final decision when it comes to yourself. Thank them for their contribution in helping you and let them know your final choice and why you decided that route.

Talk with your children about why they think their decisions were good or bad. *What did the results show them?* Help them to learn the concept of consequence.

Each day is a constant stream of decisions that shapes the direction of not just the moment, but our life's path. Allowing our children make their decisions will give them strength and confidence in who they are as a person - a wise person who can competently decide and control the outcomes in their life.

And won't they need these qualities the older they get and the more influential their peers become?

# THE POWER OF 'WHY'

"Why does?", "why is?", "why can't?", "why do?", "why are?"

We hear that little "why" word spoken so often that we often duck and weave and immediately change the subject.

It's not that we don't want to answer, but we know our child will continue until we're we find ourselves in the *I-really-don't-know* corner.

"But why, Mum?"

Now, imagine if instead of inwardly groaning and changing the subject, we saw that little word as an amazing learning moment for our child: the one in which they get to teach themselves.

Get out of the corner by asking them, "Why do you think?"

It might be some time before they can articulate a response, but return serve this as soon as they start asking you "why" so they can understand they have the power to contemplate and express.

They are never too young.

Asking them to find a response to their own question shows that you have faith that they are capable and have the power within themselves to find answers and create solutions.

As a teacher, I don't know how many times I was met with a blank stare when I asked a student for an opinion, an explanation or and breakdown of their thinking process.

It was so difficult to extract the opinion from them and to let them know that it was okay for them to express their views and to even say, "I'm not sure" or "I don't know" when they were stuck with no response.

It's totally okay for your child not to know. Teach them this from an early age. Many children stop thinking for themselves or taking steps to learn because they are afraid they don't know the answer from the beginning and they think a perfect response is what the teacher or the parent is looking for so they can receive the pat on the head or the gold sticker.

## TRY THIS INSTEAD.

"That's fantastic that you don't know. That means you now have space in your life to learn something new. What do you think we can do to find the answer? How can we think through the process together?"

A whole new world of discovery and learning then opens up for the child to think differently and form an opinion founded on a curiosity and a desire to understand why.

As a parent, it is up to you to foster your child's ability to think and solve problems.

It starts with tapping into those magical "whys."

## HELP YOUR CHILD TO ARTICULATE A RESPONSE

Until they get used to you wanting an answer, your child will meet your question with a blank stare. Give them a reasonable chunk of thinking time and if nothing arises, help them. Give them a few guided questions or clues.

Today Kalyra and I were walking around Kiama lighthouse; she asked me why it was there. I caught myself before I gave her the answer.

### **STOP. Learning opportunity.**

"Well, you can see the light on top of the lighthouse. Think about the boats out on the ocean at night. Why do you think the lighthouse is important?"

"Because the boats need to see at night so they don't crash into the rocks."

Logic lesson complete. The answers came from her observations and thinking. She didn't tune out as I told a story or gave a reply. She was engaged in the learning process, and because she reached that conclusion herself, it's a lesson she won't forget.

When you play *why do you think* you are teaching your child:

1. They have the smarts to work things out
2. To have confidence in their intelligence and logic
3. To always look for clues to help put the pieces of the puzzles together (essential for higher order thinking skills)

## WHAT IF THE ANSWERS DON'T MAKE SENSE?

Never tell your child their explanation is silly or stupid. You are fostering creative thought and problem solving. You are not expecting them to know the correct answer to every question.

As a teacher, my favourite response to anything that was off the mark was to say something like,

"Wow, Kadisha I can see your great thinking there. Thanks so much for taking the time to think about it and share your thoughts. I can understand why you think \_\_\_\_\_ but what about \_\_\_\_\_?"

Guide their thinking with a clue. Sandwich the negative between two encouraging statements. If you come straight out with the negative, your child will switch off – all they'll hear is that they are not good enough and their words aren't appreciated.

Children don't always need to have the right answer. Sometimes the answers that show how creative they are, even if way off the mark, are the best. Their responses often remind us that there are often no 'right or wrong answers.' We want our children to grow up to be creative thinkers; it's how innovation and progression happens.

"Why do you think?" helps them take ownership

Not only does this question help develop the skill of problem solving and creative thought, but it also helps a child to take ownership of their behaviour and personal decisions.

Why do you think that wasn't the best choice for you to make right now?  
What do you think you could have done better?  
Why do you think we have certain rules and expectations here at school or in the home?

Handing ownership back to them helps them to understand that there are always reasons behind things and their actions can have consequences for others as well as for themselves.

It helps to remind them that each of us plays an important role in the community in which we are actively involved.

## THE POWER OF "WHY NOT?"

Just as "why do you think?" can be a powerful learning tool, "why not" is the motivating fuel behind our dreams.



It is the belief that we hand over to our children or anyone that crosses our path - there is no reason why they can't go for what they want in life.

"Mum, one day I want to be an astronaut and fly to the moon."

"Well, why not?"

Inside you might be thinking that is the craziest thing you have ever heard. You're thinking: you have to be super smart to be an astronaut, you have to train for years, we're really poor, you have to be brave, and I know you cry at the slightest sight of blood.

The list of endless reasons why this is a silly idea rattles around in your brain. But, how do you know what your child, or anyone, is capable of until they try?

It might be something that will never happen, but your child (and yourself!) will never know if you don't ask "why not?" and see where that takes you. Giving the reasons why it can't happen will prevent them from striving for in the first place.

As W. Clement Stone says,

*"Aim for the moon, if you don't reach it at least you'll fall amongst the stars."*

The *why not* can then lead to the, "what do we have to do to make it happen."

Here you are teaching your child that nothing can come to them unless they have a plan and then take action. They might become so enthusiastic by the possibility of their dream, that after the research and planning, no matter how young, they might start taking action.

Or, they might decide, for themselves, that it's not really for me after all, I have this other dream instead.

Well, why not? Let's see what we have to do.

Foster your child's dreaming and the belief that anything is possible. You are not setting them up for failure or disappointment; you are teaching them to grow, create and express the limitless of their amazing souls. (Don't fear the failure, it's a place of growth and children need to experience it so they learn how to manage it and how it can empower them)

I would never have spent the majority of my adult life living and working around the world if I listened to those who told me all the reasons why I couldn't and why it was

stupid for wanting to. I chose instead to embrace those who said: "Why not?"

"Why not" will show your children the way to their dreams.

There is **no** reason why I can't, but plenty of reasons **why I can**.

How do you use *why do you think* and *why not* with your children?

# NINE WAYS TO NURTURE YOUR CHILD'S DREAMS

Children dream big. In their developing minds, they don't see limitations; they only see possibilities. They understand that the world is for shaping with their hands.

As they grow and share their dreams with us, they begin to hear more of the reasons why their dreams can't happen.

These reasons may come from well-meaning parents who aren't intentionally trying to step on their child's dreams. Rather, they are speaking from a conditioned response to protect their child from what they see as potential failure and the heartache that can come with it.

And then comes school. There's not enough room for dreaming in our classrooms. Children are constantly distracted from it. Noses need to be in books to learn the facts and figures, most of which will never play a part in their life once they leave school.

Their dreams will, but, by the time it comes to leave school and start living the dream, it lies buried under piles of doubts and fears.

It is up to us, as parents to foster the dreams of our children so they can be everything they were meant to be when the time arrives.

It is my belief that you don't dream something unless the Universe intends for you to live it.

*Reach high, for stars lie hidden in your  
soul. Dream deep, for every dream precedes the  
goal.*

*Pamela Vaull Starr*

## NINE SIMPLE WAYS TO NURTURE YOUR CHILD'S DREAMS

## 1. 101 DREAM JOURNAL.

I recently bought a dream journal as a present for my niece from Kikki K. In it you list your dreams (no limitations).

What I loved about it was the space for each dream to write a more detailed description of the dream AND an action plan. It's a powerful book for children. You can similarly encourage your younger children, using pictures instead of words.

## 2. QUOTATIONS AND ASPIRATIONS

Put quotations and inspirations on your child's desks and walls. Always surround your children with positive thoughts and aspirations. It's hard to dream big without thinking big.

## 3. CREATE A VISION BOARD

Encourage your child to visually represent everything they wish to be. Talk about what it might feel like when the dream comes true.

## 4. COME UP WITH AN ACTION PLAN.

It's not enough to just dream; your child needs to understand that dreams must be followed up with action. They are responsible for creating their dream and powerful enough to do it. Brainstorm a plan together including what they have to learn, who they have to form a relationship with and what steps must they follow and when.

## 5. SET GOALS AND CELEBRATIONS FOR EACH NEW ACHIEVEMENT.

Focus mostly on the celebrations being of an intrinsic nature. Often the achievement of the goal is enough, but it is also great to have other rewards now and then, like a night off homework. (Oops can I say that?)

## 6. LIVE THE ACTION PLAN.

Get out there and start building it with your child. Do the learning, take the lessons, seek the people out, draw the pictures, write the words, watch the movies of those who have done it already, and get the experience.

## 7. LIVE AND BREATHE THE DREAM.

Let your child smother their walls and line their bookshelves with the dreams. Allow them to drive you crazy with incessant talking about it.

*Dreams only become real when you make them your magnificent passion.*

My father's magnificent passion is cricket. It took him till his late 60's, but he finally got to wear the baggy greens for the over 60's Australia team. Living and breathing the dream works.

#### 8. BELIEVE IN THE DREAM

Tell your child why it is possible, not why it isn't. Believe that they can achieve everything they want in their life and remind them of your belief in them as often as you can.

#### 9. DOCUMENT THEIR JOURNEY TO THE DREAM.

Reflect upon it.

What's working, what isn't? What are they learning through this process? How do they feel about it? Is their heart still calling them to do this or has something else popped up for them?

### ALLOW ROOM FOR CHANGE.

It doesn't matter if the dream changes as your child does. Nurturing each dream as it arrives teaches them many important skills. Namely, that we are continually evolving, and our dreams will evolve with us based on what we learn and how our interests change.

None of this matters if we know how to dream, how to keep it alive, and how to chase it. Our magnificent passions will lead us to the right place eventually.



# 34 WAYS TO MOTIVATE KIDS TO LEARN

Children can achieve just about anything if they are motivated enough, yet they will learn very little if motivation is missing.

– Michael Grose

Motivation is the single biggest determinant of how well a child will learn. As a teacher, the blank expression on my unmotivated students' faces often broke my heart as I saw so many wasted opportunities for growth.

I face that battle every day now as a homeschooling parent as we sit down to learn the difference between cumulonimbus and cumulus clouds.

My 6-year-old's eyes say, "Why do I have to learn this; it's not fun nor relevant? I don't care about the names; I just care that I can create fairies and elephants in my mind out of them".

Motivation makes learning effortless, fun and valuable. Helping your child find what motivates them to explore, reach and grow is one of the most valuable things you will ever do for them.

## 34 WAYS TO MOTIVATE KIDS TO LEARN

1. **MAKE IT FUN.** Light and laughter aids learning.

2. **MAKE EDUCATION PART OF YOUR CONVERSATION ABOUT LIFE.** We had a fascinating and funny conversation about apes and evolution on one of our long road journeys! There are opportunities to teach your child in every moment of every day. Look for interesting ways to teach, and soon they will be prompting you for more.

3. **CREATE THINGS WITH THEM.** Allowing children to express their creativity from their hearts puts them in charge and gives them great confidence. Give your child free access to the tools they need to express themselves and remember that being creative together can be as simple as collecting sticks and rocks on a walk and carefully arranging them in a way that pleases them.

4. **LET THEM HELP YOU COOK.** Talk about measurement, what you're adding and why. Discuss how you make the cake and how a recipe is a process and a strategy in one. Using everyday tasks as an opportunity to learn will encourage your child to seek education wherever they go.

5. **START PASSION PROJECTS** What are their interests? What do they like to do the most? Help them learn all they can about something they are interested in and help them create things to become a specialist.

6. **ACT ON THEIR INTERESTS.** Kalyra's always been great with styling clothes, so I brought her a fashion Barbie sketch pad. She spends hours designing different outfits and learning about colour, line, and shape.

7. **BRING IN THE MUSIC.** Can they learn a musical instrument? Or make up lyrics to tell a story about their day? Can they dance and sing to a favourite tune? Can they sing their homework? Times tables? Music is a powerful motivator.

8. **GET INVOLVED.** They'll be way more excited about learning if you join them in games and activities.

9. **ENCOURAGE YOUR CHILD TO BE HANDS ON IN EVERYTHING THEY DO.** Give them a ruler and let them measure and compare. Help them build 3D towers. Teach them how to Google and research for answers.

10. **LET THEM EXPERIMENT.** Set up a corner with lots of different materials and let them see what they can discover and create.

11. **VISIT AMAZING LEARNING SPACES** like hands-on science museums and art galleries.

12. **VISIT INTERACTIVE CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL SITES.** Kalyra recently learned so much about convict history by visiting Port Arthur. She was excited to follow the life of a small boy transported for stealing bread.

13. **FOCUS ON INTRINSIC MOTIVATION,** not external rewards like stickers and treats. Have your child tell you how they feel when completing a task and focus on the good feelings.

14. **FACILITATE THEIR LEARNING** by guiding your child to new ways of thinking or doing.

15. **ASK QUESTIONS** that encourage thought and problem solving.

16. **DON'T GIVE DIRECT ANSWERS,** allow your child to reach for them. "What do you think? Where can we find the answer? Let's test it."

17. **FOSTER CURIOSITY.** "I wonder why?" is a powerful thing to ask in conversations and opens up all sorts of learning possibilities.

18. **VALUE EDUCATION YOURSELF.** Become a lifelong learner and show your children how you follow your interests and why you like the thing you do.

19. **INVOLVE THEM IN YOUR EDUCATION.** "I'm not sure how to put this desk together, would you like to help me work it out?"

20. **DEMONSTRATE GOOD LEARNING.** "I'm not sure about that. I'd like to know the answer to that; I'm going to Google it. I'd like to be able to X; I think I'm going to do a course to help me learn how to do it."

21. **GIVE IMMEDIATE AND SPECIFIC PRAISE.** "That paragraph helped me to understand how you felt." "I love the colour you chose; it goes so well with the orange shirt."

22. **GIVE CONSTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK.** "I think to make this better, or to improve on this; you could do X, what do you think?" For right or wrong answers you can say, "You've tried hard, and I can see how you were thinking, but the correct answer is Y because X."

23. **MAINTAIN GOOD RELATIONSHIPS WITH YOUR CHILD'S TEACHER.** Don't gossip about them with other parents, or say anything negative around your child. Let them know their teacher is working with you to give them the best education. It will hurt your child more in the long run, no matter how bad you may think your child's teacher is. If your child knows you don't support their teacher, they will see this as permission to not give their best.

24. **READ, READ, READ WITH YOUR CHILD.** Choose fun books that make them laugh. Talk about the characters, the themes and messages. Share your memories and thoughts that connect to the story. This is a special bonding time that will instill so much intrinsic motivation for learning (and will improve their reading skills dramatically).

25. **GIVE YOUR CHILD A LEARNING RETREAT OF THEIR OWN.** Help them to create a safe, happy environment where they can read, write, follow their passions and projects and do their homework.

26. **LET THEM MAKE THEIR OWN LEARNING DECISIONS.** Encourage them to make the decision for themselves, to own their lives a little and to contribute their thoughts to family activities, rules, and experiences. Empowerment is the powerhouse of motivation.

27. **PLAY GAMES TOGETHER.** Games are some of the best ways to learn without realising you're learning. Some of my favourite memories are of playing trivial pursuit with my parents. I remember being in awe of how clever my dad was and wanting to be just like him.

28. **VISIT THE LIBRARY TOGETHER.** Explore the books together and participate in any free story time or craft sessions the library puts on.

29. **SPEND TIME OUTDOORS** – the fresh air will inspire them to reach high.

30. **ENCOURAGE EXERCISE** it's the best way to get rid of stagnant energy and replace it with motivation for good feelings and growth.

31. **ENCOURAGE A GOOD DIET** for clarity of thought and increased energy.

32. **TRAVEL MORE** - it enhances curiosity, a spirit of adventure, and a passion for learning new things.

33. **MAKE TV TIME ABOUT DOCUMENTARIES**. Children are fascinated with what they discover about the wider world.

34. **ASK YOUR CHILD ABOUT THEIR LEARNING IN SCHOOL**. What do and don't they like? What do they struggle with? Come up with ways to extend their learning at home. Create fun and interesting opportunities for them to enjoy the things they don't like and ride the wave of the things they do. Plan extra projects or trips to places that will extend the learning.

# HELP YOUR KIDS OWN THEIR LIFE FROM THE START

I'm a very big believer in owning your life; that is, taking responsibility for your decisions and using your inner power to thrive.

Too many people suffer from a lack of confidence in their ability to create the life they want. They think a puppeteer pulls strings—it's always someone else's fault if something goes wrong, or it's the circumstances they find themselves in at the time.

Sometimes this can be true, but what is wonderful about owning your life is that you own the way you choose to respond, which is true power. It's called responding instead of reacting.

I've met too many people (and I used to be one of them) who are afraid to make decisions or who simply don't know how to. They're afraid to own their feelings, their beliefs and their choices.

Hiding who we are prevents us from thriving and becoming the person we were born to be.

## EMPOWERING OUR CHILDREN

I think we can help our children be strong, confident, and independent from birth.

Often, for a parent, the biggest thing that gets in the way of us teaching our children to become this is ourselves.

We want to do everything for them because it feels good to nurture and we love them so much. We even want to hold them back (unknowingly) in some respects because we want to feel needed and important.

Being a parent is never about you. It is about your child. It's your job to empower them to be the best they can be.

Helping to empower your child is allowing them to be involved in their life experiences. To help them make decisions, think for themselves, set their boundaries, and evaluate to improve.

This doesn't mean you sit back and let them fall and stay down. You become the



facilitator, the person who is there when they fall to help show them how they can get back up again and stay up.

It starts with very simple things from an early age that gives them that sense of ownership and achievement, all of which will build confidence and develop empowerment.

**A few simple ideas to consider:**

**HELP YOUR CHILD FIGURE OUT A SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM.** *What do you think we can do here? What went wrong?* My daughter amazes me now with the solutions she creates without even any prompting from me anymore. (Empowerment = knowing you can solve a problem and create a new way)

**ALLOW YOUR CHILD TO MAKE THEIR DECISIONS, GUIDE THEM WHERE NECESSARY AND GIVE THEM THE RELEVANT ENCOURAGEMENT** *I like your choice there because... great thinking... Do you think the orange shirt may go better with the white, than the green? Where would you like to go this weekend?* (Accommodate where you can)

**LET YOUR CHILD HAVE A GO.** There is nothing worse than being in a hurry sweeping the floor and your toddler wants to grab the broom and do it herself. Breathe and relax; this is the perfect opportunity to build that sense of achievement and independence. You can wait another five minutes. Let them do it.

**ENCOURAGE YOUR CHILD TO ANSWER QUESTIONS OTHERS ASK THEM.** Often, your child will shy behind your legs if a stranger asks their name. Guide them with a smile. *"Tell the lady your name."* (This also helps them to know that strangers aren't necessarily dangerous)

**ENCOURAGE THEM TO ORDER AND BUY THEIR THINGS.** I was so delighted on our recent sunset cruise in Phuket Thailand when Kalyra stated, *"I am going up to ask for my orange juice Mummy, you stay here."* I watched her confidently walk up and ask with a please and a thank you. (Her grin was huge walking back - she'd finally overcome her shyness)

**HAVE YOUR CHILD HELP YOU PAY FOR THINGS.** Allow them to hand over the money. Again in Thailand, Kalyra would harass us for the money to pay for our taxi cabs. She'd jump out with a smile and hand over the money saying thank you. Once she turned to me, *"Mummy! Guess what? I gave them money for the cab and then they gave me money back!"* How wonderful to view this transaction through the eyes of someone who had no idea they gave her less in change, to her it was a wealthy exchange.

**DON'T FORGET THE POWER OF "YOU TRY."** Your children are going to be watching you do everything. Give them the opportunity to try it themselves. You might be surprised at what they can do. I'll never forget sitting next to a parent in an ice cream store once

with a four-year-old boy, and she was feeding him the ice cream on the spoon. If your children are capable let them do it and who cares if they get messy, it is about learning and empowerment.

**LET YOUR CHILD FOLLOW THEIR INTERESTS.** I am a dancing mother, and I hate it. I would so love for Kalyra to do tennis instead. Every time I ask, *"Are you sure you would like to do dancing this year? Would you like to try something else?"* she replies, *"No, I want to try jazz ballet this year"* making me inwardly grimace, but I smile and say *"Sure. I know you love dancing, sounds like fun."*

**ADDRESS 'NAUGHTINESS' AS A BAD CHOICE.** Naughty is a label they feel they can't change; it's just who they are. If they make a bad choice, then they have the power to make a better one. When your child tries to explain their behaviour in comparison to others, stop and remind them, *"I don't care what the others were doing, I only want to know what you were doing."* Once you have helped them own their choice, encourage them to own what the better choice would have been and how they can make it next time. They will know that no matter what anyone else does in their life, they always have the power to make an empowered choice to change their life for the better.

**PROVIDE AMPLE OPPORTUNITY FOR SELF-EXPRESSION.** Support and encourage, and guide the sharing of opinions, interests, and personalities.

# TALKING ABOUT JOBS WITH YOUR CHILDREN

When our children are young, they have lofty dreams of being astronauts, cheerleaders, firefighters, and doctors.

They are not interested in how much money they will earn or how many letters will appear after their names; they only care about what sounds cool and fun.

*Following their heart rather than their head*

As they get older priorities get switched around. The focus turns to achieving, financial goals, checklists, and status.

A job becomes something you have to do to pay the bills and buy what you want, and perhaps maybe look good. It's rarely about spending your days doing what you love and making money from it.

Now there is nothing wrong with achieving, but at what sacrifice?

Should we be sacrificing what lies at our heart centre or can we find ways to make money doing jobs we love?

## USE EVERYDAY OPPORTUNITIES TO TALK ABOUT JOBS AND MONEY

I have been so grateful for the opportunities arising for me to talk to Kalyra about jobs and money. We spend the majority of our lives working, and for many, the choices of what we do for that stems from the conversations we have with adults when we are little.

Our children need to be aware that we do have to work to make money. We need the money to live—yes it is a basic need.

But, earning money can be fun. It's a simple switch in thinking- focus on the passion with the money as a bonus.

Help your child see their desire to have a fun and interesting job does not have to die.

Yesterday afternoon, Kalyra's dance teacher passed her a note with a notice for next term's fees.

She asked me why we had to pay money for her to dance.

"Well because Mr. Roberts gives his time every week to help you learn how to dance. Mr. Roberts loves to dance and loves to teach others how to do it too. It's only fair that he's rewarded for doing what he loves and helping others because of it."

A simple statement, easily understood by her, that shows making money is about doing what you love, helping others, and being rewarded in return. An exchange of money for value.

I could have spoken begrudgingly about having to fork out 'X' amount of dollars for dance class. There are numerous other statements I could have made about paying for lessons and the amount they were charging. But, what would this teach my daughter?

I want my girls to grow up knowing you receive rewards when you offer value. It's a healthy way to live and the more people earning money for their passions, the healthier and happier our planet will be.

This morning we dropped Savannah to child care and Kalyra asked why there were teachers there.

"They come in to help look after the children while their parents go to work. Do you know why parents have to work?"

"To earn money."

"Right, and what do we need money for?"

"For food and clothes and undies."

"We certainly don't want to go without undies!! See we have to work when we get older, you can't avoid it. It's always best to find work that you love. That way every day you wake up happy."

Like Mummy, she loves travel and blogging. And that's how I make money. I never liked teaching. It wasn't the best way for me to work because it didn't make me happy."

"I don't want to be a blogger; I want to be a cheerleader."

"Oh and you can. There are lots of people making money from cheerleading. What great fun!"

Our children have to face the concept of work and jobs from a very young age. Parents make a lot of sacrifices to earn a living. Help your child understand why Mummy and Daddy go to work.

Don't speak of it as something that takes away from their life, rather something that enhances it.

Help them to be aware that to get anything in life involves a sacrifice and outline what that is, but put the focus on the rewards.

Because I blog, we do cool things like travel. How awesome is that!

Because I took singing and guitar lessons for an hour every day, I now spend my days writing music and singing to crowds of people and making them happy. How cool!

# HOW TO TEACH YOUR KIDS ABOUT MONEY

Managing money is one of the most important skills a person needs to participate in society effectively.

It is the major cause of most marital breakdowns and depression in adults. It sends people into bankruptcy, which has disastrous consequences, not just for the individual, but society.

It's time get over the negative feelings surrounding money and learn to embrace it as a necessity in our lives.

Yes, it is. Money is as essential as water, food, and shelter now. It's a basic need.

Without it, you cannot survive, or you will have a very low standard of living. It's time to allow our children the opportunity to thrive like they were born to do.

Here are a few tips to help your child learn the fundamentals of this basic necessity.

## WATCH YOUR LANGUAGE ABOUT MONEY

You are the biggest influence in your child's life. Your child will naturally adopt what you model to them via your words and actions.

Watch statements like *Rich people are thieves. Only the wealthy get ahead. Filthy money...* and the negative things we unconsciously say. Money won't come to you if you keep attaching evilness to it and keep shutting the door in its face.

Take your arguments about money with your partner to a place they can't hear (better yet, don't argue) If your children hear these arguments; they will develop the belief that money brings pain and destroys relationships. Ouch! Imagine the self-sabotaging that can come later with that subconscious belief.

## SPEAK TO YOUR CHILD ABOUT MONEY

Don't say to your child "we can't have it because we can't afford it" or "we don't have the money." I know you don't have the money most of the time, but try to turn your no response into a positive response.

For example:

"Right now it's a little challenging to pay for this, but, perhaps in the future. Mum and



Dad have to prioritize where they spend their money and, at this time, this is not the best way to spend our money. It doesn't align with our values at the moment. But, you tell me. What do you think you could do to create the money for it? Maybe we could bake a cake together instead of buying this one, which costs more because someone else baked it. We don't have to pay them for their time then."

Can you see the concepts of money you are teaching them about just from this simple re-framing of "we can't afford it"?

## TEACH THEM TO SAVE FROM AN EARLY AGE

Kalyra already has nearly \$500 saved for her trip to Disneyland. Every week we allow her to round up our spare change "Usually this is something we waste, so why don't we save it for our dream."

Any holiday or birthday money she gets, she puts into her money box. We count the money in the box together and get all excited about the amazing job she is doing saving for her dream.

We have her hand the money box to the teller when it comes time to deposit it. She watches them count it (I patiently answer the why questions) while she eagerly awaits the bank balance.

"What is it, Mummy?" Her eyes widen with delight at my answer. She carries that home like its fragile glass and races in the door to tell her Daddy how smart she is for saving that much money for her dream.

## TEACH YOUR CHILDREN WHAT HAPPENS TO THE MONEY IN THE BANK

The bank keeps it safe for us, but they also take our money while it is sitting there doing nothing and they make money work for them. They go and invest it and help it to grow. When it grows, they leave a bit of that growth behind for you as a way of saying thank you.

See if you are clever with money you can make it work for you. Find ways to make your money grow, with as little effort from you as possible

## HELP THEM SEE HOW MONEY CAN GROW

Set up the right bank account for your child. We just discovered the Bank West Children's bank account and opened an account for the girls so they can earn 8% interest per month. This is a fabulous way to show them how their money can grow.

Let them see the statements and show them what they earned each month for doing nothing. Allow them to decide how much they want to deposit each month and where the money will come from.

## PLAY MONEY GAMES

We all know Monopoly. It's not just a fun game; it also teaches about investing, debt and bankruptcy.

Don't just mindlessly play it, talk with your child as you go. Help them strategize and ask their thought processes in regards to buying. It's not always a great idea to buy the house on Mayfair. Most of the time the train stations or the two cheapest houses on the block, give you a greater return.

Shops, hotels, restaurants all these imaginary play games help develop money concepts. Monitor your language and model right.

[Rich Kid Smart Kid](#) is a great resource for games and educational tools.

## ALLOW YOUR CHILDREN TO CREATE MINI-BUSINESSES

We all know the lemonade stands. Don't get in the way of your children when they create one, help them with it. (Just don't let them start selling things at school because that will lead to trouble.)

My nephews have started a neighbourhood lawn mowing business. They have just hit their teens and are already building a lovely little savings account. A couple of lawns a week - they're out in the sun getting active and earning money.

If your children take on the entrepreneurial spirit, use it as an opportunity to talk about responsibility, saving, and having another cash to cover expenses.

Clay Piggy is a fantastic online resource to help you children learn about money and creating their own business. I get access to this via my account with [TestingMom.com](#), which gives access to a range of online teaching resources for kids to use and practice with at home. It's one of the biggest resources I use for homeschooling my kids.

## MOVE FROM POCKET MONEY TO SALARY

Again, it's a terminology thing, but words carry meaning. Children no longer receive pocket money, they earn a salary.

Why? Because you are teaching them from an early age to respect money: that it is something we earn or create.

Craig and I have been discussing how to do this in our family life recently. Kalyra is old enough to start earning, and while Savannah is just a babe, there is no reason we can't expose her to the concept.

You can start with chores. Keep it focused on earning their salary; it is not a reward for doing a chore. I would recommend certain jobs, like keeping their room tidy, be something they just have to do, without earning a salary from it.

Sit down and discuss what they would like to do and come up with a salary plan. As we run a business from home, there are certain business related tasks Kalyra could help with to earn a salary. This only needs to be \$1 or \$2 a week.

Once your child gets older, you can present the ideas of taxation and giving back. So once they receive their salary, they have to give 10% back to you in taxes. You can even go a step further and instruct them to donate 5% and save 10%.

You have an obligation to pay them on time. As they get older stretch payment to every fortnight or month, so they understand how the real world works. Once they turn 15, if they have not yet made millions from selling lemonade, encourage them to find a real job.

## ALLOW THEM TO MAKE PURCHASE DECISIONS

Kalyra was pushing for me to purchase a doll for her recently. We spoke about how many she already had, and didn't play and so it wouldn't be a wise spend of money. She persisted, so I gave her the option. "You can, but you must use your money in your bank."

"That's okay Mummy; I don't want the doll anyway."

Talk to them about how to spend their money. Let them buy their treats now and then, and if you have to teach a lesson, let them blow the lot and suffer the consequences of having nothing left. Talk to them about this. How did it feel? Was what you brought worth it? What value did it bring you? How long did that benefit last? What could you do next time?

Help them create a money plan. It's important they understand the focus on spending money should always be on things that bring us value, enrich our lives and help us grow. Talk to them about their values and priorities. What is important to them? They are never too young for these discussions – the earlier, the better. It will involve frequent discussions and often you'll just want to quit because it can be hard for them to understand.

They will be torn between hating seeing their money disappearing and wanting to buy

things they think bring them happiness. Help them devise a plan that caters to both.

## LET THEM HELP WITH YOUR FINANCIAL PLANNING AND MONEY MANAGEMENT

This is probably a scary thought, but one that can teach your child some valuable lessons. They are earning a salary of \$3 a week and then they see your electricity bill is \$100.

“Wow Mum, things cost a lot of money. You have to work hard to live right?”

Let them help you write up your shopping list, set budgets, participate in the planning of how you spend money.

If they are older, you can even let them write the cheques out for you.

# TEACHING OUR CHILDREN RESPECT AND MANNERS

Last weekend we were enjoying a morning at Darling Park on Sydney Harbour. The intermittent rain was not keeping anyone away.

Kalyra's new favourite playground ride is the flying fox, so she raced over to join the queue. There were about five people in front of her and she waited patiently despite her itchiness to jump on and fly.

There's not much in life that raises my blood pressure, but queue jumpers will do it every time. My "teacher finger" quickly whips out if any pushing in happens around me; I've been known to turn an African mob into an orderly line as they move onto the local bus.

I also rarely judge other parents; I don't care if you breastfeed or bottle feed in public or until your child eight; eat junk food or choose a paleo diet; home school or private school. But I do care if you don't teach your children respect.

Because respect is about considering other people and it is only when we consider other people that we can have a society that cares, has compassion and raises each other up.

So my blood raced a little when, at the park, a little girl jumped the flying fox queue. She did not stop to see where the line ended, just choosing a spot close to the front, and two in front of Kalyra.

She was only about four, so perhaps does not know any better. But, her mother should. Our children are never too young to teach them respect.

Her mother stood by and watched with a big smile on her face that remained even when I dagger-eyed her.

Kalyra saw an opening and tried to push in front of the girl in front of her. I firmly told her, "Kalyra go back to your place in the line please. We don't push in, it's rude."

The mother still did not take the hint to remind her child about queue etiquette and to wait our turn no matter how desperately we want something.

We cannot live cooperatively and effectively in a society where we say "my needs are more important than yours" and teach our children the same.

I want therefore I get.

We have to stop to think about how our actions may affect other people.

Queue jumping shows a complete disregard for the person who has been patiently waiting and doing the right thing.

My youngest, Savannah, is 18 months old. She has just discovered the joy of flying foxes (as long as I am holding her of course). We go to our local park at least once a week. She races straight to the thrill-seeking ride. Every time I guide her to the back of the queue.

"Not your turn yet darling. These children have been waiting before you. You have to go to the back of the line. There you go, lovely manners. Don't worry you'll get your turn in a minute."

She moves to the back of the line grinning and waits. She's 18 months and is already learning about respect and etiquette.

## MANNERS

I saw the absence of them far too much when I was teaching.

"Manners are free, you know," I would often say to my students. "It's one of the only things in life that doesn't cost you anything, yet you get so much in return."

It's so simple.

Please. Thank you. Can I? Would you mind? After you.

Use their name. Answer politely when spoken to. Wait until the person has finished talking before you interrupt. Listen when someone speaks to you.

I know how tiring it is teaching your children manners and respect from the moment they are born. You do sound like a broken down record and most of the time you just couldn't be bothered with the hassle.

But, you signed up for the job of helping your children be the best they possibly can be and doing what's necessary to give them the best opportunities in life.

I'll never forget teaching a year one class last year for one hour. It was challenging, and there wasn't much room for smiling that day. But then there was a beautiful seven-year-old boy, Brandon (name changed).

He was a breath of fresh air and his beautiful manners brought so much joy and lightness to my day. Every time he put his hand up, I'd race to give him the attention he patiently and so politely asked for.

I was with him for an hour last year, and I still remember him well. I see him on the street, and my insides glow, and I say to Craig, "That boy has the most beautiful manners, he is simply adorable."

People remember manners and respect. It brightens their day and inspires them to help.

We all need to honour each other's soul even when we are five and finding it difficult to wait to fly like Tarzan.



# WHY YOUR KIDS SHOULD PLAY SPORT

I think we all know the benefits of playing sport for our physical body. We need to move to burn off the energy we consume, as well as keeping our heart pumping at a healthy rate.

Especially with the scary rising levels of obesity in our children, it is more important than ever to ensure they are regularly participating in some form of sport (and not the x-box thumb kind.)

## THE BENEFITS OF SPORT

I am incredibly grateful to my parents for making sure I was playing sport was a big part of my upbringing. I know so much of what I have achieved in my life has happened as a result of all I have learned through sport. It goes way beyond the physical benefits (which mind you, are life-changing on its own.)

Some of my earliest childhood memories are coming third in the 200m race and first in the discus at Little Athletics. The pride I felt in my chest at having some victory - my personal best- is still present today when I reflect back. It was a sense of achievement that comes with pushing out the limits of your comfort zone—learning just how much we are truly capable of.

Netball was the sport where I felt *in the zone*. Being tall, I was thrown into defence at my starting age of six. I was good and through the years made my way into rep squads.

But, defence was too boring. I wanted the glory of bringing home the points and being on the attack--my ambitious spirit finally had a place to shine.

"Mum. I am going to be a goal shooter in netball now."

"But, you don't know how to shoot goals. And you're so good at defence."

"Yeah, but I don't like it. I want to shoot goals. I can learn. I'll do it; you watch me."

Every afternoon, I would race home from school to the goal post in the backyard. I made a pact with myself to not come in until I had shot 100 goals. I would starve most nights, in the beginning, not coming in until hours after dinner. But, it wasn't long before my practice sessions shortened.

It wasn't that much longer until I was wearing the goal attack bib in the rep squad. I loved knowing I got there because I made the decision to follow my heart and do

whatever it took to make it happen.

There was a lot of sport I enjoyed just for fun: tip and run - or Search Party as our neighbourhood friends called it, front yard wrestles, and all-day fun tennis comps at the local courts with everyone.

There were some sports I hated. Mum put me into dancing in year six; I felt awkward and stiff. I had to finish the year out, but after that, I told Mum I'd stick to gangly freestyle dancing at the school discos.

It's just a matter of finding what you like to do. It's a shame, so many kids never get the chance to try out.

## MAKING SPORT COMPULSORY

One thing I don't like is how schools have taken out the compulsory nature of the races at the swimming and athletic carnivals. I hated going in these races. I felt awkward, shy and often came last.

My parents were there at the end to greet me, positively reinforcing how I should be proud of myself because I did not let my fear of losing or what other people think stop me from giving it my best shot.

It pains me to think children are losing these valuable lessons. The detrimental effects of helicopter parenting will be felt for a lifetime. My life has not been affected at all by being pushed into doing these races, in fact, the opposite.

My brother was an ace cricket player. Not just in his backyard dreams, but for real, making the Australia U 17's team, touring England, and playing all over Australia. I loved spending the summers with my family moving around the state to watch him play. I got to perv on his cricketing mates; we had a family holiday of sorts, and I was surrounded by a group of people who supported one another. I felt like I belonged to a much larger family.

My Dad is a cricket fanatic. Growing up, I resented it at times, but now I am older I understand. I am a travel fanatic; it's empowering to have a dream and an all-consuming desire. Something that gives you meaning and a place where you feel you can be who you were truly meant to be.

His love for cricket also taught me about perseverance and dedication. You show up for your dream. You learn from the masters, you practice, you play full out.

If you didn't show up and give your best, you give yourself a swift kick up the butt. If you did give it your all and failed, you take the time to work out why and do better next time. Or, if you did give it your all, and play in the zone when you can do nothing wrong,

then you accept your victory graciously and humbly. You pass the attention on to your team mates as you know you couldn't have done it without their help.

## A LIFETIME OF SPORT

I know perseverance pays off. I know a lifetime playing sports pays off. I've had amazing role models to prove that to me.

My father is in his seventies. He still plays cricket. In fact a few years ago, he finally achieved his dream—to play cricket for Australia. He tours the country representing his home region, his state, and his country in the elderly gentleman's team.

He looks 15 years younger. His face and body is youthful and fit and reflects a spirit worshipped through the strength of sport—physically, mentally, emotionally, socially.

I remember a few years ago when I was living in Raleigh, North Carolina. My hips were becoming a little plumper and my insides felt blocked. Excuses like no time, too tired, no money kept getting in the way of me enjoying one of my favourite sporting activities—the gym. Not the weights, but classes: running, jumping stepping out, dancing and yoga. When I was in Uni and time was on my side, I sometimes did two or three classes a day. I missed that vitality and joy.

A bonus fitness assessment came when I signed up. I knew I was in trouble. I had a few tasks to do and the trainer measured my working heart rate.

"You easily recovered back to resting heart rate. You're pretty fit."

"What? How could that be? I haven't exercised properly in about a year."

"Have you been sporty throughout your life?"

"Yes. I have always trained and played sport."

"That's the great thing about always looking after your body. If you are looking after your heart for your entire life then you raise its baseline each time. Your heart will always be strong. You might lose physical strength and feel a lot more exhausted once you start training again, but your heart will keep its baseline fitness no matter how slack you get."

I felt he had just told me the secret to a long and happy life. All we need to do from an early age is to play sport once a week and keep ourselves fit. The impact that has on our hearts for life is incredible.

We need to give our children this amazing gift. Without our health we have nothing.

## WHAT SPORT TEACHES US

There are so many sports to choose from. Therefore every single child has an opportunity to find one they like and are skilled somewhat in.

Apart from the health and fitness benefits look at all the life skills they learn in return:

- ✓ How to work as a team
- ✓ How to play to their strengths
- ✓ How to learn
- ✓ How to improve
- ✓ How to get up when knocked down
- ✓ How to be self-disciplined
- ✓ How to work to a goal
- ✓ How to never give up

Apart from teaching your child to read every night from birth, getting them involved in sport is the single best thing you could do to help your child develop—physically, spiritually, emotionally, mentally and socially.

# HOW TO HELP YOUR CHILD DEVELOP A HEALTHY MIND-BODY CONNECTION

When we are born all we have to rely on are our bodily sensations to give us cues for everything.

It's how our body feels which determines how we communicate and how we should respond.

As we get older, our mind starts to become more dominant, and we let it tell us how we feel and how we should respond.

This can lead down treacherous paths because it is our mind that tells us we should eat because we are bored or depressed rather than hungry. It also likes to ignore the things that make our body feel great. Instead, it focuses on those that satisfy our thirst for constant thinking.

We lose touch with our ability to feel and to work through pain, rather choosing to numb it. In burying our problems we end up hanging on to them as weighted baggage that affects so many parts of our life.

If only we just listened to our body, we would be better at letting our emotions pass through and move on, just like our babies do.

We also lose touch with our breath and those physical senses that tell us we are alive and shows us how to interact with the world safely and wholly.

As parents, we should be doing more to help our children develop a healthy mind-body connection - one in which they learn that to have a healthy mind you need to stay in touch with your body and how it is feeling. You need to use the physical cues to control how we think and act.

## MIND-BODY CONNECTION

Helping to develop a good mind-body connection is all about teaching your child to be fully present in experiencing the world through their five senses. And then connecting that to our feelings and as a result of that, our actions.

**Here are a few strategies:**

## STOP AND LISTEN:

When we are out in nature, I often take a moment to play stop and listen with Kalyra. *"Okay now be still and just listen. Tell me what sounds you can hear."*

## BREATHING:

It is amazing the control you can have over so many challenging aspects of your life when you focus on your breath. Have a five-minute morning routine where you do nothing else but deep breathing with your child. When they are stressed or in pain, help them relax with deep breaths.

## YOGA:

Your child is never too young to start Yoga. There are lots of great [yoga DVDs for kids](#). Yoga is all about mind-body connection. Teach them the downward dog at least, they love that posture and tend to do it anyway when they are babies. [Cosmic Yoga for kids](#) on YouTube is AWESOME (and free)

## QUIET TIME:

Schedule quiet time in your child's routine—even if it is only five minutes. Take away all the gadgets and stimulating activity. Teach them just to sit and be. Do it with them. This is helping them to learn the foundations of meditation--what I like to call the eighth wonder of the world and the secret to a happy and calm life.

## RELAXATION MUSIC OF AN EVENING:

I have a few [meditations CDs](#) I play for my children of a night when they are sleeping. The quiet sounds help them to find their calm space and relax into a peaceful night's sleep

## EXERCISE:

Like Yoga, there is no better way for your child to form a healthy mind-body connection than through regular exercise. It is through movement that they learn about how our body uses energy and how it makes us feel. Exercise is an excellent way to work out stress and feel revitalized.

## HOW DO YOU FEEL AFTER YOU EAT?

Have your children eat slowly and help them to pay attention to how they feel after it. Have them describe what their body feels like after different types of food. How do you feel when you are full? When they are hungry, don't feed them immediately. Allow them

time to process what hunger feels like. Eating is a process of stocking up our energy reserves not shoving food in our face because we are bored, lonely or sad.

If they have sugar and turn completely nutty, make sure they are aware of how the food is affecting their behaviour. Say things like, *"Look at how you are acting now. That is the sugar in your body. How is your body feeling after eating that sugar?"* Kalyra always wants to have a drink after she eats sugar; my response is *"Sugar makes you thirsty, which is why you need to drink so much water now. It dehydrates you and does not make you feel good."*

### WHERE ARE YOU FEELING YOUR EMOTIONS IN THE BODY?

What is happening when you get angry, joyful, and sad? Try to have your child look in the mirror when they are experiencing emotions. Sometimes it is the best way to snap a child out of a tantrum or distress because they look at their contorted face and wet eyes and laugh at how silly they look.

Help them to pay attention to their trigger points—*"I can see you are getting worked up now, how that is upsetting you? You are tired now. What can happen when you are tired?"*

### WHAT DOES YOUR GUT TELL YOU?

I am a big believer in allowing my children to make their decisions, within reason. Their growing independence can be challenging, but worth it in the long run.

Ask them how they feel about a certain decision. *Why do you want to make that decision?* Always bring it back to how their gut feels. *What decision is that telling you to make?* It is **VITAL** They learn this skill from a very early age.

*Your gut is the only voice you can ever trust.*

It's the source of knowing. Help your child base their decisions about how they feel, not what others think.



# TALKING ABOUT THOSE BIRDS AND BEES

There's not much I remember from my University days. I do remember the Sydney Harbour cruises held once a semester and the sumo wrestling competitions at our Uni social barbecues.

As for the lessons taught to me by professors, my mind draws almost a blank.

Except for one conversation.

We were stuck in a class discussing theories related to physical education. Usually boring compared to the physical lessons of touch footy, abseiling and kayaking, but this lesson we were talking sex.

My lecturer asked, "When do you think we should start teaching students about sex?"

Thinking back to our schooling we answered around Year 6.

"No," he replied. "You start from Kindergarten."

There was silence. I think we were all thinking the same thing, "Are you flipping crazy? There is no way I am going to be teaching five-year-olds about the birds and the bees."

He went on to explain, "Sex ed is about more than the actual act. Sure, you aren't going to be talking to kindergarten children about the act of lovemaking. That will come much later. But, you are going to be teaching them about respect and self-love, two very important values our children need to have a healthy attitude about their body and what they do with it."

Ahhhh, gotcha.

## EDUCATING ABOUT THE BIRDS AND THE BEES FROM BIRTH

Sex is a tricky topic that would make most parent's squeamish, but it shouldn't be. It's how we all arrived, and it's a far better topic to discuss around the dinner table than things like violence, which our culture seems to think is okay.

Ultimately, the best person to decide when your child is ready to hear the nitty gritty about sex is you. You know their maturity level and what they can understand. Be aware that in today's society, sex Ed is readily available for your child to learn about in all forms of media.

You want to ensure that you are the one giving the information and advice first.

## TEACHING A HEALTHY RESPECT FOR BODIES

Example is our best teacher, so always model a healthy respect for self and others. Foster and guide this within your children through your conversations.

Continually affirm (without frightening them with paranoia) that their private parts are theirs and nobody has the right to touch them without their consent.

Teach them to be confident and assertive. If someone is doing something they don't like, teach them to firmly state, "Stop it I don't like it."

If you are playing with them through tickles, wrestling or even cuddles and they ask you to stop, then stop. Demonstrate that they have ownership over their bodies and have a right to be respected. Ensure they are showing this respect to others as well.

Build your child's self-esteem by focusing on who they are, not what they look like. Of course, you are going to tell them how beautiful they are, but don't leave them believing that their value lies only in their outside appearance.

## COMMUNICATE AND SUPPORT

Keep open the doors of communication about sexual issues. When you feel uneasy about discussions or certain questions your children ask, say so. If you can't answer a question, talk through with your child about how you can find out.

Never make a child feel guilty or ashamed about any self-exploration they may go through. It's natural for them to be curious so gently remind them that it's a private act and allow them to explore.

You always want to be the first person your child turns to for answers, to discuss a problem, or for advice. The best way to encourage them is to value, listen, understand and support them from birth.

Support doesn't mean giving a child what they want just to make them feel good. It means guiding them to be the best person they can be, and being there for them even when they mess up.

## WHERE DO BABIES COME FROM?

As a child moves into double digit territory, they will start asking more questions about where babies come from. Use your good judgment; only you know what your child can comprehend or handle.

Don't lie; use the facts without attaching any emotion to it. Always speak of baby

creation occurring due to an act of love. We want our children to know love created them and life is a wonderful miracle. We want them to know that it is a special act reserved only for those who are our special partners.

## THE BIRDS AND THE BEES NITTY GRITTY

By about grade five or six, they are ready for their anatomy lesson. Most schools will be delving into the topic at this time. This is where they will learn all the stuff that sends your face red when you talk about it.

Many children at this age will be experiencing huge hormonal shifts as puberty hits. It is essential you talk with them about what to expect.

Discuss with your child about changes and the importance of accepting and embracing it. Celebrate all the good things about growing up. Let them know the physical, mental and emotional changes they will go through.

Ensure your child understands what puberty means. What is their life going to be like now?

Talk to them about safe sex, STDs, and the implications of being a teenage parent.

## FOCUS ON DREAMS AND EMPOWERMENT

The more you focus on your child's dreams and goals for life and what they need to do to achieve this, the more they will be aware of how decisions may affect and stop their dreams from happening.

If you have been raising a responsible child who is confident in making decisions, understands the concept of consequence, has a healthy self-image and respect for others, you will be in a confident position to trust your child to make the right decisions to suit themselves.

# TALKING ABOUT GOD

It doesn't matter what your religious affiliation may be, or even if you have one, I think it is important to talk to your children about God.

Each of us has a concept of what God means, and perhaps even a different term for it. For some, it is Allah, others Yahweh, or for those like me, the Universe.

To me, God means more than belonging to a particular set of rules and dogma. It's an energy that can't be defined or contained.

Looking at God from this perspective reminds me that we are all connected and come from the one source. It reminds me that I hold unlimited power within me; one I can call upon in times of trouble, to help others, or to just celebrate.

It also helps me to understand I am here with a particular purpose to serve for the greater whole.

These are complicated beliefs. It's not something we can experience through our five senses; it's a knowing that has to come from within us. It's a logic that can never be explained completely to the human side of our being.

How then do we explain this to our children? How do we approach this subject if we are not even sure if God exists and why should we?

## WHY SHOULD WE?

It's important for our children to know they came from somewhere special, are made from something special, and always have someone special to turn to.

It gives them a sense of purpose, a knowing that they are here for a particular reason and fit into a much wider interconnected community.

- ✓ To teach them that there are many paths to God and there is no right way.
- ✓ To teach them to question and think outside the box and beyond possibilities.
- ✓ To help them discover that God lives everywhere and can be named many different things and serve many different functions—all of which stem from love and joy.

- ✓ To learn respect, values, compassion, kindness, and consideration.
- ✓ To teach them how to believe and to believe in magic.

## HOW DO WE APPROACH IT?

- ✓ In our everyday conversations.
- ✓ In the kindness and compassion, we give to others.
- ✓ By teaching them self-love.
- ✓ Through stories, poems, songs, and discussions.

Kalyra has started scripture at school. As I am of no religious faith, I questioned as to whether I wanted her to attend the classes or not. As someone who was raised by strict Catholic parents, I'm kinda scared of religion.

My ideal would be that the school had alternate religious teachings—like I had seen at other schools-- and I could have chosen a different one each term for her to learn. I want her to see the different options available, how similar they are (in essence more so than practices) and to decide which one resonates the most with her.

But the school hasn't taken that giant leap yet, so I have to choose: Christianity or nothing. *Do I pretend it doesn't exist and draw her further away from the concept of God, or allow her the opportunity to learn, expand her mind and start to develop the ability to connect to some greater power and what she chooses to believe?*

I attended Catholic school right up to University graduation. I didn't hate God at all, and she didn't make me feel anything but safe and loved. But, I hated having to go to Church every Sunday and reciting prayers that were not my words and performing traditions that just did not make sense with the way I wanted to do things.

I loved God. I totally loved Jesus. To me, he was a person of total love and acceptance. He performed miracles and spoke to all people with words of wisdom and hope.

I still believe Jesus was one cool dude, much the same as I believe Gandhi, The Dalai Lama and Nelson Mandela all are.

People who inspire us to be better are everywhere. There's no reason why we can't be like them too, and I think, for me, by placing God way up there, I felt I could never be special enough so perhaps didn't try. I want my girls to know that God is not some unattainable being up there, but deep within. They are God.

I don't want to enforce my beliefs upon my girls, but I certainly want to start the path of her discovering. And I hope I can guide them towards that sense of empowerment and love.

Kalyra is enjoying her scripture lessons. The discussions about God and Jesus are happening and are enlightening.

I totally love Kalyra's new statement,

"Mummy I love you more than all the heavens. You know Jesus could love more than all the heavens."

"Yep. That is how we can all love. And I love you way bigger than the whole Universe too."

"Who is God Mummy?"

"Well, God is the thing that made all of us. It's the place where we all come from?"

"But who is he? I can't see him."

"God is not a he or a she. It's hard to think about because we can't see God we just have to believe she is there. God is everyone and in everyone. Who do you want God to be? Sometimes I see God in the sun, or in people, or even in the food I eat."

"I want God to be a tree."

"Oh, I love that honey. I think God is a tree. That is why we must always be kind to them. I always see God in trees. I see God in you too."

"Who is Jesus?"

"Well, he was a very special man, who taught everybody to be kind. All he wanted was to help everyone love themselves and love each other. So simple isn't it?"

"Do you pray to God?"

"Mummy talks to God all the time. I like to thank her for amazing things happening in my life, and if I have a problem I like to ask God to help me."

Like this, "Dear God, I hope Kalyra has a great day at school today. Can you look after her? Thank you."

She started, "Dear God, I hope it doesn't rain today so I can play."

"Dear God, this traffic light is annoying me, can you help me to be patient ... oh and

make it turn green?"

"Dear God, Can you please help Daddy to stop smelling."

We cracked up.

I pictured God sitting somewhere with his hands on her belly like Buddha and chuckling, filled with joy in knowing that the children are the ones that get him the most.

God is playful and fun, and real and sacred, high and low, black and white, sad and happy, and free to be and free from judgement.

A source of empowerment that is here to guide and support. It's the place of perfection we all come from and strive to return to when we serve our purpose.

This is my belief. This is my path to God--a path born from learning, from questioning, from experience, and from deep within me.

Know yours and help your child find theirs.



# HOW OTHER CULTURES CAN ENRICH YOUR CHILD'S LIFE

One of the main reasons I love to travel with my children is to expose them to other cultures.

I don't want to raise my children without giving them an awareness of how others choose to live. Without knowledge, comes ignorance and from ignorance, springs fear.

We are taught too much about stranger danger and not enough about the value each person holds, no matter where they come from.

Yes, we need to be always aware of 'stranger danger,' but we should never be fearful of someone just because they look or sound different, or act in ways that may seem strange to us.

As the Dalai Lama says,

*"When ignorance is our master there is no possibility of real peace."*

Why we would we want anything else but a peaceful world for our children? We need to help them understand that other cultures should be embraced, not feared.

## CULTURAL ENRICHMENT

Learning about other cultures will enrich your child's life. They get to try new foods; learn different languages; discover new ways of dressing, singing and dancing; and learn new ideas.

Australian children are very lucky. We grow up with other cultures around us, whether it be in our classrooms, on our TV through sport, books or the movies.

I admit I was shocked when I moved to the USA to live and teach. Many of the children (and, dare I say it, adults) did not even know where Australia was. The questions they asked, seemed ridiculous, but to them, it was their first encounter with a 'foreign alien' so how were they to know any different?

The program I taught in the States in was created to help American students develop global awareness. My role was, not just to teach, but to expose my students to Australian culture.

Every year we held an Australian exhibition; the rest of the school would visit, and we'd teach Australian games and slang words. They tried Australian food - seeing their reactions to eating Vegemite was worth all the hard work!

Because of this experience, my principal set up a global awareness program once I left. Each year the school chooses a country to study. They learn all about the culture and finish the year off with an exhibition the children created, similar to what we did in my class.

Now that is global empowerment, and the children were thrilled and passionate about learning.

Through my stories of travel, I noticed dreams begin to form in my students. One girl was determined to go to college and then travel the world after graduating, another had a thirst to spend time with the Masai warriors in Africa, and many were adamant they would visit me in the 'Land Down Under.' I still speak to many of them via the wonderful telecommunications available to us all today.

### PERSONAL, CULTURAL INTERACTIONS ARE THE BEST

Global education in the classroom is good, but nothing can teach more than having personal interactions with other cultures.

That is when you get to hear the voice and heart of others and recognise that they are truly no different to you. Our differences are quite superficial; our similarities are our essence, and that is the most important thing. When we begin to know and understand this more, peace will become our way of being.

I know this deep in my heart to be true. It is what I have experienced on my travels now for 15 years around the world.

I think of the misconceptions I had about other cultures and the fear that was present as a result of ignorance.

I'll never forget attending my first Muslim wedding. It was in a small village in Indonesia, and we were invited to go by some of the men who worked as hiking guides. I'm not sure if the marriage party wanted us to gate crash, but we did. I was nervous and scared walking up the dirt alleyway to the home; my ignorant fear immediately vanished with the smiles that welcomed us.

Could you believe it? They were laughing and dancing and celebrating just like we do in

our Australian churches and backyards. Since that moment, learning about other cultures has been the most magical part of travel for me. I have grown as a result of my cultural interactions and have formed many friendships across the globe.

Now I get to see that with my children. My heart wept with joy recently when we visited a traditional Vanuatu village. A fierce warrior welcome greeted us upon arrival, which made Kalyra's eyes round with fear. It soon turned to curiosity and gentle smiles when she saw they were friends.

They learned about their customs and way of living. They heard the laughter in the voices and watched as they hugged their children. And then my baby Savannah had an interaction with the Chief's granddaughter, which had us all spellbound with the pure love and innocence of it.

Interacting with other cultures from an early age smashes all barriers of fear and ignorance and teaches us our hearts are the same.



## NINE WAYS YOU CAN ENCOURAGE CULTURAL INTERACTIONS

It doesn't always have to be about going to another country. There are ways to have these cultural experiences here in Australia.

1. What cultural classes can your students attend in the local area? Samba dancing? African drumming? Karate?

2. If you know about another culture, volunteer to speak to your child's class and share what you know.
3. If you can travel overseas, then do so and ensure that your child interacts with the locals on your travels and gets to know more about the culture. Encourage your child to share their experiences upon return to school.
4. Watch programs on TV. Forget the dramas and the TV crap, turn to those educational documentaries. It is my experience as a teacher that children LOVE documentaries. They love to learn and are fascinated by the world.
5. Look for cultural shows you can attend in your area or when on holidays in Australia. We recently went to the Yanguwah cultural show on the Gold Coast, which taught so much about Aboriginal culture. My daughters loved it.
6. Eat at multicultural restaurants. Head out for Thai, order Chinese takeaway or have an Italian night at home. Help your child savour the exotic from an early age.
7. What festivals are in your local area? Every year our town holds an Italian festival, filled with good food, music, dancing and Lamborghinis. It's a great way to learn more about a different culture.
8. If there are many different nationalities in your child's school, encourage them to befriend different people. Arrange play dates. Talk about each other's culture, find out what is the same and different and celebrate both.
9. Watch the words you model when talking about different cultures, particularly what they believe and how they practice traditions. Use this mantra that has helped open my mind to embrace a wonderful world: It's not better or worse, it is just different.

# WHY YOU NEED A VILLAGE TO RAISE A CHILD

I am sure you have heard this ancient African proverb,

*It takes a village to raise a child.*

When you visit countries in Africa and South East Asia, you see how this upbringing benefits the child.

It's not easy in the West to raise our children in this way. We are mostly on heightened alert. We constantly monitor what our children say or do for fear of judgement and criticism by the person next door.

We hear this judgement constantly through our media and backyard conversations:

Parents quick to judge others to make themselves feel just that little bit better about the way they are doing it, and to try and appease their guilt and concern.

A better way of thinking, one that is more beneficial to our children, is to use the eyes of compassion and understanding.

I am just like you and you like me. My struggles are your struggles, so I understand you. I know that each of us are doing the best we can. We have days when we can be awarded the 'Super Mum of the Year' award and others when we get to wear the "Who let me become a mother?" hat.

Instead of judging and condemning we should be reaching out.

## THE BENEFITS OF A VILLAGE RAISING A CHILD

It lets our children know they belong to a greater community

On a trip to Thailand, I adored watching how the locals interacted with our children and helped to raise them.

Instead of judging me when I was about to lose my inner strength, they came and swooped the girls in their arms, told me to sit and rest while they chased them around the restaurant and played.

They guided them and set boundaries as well as filling them with love. My children were wide-eyed and giggled with the comfort of knowing that everywhere they turned there was an Auntie or Uncle to love and care for them.

We don't need to go about our lives feeling separate and alone. Communities of supportive, encouraging people surround us.

### SOMEONE IS ALWAYS LOOKING OUT FOR OUR CHILDREN

I think the more our children are raised by the village, the safer they feel. They know there is someone they can turn to for help.

It takes away a lot of need and reliance on one or two people and gives them the courage and confidence to step outside the comfort zones just that little bit more.

It was in Thailand that I noticed Kalyra step way outside that protective circle we had given her. She felt safe with the village around her. She'd march up to the service desk—alone to order a drink. She'd jump out of cabs and run around to the driver to pay.

She always knew she was going to receive a smile, an encouraging pat, a hand to hold, a person to laugh and play with, and maybe even some change in return!

### THERE IS STRENGTH IN HAVING DIFFERENT GUIDES

As much as we like to think it, we don't know everything.

There are people in our lives who are much better at child rearing than us. There are things they understand better than us. We can learn from them.

I used to hate having to turn to other people for advice. I felt like I was a failure, which I had to know everything. What a joke!! Why put that pressure on myself and think I have to be that special? Now I turn to my parents, my in-laws, family members, friends and strangers to help me know what to do!!!

It's wonderful for our children to have different guides. They learn about perspective, many different approaches to solving a problem, and that the Universe provides us with an unlimited amount of resources to help get direction. It also helps them to know they don't have to have all the answers and not to be afraid if they don't.

### IT TEACHES YOUR CHILDREN NOT TO BE AFRAID OF STRANGERS

What??? Stranger danger alert! We have to make them fearful of strangers.

No. There is a small minority of bad people in the world. Of course, we need to teach our children caution and how to read others. As they are developing these stranger danger radars, and understanding how people interact, we have to be watching and monitoring.

If our children fear every stranger how can they develop the ability to listen to their intuition that speaks very clearly when real danger is around?

I feel the far greater danger lies in teaching our children to be fearful of other people. If we have that village raises the child mentality, our children will know that for every bad person there are hundreds more looking out for them and wanting to help raise them into strong, happy adults.

We can have beautiful exchanges with strangers. Think of every friend you have; they were once a stranger. It is with these exchanges that we learn the world is indeed beautiful and every person is so much more similar to me than different.

### WORDS TO REMEMBER:

It is because of fear that we judge, it's because of judging that we hate, and it is because of hating that we hurt.

## HOW CAN WE BEST BE THE VILLAGE?

Being the village that raises the child is simply looking out for all children. Giving a helping hand, an encouraging word or a reminder of how to be kind to themselves and others.

It's about always coming from a place of love and support, never judgment or scorn, or speaking out to make a parent feel small.

It's always what is best for the child.

Thanks to my years of teaching, I feel looking out for children that are not my own comes quite naturally.

I rarely walk through the school playground when I drop Kalyra off to school without asking a child to stop running, to comment on their broad smile, or remind them how to be kind if I see something that speaks the opposite.

I don't do it to be a controlling teacher, but because I am used to looking out for children and caring that they are safe and being kind.

I do the same in playgrounds. There was a group of children arguing in the playground the other day. I had no idea where their parents were, and I was not worried. If we have a village raises the child mentality, the parents don't always have to be watching and monitoring every move. They can have a quick conversation with someone or have a five-minute brain check out time--helping each other to manage.

So I set to work trying to settle the dispute. It was about being kind and loving to each

other, and thinking of solutions as to how to play nicely. One child commented about the others boots being on the wrong feet.

“Well, that’s okay! He can still walk well in them. I used to put my shoes on the wrong feet when I as learning too. I? Am sure you did too.” The wrong-footed boot boy was wielding a sharp stick so we spoke about how it can be a little dangerous, and it might be a great idea to put it down. In the end, the children began talking and building volcanoes together.

You have to be thinking of the children and the greater good, i.e. to raise as a society of people who care for each other.

Be prepared for parents to get their back up if you step in somehow. I have found if you are doing it from a place of love rather than judgement rarely will they care. They will be happy for the support.

How can we show this? By a smile and encouraging word. Something like “No worries. I know how tough it is. We’re all here to help each other. My child drives me bonkers and does the same.” Be kind and gentle with their children and find something wonderful to praise them about. The parents will love you for it.

Crack a joke. Share a story of how much you struggle yourself. “This is bloody hard work hey?” Let them know you are a friend, not an enemy.

If someone steps into help with your children, don’t get defensive, relax and appreciate the help, the care, and the concern. If you are struggling, don’t be afraid to admit it or frightened that someone noticed it. It’s perfectly normal to struggle as a parent and to stuff up.

How wonderful it is to known we have a supportive village to help us get back up again while our children are loved and cared for by many?



# YOUR CHILD AND SCHOOL



# WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR YOUR CHILD'S EDUCATION?

Parenting is tough. No one can ever prepare you for the demands that arrive 24/7 the minute the nurse places your wriggling, screaming baby into your arms.

Often you feel as if you might topple into insanity if you don't just get a five-minute peace break. The weight of the responsibility can be hard to carry.

But as parents, it is our job to carry it. Always.

It's easy to think that once school rolls around, we can drop part of that responsibility and hand it over to the teacher.

We breathe a huge sigh of relief; that's one less thing I have to worry about now. Perhaps I can get my five-minute breather.

We hope our children will go to school and they'll learn to read and write, develop physical skills, learn about the world around them and form strong friendships.

We'll help them with their homework and check in once a week to make sure they are happy and learning. We'll feel safe that the teacher has everything covered and we can continue to have one less thing to worry about.

It's my experience teaching around the world that the majority of teachers are exceptional and work above and beyond what is required. They believe passionately in education and helping the whole child in their care to prosper.

Except they are only one person. One person who has excessive demands placed upon them and has to find a way to manage this and educate up to 30 people.

It's a tough gig.

It means that as a parent, you can't check out. Ultimately you are responsible for your child's education, just like you are responsible for every other part of raising your child. You can't hand that responsibility over; it is too much of a risky move.

Besides, learning is a life-long process. It does not start with the school bell at 9 o'clock and finish with a race out the gates at 3. It's always happening. And most of the time it is happening as we participate in our life experiences.

So as parents, it's up to us to facilitate learning:

- providing those life experiences
- following the lead of our children's curiosity
- nurturing our child's dreams
- providing opportunities to develop their talents
- reading to them every night
- asking them thought-provoking questions
- teaching them about money
- helping them to make a decision
- asking them to solve their problems
- teaching them how to interact with and respect others.

It is up to us to monitor their formal education as well: discussing their school day with them, helping them with homework, allowing them the opportunity to practice their new skills, maintaining an effective parent-teacher relationship, following up with any concerns and following through with any suggestions made by your child's teacher.

As parents, we are first and foremost the sole educator in our children's life. Don't ever hand that responsibility over at the school gate.

# THE SINGLE BEST THING TO HELP YOUR CHILD'S EDUCATION

It's probably a given that every parent wants their child to do well at school. Too many parents think they have to wait until the child's first day at school for the learning to start.

With an over-packed curriculum, large classrooms, and too many challenges for a teacher to manage, relying on schools to do all of the teaching is a very risky decision.

As a parent, you are the most important educator in your child's life. You can take control of your child's learning from home and birth.

The single best thing you can do to help your child's education is very simple and will take no longer than 10 minutes a day.

## **It's reading to your child.**

Avid readers may be shocked to learn that it's not uncommon for a child's first experience handling a book to be their first day in Kindergarten. This creates a gap that is almost impossible to fill during the schooling years.

Reading is the most important skill your child will need to be able to participate in society effectively. It forms the basis of almost every other task, and without having the skills required to be an efficient reader, the gateway to acquiring knowledge becomes almost closed.

If you start reading to your child from birth, not only will they become aware of the role of language and storytelling, they will also be learning how to be a fluent reader and how to engage with a text for meaning.

Most importantly, they will develop a love of reading, and when you have a love of reading, learning becomes so much easier.

Your child may not know how to read the words before they start school, but reading is so much more than knowing which word is what. By following the tips below, you will have best prepared them for a lifetime of reading and learning.

## TIPS FOR HELPING YOUR CHILD READ

I have followed all of these tips with my daughter from birth. Obviously, the younger they are, the less time you will spend, but even if you only get 30 seconds of attention it is better than nothing.

## RAISING PRINT AWARENESS

Print awareness is the understanding of how books and print works. Let your child hold the book and turn the pages. Show them the way words flow and follow the words with your finger as you read them left to right. Point to words like 'ball,' and then show them the corresponding picture, so they learn to understand that written words are labels.

Point to signs and explain what they are and what they are telling us. Read menus with them and then let them choose their food from 'reading' it themselves. When we go to a restaurant, Savannah will grab the menu, run her fingers over the words and then select the cheese sandwich.

## LETTING THE PICTURES TELL THE STORY

You will be using picture books with your children until they are about 7-8 years of age. Allow them to tell you the story by using the pictures alone. "What's happening on this page?"

Using pictures is a very important part in helping a child learn how to read words.

Look for patterns or hidden messages in pictures and talk about them with your child. Use them to help predict the story,

"Oh, look he has a sad face. Can you see in the picture why he might be sad?"

If you read a sentence that says *Jim had red hair*, ask your child to point to Jim in the picture.

## READ ALOUD: FLUENCY AND EXPRESSION

Reading aloud to your child is the most important activity for building the knowledge required for success in reading. Reading aloud helps children learn new words, learn more about the world, learn about written language, and see the connection between spoken and written words.

They need to hear your fluency in reading and your expression. Don't be shy to change your voices for the different characters and be sure that you are intonating for questions and full stops, and pausing after commas.

Now and then, read a sentence with the incorrect intonation and correct yourself.

"Oh hang on. That had a question mark there. That means I need to read it differently. Let me go back and do that again."

## THINK ALOUD: UNDERSTANDING HOW TO MAKE MEANING

It's amazing how many students I have taught who are fluent and expressive readers, yet they are not proficient readers. They are not proficient because they have no idea what they have just read. We call it, barking at print. There is no point being good at reading words if you have no idea what the meaning and purpose is behind the words.

Thinking aloud when you are reading to your child will help them develop those vital comprehension skills.

When we engage with text and work to understand them, we are constantly thinking about the text in our minds. You now express those thoughts to your child. Express the thoughts that help

- ✓ Clarify anything you are confused about
- ✓ Predict
- ✓ Put clues together to work out the meaning
- ✓ Make you think about things
- ✓ Connect what you have read to your own life.

Here are some 'think alouds' to help you:

*I wonder....* (I wonder why he is feeling so sad)

*Hang on let me go back and check that; I'm confused...* (I thought Sheila was telling the story, but the word *he* tells me it is a boy, I must have read something wrong)

*Oh I think I know what is going to happen next...* (Explain why you think this using the clues from the text)

*I like how...* (Gina held Timmy's hand to cross the road. That tells me she cares for her little brother)

*That reminds me of....* (Oh I remember the time your Daddy brought me red roses, it was when you were born)

## PREDICTING AND ASKING QUESTIONS



Before your child can read the words, involve them actively in the reading process. As you are reading and thinking aloud, ask them questions,

“What does this remind you of?” “What do you think will happen next?” “If you were Sue what would you do?” “How do you think dinosaurs became extinct?”

This lets them know they can participate in reading as well and help them to understand deriving meaning from text is an active process.

## REPETITION

Read the same books over and over again. This helps them to understand the world of books and language better and then they will be able to apply it when they open a new book.

After you read the same books repeatedly, they will get a greater sense of rhythm and rhyme. Soon they will be able to read the book to you (not by reading the words, but by memory and understanding) When they read it back you should hear the expression and rhythm in their voice.

If you have been modeling correctly, you will also hear their voice change for different characters. It is truly a special experience to hear your child read a story to you. Your heart will burst with pride and joy.

## WORD RECOGNITION

Help your child start to learn the basics of word recognition. Talk about the letters words start with, and ask if they can guess the word. Use the pictures to help. Read a sentence and leave off the last word (if it is a repeated book that has rhyme, they should be able to fill the gap).

Do this with one word at the end first, then start to leave off phrases, words from the middle and words at the beginning.

## BE THE MODEL READER

Let your child see you reading every day in different scenarios and with different text types.

Tell them things like:

*Mummy is going to have some rest time and curl up with my book. I love this story I am reading now because...*

*I am not sure if I know the answer to that, I am going to read a book on it now to find out.*

Go to the library or bookstore together and let your children see your enthusiasm for books- fake it if you have to.

Always show them that reading is a pleasurable experience that gifts your life with so many treasures.

By following these reading tips with your child every day, you will be laying the foundations for them to become proficient readers. Because of that, learning just got a whole lot easier and a lot more enjoyable for your child.



# LEARNING IS A PROCESS, NOT A RESULT

Results, results, results.

We live in a world which bases our achievements on numbers and comparisons with others. As parents, it's hard not to push those quantitative measurements onto our children.

Of course, we want them to be the best.

But the best in compared to what?

Others? Or compared to themselves yesterday?

It is far better to encourage our children to be the best they can be, rather than encourage them to win a race against others.

It does not matter if your child is at the top of the class or excelling in every subject. It's not about pushing; it is about allowing them to grow to their optimal.

Results are important; they give us a baseline and help us to see where we are at and where we need to go. But, they are not the ultimate and the only tool we use to determine how successful our child is, nor should they be used to compare them to others.

*"If you compare yourself with others, you may become vain and bitter, for always there will be greater and lesser persons than yourself" Max Erhman*

## TEACHING FOR RESULTS ONLY

I taught in the States for four years. It was a system heavily focused on *The Test*. We were forced to focus our teaching instruction towards the one test at the end of the year. The test results determined the child's growth and ability. It did not take into account the work they did throughout the year, nor their creative thinking ability.

If we did not get our students to pass the multiple choice test, the school might not reach the targets required for funding. The pressure on teachers and students was immense. It broke my heart to hear my students often say, "Why are we learning this; it's not on the test?"

Instead of ensuring each child understood one concept before moving on to the next, we raced from one to the other to cram in as much as possible before the test. Worst of all, many lessons were focused on teaching the students how to take a test and circle the boxes on the electronic sheets.

That was when I decided teaching was no longer for me. I wasn't interested in pushing students who weren't ready to rote-learn concepts just to produce the required results. I was sending grade five children to middle school, who did not know their multiplication tables, but knew how to bubble a sheet and take a pretty good guess at an answer.

No wonder they struggled with division and more complex algorithms.

## LEARNING IS A PROCESS, NOT A RESULT

It is essential our children master the fundamentals of reading, writing, and arithmetic.

Once they have those fundamentals in place, it is far easier for them to move onto the more complex procedures. If they don't, they'll get stuck in the pile of learning mire with no desire to get out.

We certainly don't make our babies run before they have learned to crawl, but that is exactly like what is happening with many children's formal education. And it's all because of the race to produce a measurable result.

An essential component of a child's learning and growth is their ability to think for themselves, to solve problems, and think creatively. These are the processes we should be focusing on helping our child master, not tests and results.

The education system hasn't quite worked out how to effectively measure this yet. Schools need measurements. Many schools do a great job of teaching the higher order thinking skills, rather than purely focusing on test results and grades. But, sadly many don't.

It's up to you to be the number one educator of your child. You cannot ever pass that responsibility onto someone else.

## MASTER THE FOUNDATIONS AND THOUGHT PROCESSES

- ✓ Allow life education to occur in your home. Give your child plenty of experiences in which they can absorb the world around them and be curious about it.
- ✓ Read to your child every night from birth. The older they get, the more you involve them.

- ✓ Allow them to answer their why questions. Encourage creative thought.
- ✓ Have them solve their problems.
- ✓ Help them make their own decisions.
- ✓ Ask their thoughts and opinions and ensure they explain why they think so.
- ✓ Ask very important questions like, "What would you do if you were in that situation?" "What do you think would happen if we took this tree and planted it indoors?"
- ✓ Make numbers an exciting element in their life. Talk about them and give plenty of concrete examples. "You've built three sandcastles. What if we build two more, how many will we have?" Simple, quick teachable moments, which will help them grasp basic concepts.
- ✓ Don't push your child to the next concept until they are ready. Be patient. Everybody learns at different rates and find different things challenging. It does not matter if they might be a little slower than the rest of the class in grasping a concept. What is important is they do. If you move them on too quickly the mud will swallow them.
- ✓ Allow them to play and imagine a lot.
- ✓ Give plenty of concrete examples. It is from picking things up, moving them and playing that they understand the foundations. Once mastered, move only to pen and paper. For example, pick up five beads, add six more and then count how many altogether.
- ✓ This may seem unusual but praise mistakes. It's vital that your child understands the power of a mistake – it's one of the best learning tools we have. Kalyra is quite the perfectionist and gets upset if she makes a mistake.

My response to her is always, "That's awesome Kalyra; now we have a chance to work out what went wrong and learned how to do it better. A mistake is one of the most powerful ways we learn. Don't get upset about it. I love mistakes for what they teach me."

Having a fear of failure and making mistakes is crippling to a child's growth and desire to chase dreams. It's important to change their perception of it so they can live up to their potential.

- ✓ Go over tests with them, and ask them to tell you how they solved the problems and what were they thinking at the time. Work through incorrect responses and

help them to see their mistake and how they can fix it. Don't just give them the answer; this will not help them learn.

- ✓ Don't compare their test results to others. Compare them as to how they grew from the last test to this one. So if the last one they got 40% and this one they got 50%, it still might be below average, but there is cause for celebration because they improved.

Similarly, if they got 96% on the last one, but only 85% on this one, they are still above average, but they slid backward. (Always allow for bad days, but you won't discover this unless you discuss with your child how they were feeling on the day, what their efforts were like, and any challenges they had.)

Always understand that while our children, may not be the gifted scholars, they may be gifted in other areas such as the arts, sports, creativity and people skills. Knowing they have the foundations in place, gives them greater freedom to thrive using their special talents.

# EIGHT TIPS TO HELP PREPARE YOUR CHILD FOR SCHOOL

By now parents around Australia, particularly those with Kindergarten children, are settling into the routine of life at school.

I'm a first time school Mum, and I am finding being on the other side of the school fence a completely different experience to all my years of teaching. In some aspects, it is making me wish I had done things a little differently as a teacher to help new mums feel more at ease with the transition.

I'm eagerly awaiting school notes, so I know what is going on. I'm holding back myself from handing in my schedule of when I am available to volunteer (whether the teacher needs me or not). I wish I had a welcome note, so I know of Kalyra's daily routine, class rules, and curriculum outlines for the terms.

None of this is all that important - they are more my teacher control issues. What is important is that I have done the best I could to prepare Kalyra for this new adventure and I will continue that preparation throughout her schooling life. My job as the most important educator in her life does not end with that first day of school.

Here are eight important tips to help prepare your child for school.

## 1. TALK ABOUT WHAT TO EXPECT

Spend weeks leading up to school talking about what your child can expect. I like to do it on the weekend as well, preparing them for Monday.

Discuss what they will be learning about the next week. Do they have any thoughts or questions on the topic already? Discuss routines and procedures. Talk about rules and why we follow them. Let them tell you what some good rules to follow would be.

## 2. INVOLVE YOUR CHILD IN PREPARATIONS

Let your child help plan for the week ahead. Follow their suggestions on what they would like to eat. Create a menu plan together. Talk about what tools and materials they need for the upcoming week. Pack together each evening and ensure they have everything they need for the following day.

### 3. ENCOURAGE INDEPENDENCE AT HOME.

Help your child learn how to dress themselves, tie up shoelaces, undo lunch boxes and containers, use pen and paper, write their name, clean up after themselves, and do simple household chores. (My Kalyra has just started vacuuming= happy mummy.)

### 4. BE AS INVOLVED AS YOU CAN IN SCHOOL LIFE.

Attend P&C meetings, volunteer in the classroom, drop off and pick up your child, interact with other parents and chat with other children. Wear a huge smile and show your children you love school just as much as they should. Attend any information evenings and always read your child's school notes.

### 5. PROVIDE AMPLE SOCIAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUR CHILD

Interacting with adults as well as children outside of the school setting is important for all children. Model good social behaviours for your child, the use of manners and to respect others. Discuss with your child proactive and positive ways to deal with confrontation and work towards peaceful solutions.

### 6. READ TO THEM EVERY NIGHT

From birth, read to your child every night and continue this practice throughout their schooling. As they become more independent readers, they can have their own quiet space and time for reading each evening. Ensure you are providing adequate learning experiences through play and life experiences such as cooking, using money, and asking thought-provoking questions.

### 1. HELP YOUR CHILD WITH THEIR HOMEWORK

Ask your child what they learned through the day and what they thought about it. If they are learning the letter A, then talk about words that start with this letter and the sound it makes throughout the week.

### 8. ALWAYS SPEAK ABOUT SCHOOL IN A POSITIVE WAY

Get excited about it. Tell your child how much fun they'll have and what a wonderful opportunity school is to learn and grow. Speak positively about the teachers. If your child complains about their teacher, stop them by asking them to say one good thing they love about them. Always focus on the good. The more comfortable and happy your child is in school, the more they will learn and the more they will achieve.

# WHY GOOD PARENT-TEACHER RELATIONSHIPS MATTER

Once your child turns five, you'll be pass over the responsibility (a large chunk of it) for their education and well-being each day to another person.

Throughout your child's schooling, their teacher will be helping them learn the vital skills necessary to become an effective member of society.

It's not just about teaching the 'three Rs,' their duty of care extends to ensuring your child eats their lunch, has friends to play with, learns how to co-operate, develops physical skills and solves a multitude of problems.

You are the first and foremost educator of your child and the most important person in their world; the second most important is your child's teacher.

Five days a week, 11 weeks a term, four terms a year.

Having a healthy relationship with your child's teacher matters. Here are some tips on establishing a good parent-teacher rapport, right from the beginning.

## ESTABLISH THE BOUNDARIES OF RESPECT AND RESPONSIBILITY

Never talk bad about your child's teacher in front of them. I can't believe the number of times I hear this happen. I want to scream, "Please don't do that. You're giving your child the wrong message."

Firstly, we should be teaching our children the concept of respect for elders and respect for authority. If you speak badly about your child's teacher in front of them, you are saying that these things don't matter.

Trust me; your child will take this attitude into the classroom. As a result, they will not listen to the teacher or follow their directions. It has happened to me as a teacher over and over again.

Who gets hurt here? Your child. Their learning suffers, their concept of respect suffers, and other children in the classroom suffer.

Yes. There are times the teacher is wrong or is not doing their job correctly. However, to continue to teach your child the importance of respect, approach your concerns from a

different angle. Approach from the angle of responsibility

"Teachers have a difficult and stressful job. They will make mistakes just like you and me, and I know deep down they are doing the best they can. This doesn't mean you don't listen to them or follow their directions and show them the respect they deserve. Let's think about what you could have done or can do from now on. How can you make this situation better? How do you think your teacher was feeling at the time?"

Show your child the responsibility he/she has for their learning and growth and that no one will influence this as much as they.

## MANAGE PROBLEMS CALMLY AND RATIONALLY

If you have a problem with the teacher, take it up with the teacher. Don't talk about it with other mothers at the school gate in the morning.

Don't take it up with the principal or other teachers (unless you feel you have exhausted your options to speak with the teacher first).

Approach the teacher from a 'let's work together' angle, rather than immediately being on the defensive or, worse, going in for the attack. You and the teacher must work together to come up with solutions that benefit your child. Arguments will not help anyone. If you need to take a couple of days to cool your jets, then take them.

When you discuss the issue with your child's teacher, calmly express your concerns and why you feel this way. Listen to what the teacher has to say in reply.

Be open to understanding different points of view and understand that your child might not always be the angel you hope they are. (I know. Can you believe it?) We all make mistakes, even our children. Acknowledging our mistakes means we can make a different choice.

Work with the teacher to come up with an improvement plan or solution to the issue. Implement with consistency and back each other up.

If your child has been in the wrong, discuss it with them. Make your child accountable and work together to help them do better next time. If the teacher has made a mistake, I guarantee, if you have this calm and logical approach they will make amends for it.

## COMMUNICATE FROM THE BEGINNING

Many of the issues that arise in school are due to a breakdown in communication. You can prevent this by opening up the lines of communication with the teacher from Day one.



If you wish to speak to your child's teacher about an issue, always organise a time to speak, either by phone, email or letter.

Grabbing them at the door in the morning or afternoon means you are just interrupting the time they need to devote to the students. They are trying to get a class settled or have a million things they need to do to wrap up the day.

It only takes one minute of teacher distraction for a class to become unruly and lose their focus for an entire day. At the end of the day, they are exhausted and may just need space to process the day.

Set up a communication folder/book. A lot of schools will already have this, but if yours doesn't perhaps you can suggest one yourself. Simply ask your teacher to jot down any issues or problems in your child's homework planner each night. You can easily write your questions in there as well. If this is too much, ask for a weekly paragraph in the planner or immediate contact if anything is pressing.

Attend parent/teacher evenings and interviews. This will give you the opportunity to stay in touch with your child's progress and to discuss any issues or concerns.

Read all school newsletters and notes. Check your child's bag each night as they like to squash them in and bury them.

At the beginning of each term ask your child's teacher what the topics of learning will be. This will help you to know how to help your child at home.

Always let the teacher know if your child is experiencing difficult times, at school or home. Don't be embarrassed - anything you say will be with confidence. It can help the teacher to know any reasons behind why a student may be acting differently.

Understand that your child is not the only child on a teacher's priority list. They are one person responsible for up to 30 children. Be considerate of their time.

## HELP YOUR CHILD'S TEACHER

Teachers have so many expectations and roles to fill. Their workload is ginormous and the pressure can be huge.

You might not be able to give them a foot rub each afternoon, but how can you help?

Perhaps you can volunteer in the classroom, mark homework, cover books, and supervise on excursions. Think about the skills you can contribute. Maybe you have a passion for cross stitch and can teach the children a lesson. Talk it over with the teacher; they will LOVE your help.

If you are in the position to help, you may be able to assist your teacher by supplying any materials they may need in the classroom. I loved the 'wish list' concept every school did in the US. Parents would bring in some things from tissues to pens, books, cardboard, and even money to help a teacher buy supplies.

I even had parents who would help cover the cost of any other students who could not make excursions due to financial constraints. I know many will say this is the responsibility of the school and I completely understand, but budgets to supply a classroom are low and more often than you think, the teacher will dip into their own pocket. Trust me; their wages are extremely low compared to the work they do and the important role they have in your child's life.

Anything that helps your teacher teach, helps your child.

## BE FRIENDLY AND NICE

Greet the teacher with a smile and ask them how their day is. Let them know you are on their side and appreciate what they do.

You don't have to buy presents (although we do love wine and chocolate). Maybe just a hand written note thanking them for all the hard work they put in every day.

A simple thank you, and a smile goes a long way. I don't know how many times I wanted to hug a parent for this alone.

## BE AN ACTIVE PARTICIPANT AND SUPPORTER

I'm sure every parent struggles to find the work/life balance they crave. Throwing school into the mix can make this even more chaotic. It is not easy to show up to school performances and award nights or to volunteer in the classroom.

As always do the best you can from where you are. Try to attend at least one event at the school every year.

Ensure you are supporting and being active at home. Ask your child how their day was, what they learned, how they might improve, how can you help. Support them with their homework, even if you don't agree with the concept, your help shows them that practicing and extending is an important part of learning.

Ask if there are any problems. Communication helps you stay on top of any issues so you can deal with them ASAP. It is very hard for a teacher to solve a problem if they learn about it a month later.

Always find a way to praise your child's teacher. You'll find these moments if you talk

with your child about their day and what they are learning. Your child wants you to like their teacher and get along with them. Show them that you do.

A healthy parent-teacher relationship matters. In my 15 years of experience teaching around the world, the most effective learning experiences were when the parent, myself, and the child had a relationship based on mutual trust and respect.

It's a team effort.

# WHY I THINK HOMEWORK SHOULD BE BANNED

Homework. Blah. I hate it.

If I could make the rules, I would eradicate it.

Why?

Because it is a drain, it bears little relevance and produces tiny results compared to the horror it lays upon everyone.

Let me explain my thoughts carefully and then present an alternative homework plan.

## THE DRAIN ON TEACHER RESOURCES

From my experience as a teacher, homework takes a good 15 minutes out of my teaching time every day (Yes, with an over-packed curriculum this is a LOT).

And this is just the follow-up.

Where's your homework? Why haven't you done it? How could you let the dog eat it? Have you got a note from Mum? Why is it so scrunched up that I can't read it? Do you think you could write neater, I can't read it? Why have you missed all these questions?

"I didn't know the answer, Miss. There was no one to help me. It's been ages since Mum and Dad have done trigonometry, they had no idea. I had sports practice. Mum had to work late. I was so tired. What's the point? I couldn't be bothered. The dog ate it."

Back and forth, back and forth.

I also don't have time for the marking of homework with all the correcting of the student's work during the day (That's four subjects times up to 30 kids)

Don't forget the planning, recording, reporting; individualised learning and behavioural programs; extra-curricular activities and meetings; and phoning Sue's Mum to ask why she won't do her homework, begging her to please follow the school rules -whether you find it pointless or not.

Ugh.

## THE DRAIN ON STUDENTS

But moving on from the gigantic pain it is to teachers, what about to the students?

The drain on student's motivation and ability to take in yet another thing

They have sat still in their seats all day (okay, so maybe that is a stretch), often learning stuff they have no interest in.

They've practiced discipline, good manners, concentrating, staying on task, listening, speaking and knowing when not to speak, walking in a straight line, and putting their heads down to work, work, and work.

If they finish all their work -sometimes with great difficulty - and make good choices they will have two blocks of up to 40 minutes for outside play. This is after they sit down for 15 minutes to eat.

When the bell rings at the end of the school day, their brains are fried, and they are exhausted.

Imagine coming home after a restrictive full day at work, to more of the same: work.

I think you'd also be unmotivated, frustrated and have a severely limited ability to think straight.

You'd be mad because all you want to do is go outside and run off some steam with your mates; play with your barbies and toys; practice the guitar you are so talented at; or go to Little Athletics because you have a dream to be the fastest runner in all of Australia.

But you can't do that because the next day at school your boss will have her stern face on and her finger wagging because you put your dreams before work.

(Honestly, the teacher doesn't care either, she is just wagging that finger because she has been told to.)

## THE DRAIN ON FAMILY TIME

I'm guessing you see your child for an hour maybe before school and then when they return home?

It depends on your work and their extra-curricular schedule, but it couldn't be much more than a couple of hours. In that time there is cleaning, cooking, and showering, which doesn't leave much room for family time.

That little bit of time you have left is gifted to homework.

Battles ensue, and you feel frustrated and annoyed that you can't have quality time together after a long day. All you want to do is cuddle, talk and enjoy each other's

company.

You remember how much you hated homework and how pointless you thought it was. You battle to keep this quiet, so your children learn to follow the rules.

We are giving away precious time with our babies for homework. Something that comes at the end of the day when they are tired, overworked, unmotivated and struggling to find the relevance - probably the number one thing that helps us to learn.

But what about practice and study for a good education?

Discipline, good practices, and study are essential components of becoming the best person you can be. Of course, we need these elements to learn, but why can't it be about what our children want?

I guarantee when children start to pursue their dreams and own curiosities, learning will become easier and more enjoyable. It will just be a natural by-product, and they will flourish.

The sheet of paper that has them writing out the definition of a conjunctive verb won't do much for them. (Thank Christ, you say, because you don't even know what that is. It sounds like a festering eye disease...)

What I outline in my homework project below teaches children how to live a happy, balanced and fulfilled life.

## THE NEW HOMEWORK PROJECT

When do we give ourselves time to breathe and enjoy life?

My new homework project is all about making this a priority.

"You have a new project for homework tonight and every night. It's called '**Play, Follow your Dreams, and Let Yourself Breathe.**'

"From now on, you must spend every night talking with Mum and Dad about anything you like; playing with what you love; doing a few helpful chores; taking one step towards making your dream a reality, and then sit in a quiet space on your own, close your eyes and breathe.

"I'm not going to check to see if you have done it because I believe you will."

Stay tuned for Part 2 next week when I offer helpful tips in helping your child with the homework that has not yet been banned from schools (Bummer, you mean we have to do it, after all, that? *'fraid so!*).

# HOW TO HELP YOUR CHILD WITH THEIR HOMEWORK

You know if I ruled the school, homework would be banned. My opinion on that still stands, BUT for now, I'm afraid, homework is the real deal.

We can't just throw it in the rubbish and refuse to do it that; would be irresponsible. We need our children to understand sometimes they just have to do what is required of them whether they like it or not (and then we silently pray that soon the powers from above will change the rules).

There are plenty of ways in which you can make homework a more pleasant experience for your child and yourself.

The more your child embraces learning as an ongoing life education, the less they will struggle with their homework, and the quicker it will take. In fact, they may even learn to enjoy it.

## HOW YOU CAN HELP WITH YOUR CHILD'S EDUCATION

Yes, parents, your children do need to be learning at home.

This is a given and should be happening from the moment they are born. It is not something that is done from 9am-3pm Mon – Fri and then for 30 mins of an evening during [argument](#) homework time.

If you follow these guidelines with your children, you shouldn't ever have to worry about homework.

### 1. READ WITH YOUR CHILD EVERY SINGLE NIGHT FROM BIRTH.

Make it a special night-time ritual. Inspire in them a love of reading.

### 2. INVOLVE THEM IN EVERYDAY MATH'S' ACTIVITIES.

Randomly count things, cook together and talk about volume and amounts, talk about length, speed, and all the math's concepts that are a part of your life.

### 3. FOSTER A LOVE OF LEARNING AND A CURIOSITY OF THE WORLD.

We all know the constant why questions children have; they drive us nuts. Quit complaining about it and think about the alternative - a life of school homework they can't do. Tell your child what a great question it is, *"I like your thinking," "How can we find the answer."* They are asking you questions about their interests and want to learn the answers- ah, now we are talking about a good school system!

### 4. DON'T GIVE YOUR CHILD THE ANSWERS.

Encourage your kids to think of the solutions for themselves. Even if their solution is not great, tell them you love the fact that they are thinking of a way to solve a problem and then give guidance as to how it could be solved.

### 5. ENCOURAGE YOUR CHILD TO FOLLOW THEIR DREAMS AND LIVE THEIR PASSIONS.

Do not make them miss their practice and their dream-following for homework (I did not say that!). Find a way to make it work. Encourage them to believe, take action steps, and you walk the dream with them.

Children will forget the homework, but they will never forget how you inspired them to live their dreams and how you taught them to be thoughtful, inquisitive, intelligent, independent, and creative human beings.

It all comes down to learning from life. Nothing will prepare them more for it.

## TIPS FOR HELPING YOUR CHILD DO THEIR HOMEWORK

### 1. HAVE A SET TIME FOR HOMEWORK

I suggest either as soon as your child arrives home or just before dinner, after their play time. You know your after school schedule and how your children best work.

### 2. HAVE YOUR CHILD NEAR YOU

Even if you have to cook and multi-task, having your child close by means you are available to help when needed.

### 3. HAVE A SNACK READY

Have a glass of water and a healthy snack at the table ready for them. Help them get the homework and all the supplies they need out of their bag.



#### 4. GO THROUGH THE EXERCISE WITH THEM

Set a timer for the completion of each section. If they get stuck, work through it with them, encouraging their thinking to solve the problem each time. Be patient.

#### 5. GIVE THEM A BREAK

If they are struggling, give them a break. If they are really, really struggling, make a note to give to the child's teacher that they need more help. You should never have to teach your child their homework; it's meant to be a practice of concepts learned at school. Communicate with your child's teacher if this is a problem.

#### 6. REWARD THEM FOR A JOB WELL DONE

Give your child a reward for completing the homework. This could be a simple sticker, a stamp, or a high-five and a hug saying how proud you are of them for finishing.

# HOW DO YOU HELP YOUR CHILD WITH THEIR NIGHTLY READER?

The nightly reader. It's enough to give you the night terrors.

What do you do with them?

The nightly reader shouldn't put you in a panic. It's a lovely time to bond with your child, see their reading growth, and get an inside look into how they learn.

The purpose of the nightly reader is to help your child get used to the conventions of reading, use repetition to develop decoding skills and fluency and to develop an appreciation and enjoyment of reading.

Nightly readers are short and sweet and usually shouldn't take longer than 10 minutes. They are picture heavy, and words and phrases are repeated throughout the book. This helps children develop familiarity with words to learn how to read them.

## HOW TO HELP YOUR CHILD WITH THEIR NIGHTLY READER

Make a special time for reading with your child away from distractions.

Be relaxed, interested and supportive which helps your child feel safe to make mistakes and take the time to work it out.

Before reading, talk about the cover, the title, and the pictures, and discuss what the book may be about. Connect to something relevant in their life. For example, if there is an egg on the front cover talk about the time they visited the farm and saw hens.

It's important that the nightly reader is the time your child reads to you. Remind them to point to each word as they read it and to look at the pictures to help them.

As you are reading, you can ask them to pause and ask them to predict what will come next. There is not a lot of predicting that can happen with these short, repetitive texts but you want to get them in the habit of thinking about what they are reading and connecting to it. You only need to do this once or twice.

If your child is enthusiastic, or you feel they need another practice, read the book together one more time. Or, let the other parent hear how wonderfully your child

reads.

Always praise at the end of the reading. Avoid saying things like *good job* or *lovely reading*. Say exactly what you liked:

*I really liked how you used the pictures to help you discover the words.*

*I loved your expression when you read that book.*

*You are getting so good at using the final sounds to help you read the words.*

## WHAT DO YOU DO IF THEY DON'T KNOW HOW TO READ A WORD?

It's so important that you allow your child to figure reading out themselves. If they come to a word they don't know, use the following strategy to help walk them through it.

### **Pause:**

When your child comes to a word they don't know, try not to jump in straight away. Wait and give your child time to work out the word.

### **Prompt:**

If your child successfully works out the problem word, suggest they go back to the beginning of the sentence and re-read it (to recap meaning) before reading on.

If your child has not worked out the problem word, prompt them with some quick, low-key suggestions. Say things like:

"Try reading on for a sentence or two, miss out the difficult word and see if that helps you to work it out."

"Look at the sound the word begins with, use that clue, and think about what may make sense here? Look at the pictures."

If they guess the word and get it wrong, but have initial sounds right, ask them to pay attention to the final sounds in the word.

e.g "Look at the sound at the end, does it make a *n* sound. What sound does it make? *"t"* right. Can you try that word again?"

If prompts like these are not working, simply tell your child the correct word. Try not to spend too much time prompting, as your child will find it difficult to maintain the overall meaning of what they are reading.

**Praise:**

Praise your child's reading efforts and successes.

# HELPING YOUR KIDS SHARE THEIR NEWS AT SCHOOL

Your child is excited; tomorrow is the big day—his turn for "news" at school.

Your enthusiasm does not quite match; you dig into the cupboard trying to find something worthwhile for him to show, you even contemplate making a super-charged robot, or freshly baked muffins for him to take in and share around as a distraction.

But, then what would he say? And what if no one listens? Will taking in his patched up old Teddy do?

Put down the anxiety and take a deep breath. News is not that difficult or worrisome, in fact, it's one of the most exciting parts of your child's week at school.

It's when they are in the spotlight and can finally share what they've been dying to tell with every arm-raise during the math's lesson they are not paying attention to.

"Wait until news day to share it, Jimmy, can you please just now tell me what number comes after 5." The exasperated teacher can't wait until news hour either!

## THE IMPORTANCE OF NEWS TIME

News time is one of the most important parts of your child's early learning.

We know how much you hated getting up in front of the class to talk about your life but think about how often as an adult you have to talk and listen.

You cannot escape it: family functions, social gatherings, work meetings, community gatherings, lectures, and general conversation.

Our children need to learn from an early age that they have something worth sharing and other people have something worth listening to.

The earlier they start, the more skills they will learn and the more confident they will be to talk and listen when they are older.

Let's help our children learn these essential communication skills by starting with some tips for getting news time right!

**Be aware:** News time is for the littlies, so don't stress out or go too over the top. But do your best to lay solid foundations for their future.

## WHAT TO SHARE

Sometimes you may have the problem of your child having too much to share. Fantastic!! This will help you to teach them how to choose. Discuss it with your children. Think about the following:

1. **WHAT IS RELEVANT AND INTERESTING TO THE AUDIENCE?** Eating dinner with the family is probably not that relevant and interesting unless you had a runaway dog burst into the house, jump on the table, snatch Dad's steak and bolt back out the hole he put through the door.
2. **WHAT DO YOU FEEL MOST PASSIONATE ABOUT SHARING?** Dinosaurs are usually a lot of small boy's passion, and they could seriously talk all day about them. Well, that's awesome and what you want them to share for news. (Just follow the tips below, so they don't bore their audience with too many facts!)
3. **WHAT DO THEY KNOW A LOT ABOUT?** They may be passionate about dinosaurs, but can't say much other than, *"This dinosaur is cool. I fight my brother with it."*
4. **WHAT EXCITING, UNIQUE, NEWSWORTHY THINGS HAVE HAPPENED THE PAST WEEK?**
5. **WHAT COOL THINGS CAN YOU SHOW THAT WILL WOW THE AUDIENCE?**

**Note:** Often the class teacher may have a theme for the week, to help guide the children (and check off those curriculum requirements). It's a great way to focus your children and to help them learn how to create a talk around any topic. You will have to discuss what fits best with the theme and how to make it interesting

For young children, it's best to have something to show if you can. It's a fantastic prop to help them stay focused and remember what to say. It was easier to remember the "show" part when news was called "show and tell" back in our day, right?

## PREPARING TO PRESENT THE NEWS

The best thing you can do to help your child share their news is to prepare them. Every Thursday afternoon, Kalyra and I prepare for her Friday news time.

We go through the above questions. She picks her topic or item to share, with help from me.

Then I ask her what she is going to talk about. The more they own the talk, the more

they'll remember. But, you help them out. Point out interesting features or great talking points.

Then practice.

Have your child say their news using the right format:

"Good morning boys and girls."

(You be the boys and girls and reply "Good Morning" in that slow, sing-song way classes all seem to.)

Prompt your child with what to say next. Guide them, so they are clear, and it flows.

It's important while they share their news that you are the model listener: maintain eye-contact, smile, and nod your head.

Allow for question time - ask them some questions to prepare them for question time at the end of their news. Make this as fun or as serious as you like.

Encourage your child to stand up straight, be still, smile, and look at the audience.

Give feedback at the end, "I really liked how you shared this part... I did find it hard to hear you sometimes because you turned your head and spoke to the wall."

Practice this every week. You'll be amazed at how their confidence will grow. They will not feel so nervous speaking in front of the class because of your practice sessions. Help them banish the attack of the red face from an early age (trust me, this is important —I was a major sufferer of face burn!).

They'll also love this one-on-one time with you.

## HOW TO BE A GOOD LISTENER

News is just not for sharing, but an opportunity to develop listening skills.

Go over what being a good listener is with your child.

What does a good listener look like?

What does it sound like?

What does it feel like?

Talk about how it feels when someone listens to us and how exciting it is to hear what

others say as we learn so much and get to know them better.

Practice listening. Have your child practice their news and don't listen: play with your shoes, sing a song, talk out loud, and roll around on the floor. Talk about how that made them feel.

Your turn: you talk and let your child listen. Stop in places and say "I love how you are looking at me with your eyes... You are sitting up so straight I can tell you are listening well."

## ASK QUESTIONS AT THE END

A great strategy I did with my students during news time was, as the child was sharing their news I would write sentences on a piece of paper about what they said with words missing. For example, Sally went to the \_\_\_\_\_ on the weekend.

We would then read the sentences together as a class after News, and they would have to fill in the blanks to show what good listeners they were. The news sharer then kept the paper and drew a picture under it as a memento.

## HOW TO ASK GOOD QUESTIONS

This skill takes a lot of practice. You will have to remind your child what words a question starts with.

Who, what, when, where, why, are, do, can? Not, tomorrow I am going, I have one of the same, I like potatoes...

Remember too, that it is best not to ask the same question Mary Beth asked, so you must be listening to all the questions and answers as well.

Discuss some great possible questions.

## AFTER THE NEWS

When your child arrives home on their news day, ask them all about it with lots of excitement.

Did you love it? Were you nervous? Excited? What did you say? Did you get lots of questions? Any silly ones? Were you a good listener? How did you know? What did you learn?

Do you love news day?



# HOW HEALTHY FOOD HELPS KIDS LEARN

Science has proven over and over again that food plays an essential role in how our brain functions as well as our body. Food affects kids' memory, attention, and cognitive skills. The underlying cause of many behavioural issues can often be traced back to what is put in the body.

As a teacher, I know the effects food choices can have on a student's ability to learn.

Party time and birthday cakes were always a fun addition to the classroom. You'd sit back and watch the chaos slowly unfold once that sugar hit. You could count out any real learning happening for the rest of the day.

Choosing the right foods gives our children a much better chance for learning and growth.

## FOOD CHOICES FOR BRAIN SMARTS

### BREAKFAST

There's only one thing worse than sending a child to school on an empty stomach, sending them full of sugar.

You would be surprised. Choose your breakfast cereals carefully, as most are full of sugar.

#### **Great breakfast ideas to boost brain power**

- ✓ Porridge topped with blueberries or bananas
- ✓ Toast with Vegemite, or peanut butter, or better still avocado
- ✓ For an extra brain boost, cook eggs - our brain loves the protein. Supercharge that by serving it with greens: spinach or kale with mushrooms and tomatoes (stir fried in coconut oil)
- ✓ Juice - make it freshly squeezed juice with more vegetables than fruit
- ✓ Green smoothies sprinkled with LSA (Linseed, sunflower, and almond meal)

### SNACKS

- ✓ Cheese

- ✓ Sunflower seeds and pumpkin seeds
- ✓ Natural Yoghurt (no added sugar)
- ✓ Fruit: mostly berries, oranges, and peaches
- ✓ And do not forget vegetable sticks. We always want to be eating more veggies than fruit
- ✓ Homemade muffins - make them low in sugar and high in vegetables and fruit. Throw in some chia or flax seeds and sprinkle the top with pepitas
- ✓ Look for low-sugar treats like raw chocolate balls or cakes that use raw cacao but not sugar
- ✓ Olives make a great snack
- ✓ Nuts are so full of good fats and nutrients and are perfect brain food. However, there is most likely a nut ban at school, so ensure you follow these rules and save the nuts for a snack at home. Sprinkle some on morning cereal, in yoghurt, or in smoothies

**Avoid:** chips, processed and packaged food, and white bread - they make the brain want to slumber; think heavy and stodgy.

There is no reason why we can't allow our children a treat. What is the definition of a treat? Every now and then. And it is best to leave it for the afternoon.

## LUNCH

It's hard to be inventive with sandwiches. Kids want something quick and easy. If your child is like my daughter, they don't want to be too different.

- ✓ Use multi-grain or wholemeal bread and choose healthy fillings: salmon, cheese, salad, chicken
- ✓ Try wraps for something different
- ✓ Or for the adventurous mums, make sushi, pasta salads or use left-over dinners

## DRINKS

- ✓ You can't beat water for re-hydrating the brain and helping it think clearly. Forget the juices and the milk. Pack water or coconut water.

**What about tuckshop orders?**

If you need to order food from the tuckshop, follow the above guidelines. It is better that you pre-order, including snacks, rather than give your child the money. They may not make wise choices, and they may lose the change.

Fill lunchboxes with colourful, nutrient-dense, brain food. Your children will thank you for it on the day they walk out from school with a healthy brain filled with all they need to know to live a happy life.

PS - Eating healthy is also not as expensive as you think. We have recently pretty much cut out all processed and packaged food from our home. Our focus is on fresh, whole foods. Due to health issues, I am now gluten-free and 90% sugar-free. The first few weeks of readjusting my pantry cost a little more than my regular grocery bill, but now we have settled in, I am noticing a significant drop in my costs. My energy levels and general well-being have shot up in the opposite direction.

# WHEN IS MY CHILD OLD ENOUGH TO CATCH THE BUS?

It was the end of the second week of school. We were driving home when Kalyra said it.

"I want to catch the bus home."

My chest tightened, "No darling. You're not old enough to catch the bus. Mummy and daddy will take you to school and pick you up."

She was not happy with the answer, but I was not going to budge.

I pictured her climbing the stairs of the bus balancing with her backpack so her small frame wouldn't topple over. I saw her timidly walking down the aisle past children bigger than her to find a seat.

Of course, she would plonk herself next to the school bully and be tortured the whole way home. She'd be so distraught she'd be unaware of where she was and miss her stop, while her mother frantically waved outside chasing the bus down the street with pleading screams to "Stop the bus."

My child gone forever.

That was probably my real problem.

Does the bus represent the bridge to that land when our children are, in a sense, gone forever? When we have to accept that they are not babies anymore and no longer have to rely on us for everything?

It's scary passing that responsibility over to them. It's terrifying having to let go. But we cannot hold on forever just for the sake of our needs.

When do we allow that time to arrive? When is my child old enough to ride the school bus?

Kalyra had the same reaction when she pleaded with her daddy to ride the bus.

"You don't have to ride the bus; we can pick you up. You're too young."

"I'm not too young." The tears began to cloud her eyes. And I saw her desperate need to claim her independence.

I know that feeling well.

It made me stop and think. What daughter am I trying to raise? One who can't think for herself and has to rely on me for everything, or an independent child who can competently solve her problems and have confidence in who she is?

Why was I then not allowing this to happen by letting my fears get in the way of her catching the bus?

Letting go will always bring fears and we will start to see the monsters we can no longer control: accidents, mean children, pedophiles, getting lost, loneliness and fear.

But are they there? Is it helping our children to base decisions based purely upon imagined demons?

## WHAT DID I KNOW TO BE TRUE?

I caught the bus when I was in Kindergarten. I had my elder brother and sister with me, but I still caught the bus. I'm still here and have no memories of any problems. I have also taught many Kindergarten children who caught the bus to school and home again. I know how thorough teachers can be in ensuring they get to their bus okay of an afternoon.

If Kalyra catches the bus, I'll be there to put her on and collect her so that she won't miss her stop.

There are no members of the public allowed on the bus so I can remove my fear of child kidnapping molesters being on there.

There are bus monitors and a bus driver who can keep an eye out to make sure she is safe.

I asked around, and there were other Kindy children riding the bus too, so I am sure she will have some friends.

I also know that she has had a wide variety of life experiences. She's confident and worldly and has had no problems catching planes, trains and buses around the world. She'll buy her ticket herself and hand the money over to strange taxi drivers with a smile and good use of her manners.

Allowing her to catch the bus would be a great way for her independence and confidence to grow, and I want that more than anything.

Giving her that means letting go for me in many ways. And I think that is the scariest thing of all - accepting that your child is growing up and no longer needs you for

everything.

I spoke with her about riding the bus - a proper conversation where I listened to what she wanted and why. We spoke about how she would be all on her own and would not have mummy or daddy to greet her when she walked out of the classroom. She'd have to find her way to the bus and remember where to get off.

We spoke about what a big responsibility it was, and she was okay with it.

So we made a deal. When it was time to ride the bus, I would ride it with her for the first couple of weeks until she was confident to do it herself.

But, there would be no riding the bus until I felt confident that she was responsible enough.

That meant I needed to see certain behaviours at home: cleaning up after herself, managing her tiredness and resulting tantrums, and being nice to her sister (we've had far too much pinching lately.) I think it is good to teach our children that if they want to have the responsibility and independence of a *grown up*, they need to demonstrate these characteristics in all aspects of their life.

When I feel confident in her ability to do this, I'll know she'll be ready to catch the bus. And we are not too far off. I think by Term 2 both of us will be ready for this gigantic step forward across the bridge.

# HOW TO PREVENT BULLYING AND WHAT TO DO IF IT HAPPENS

The [latest statistics](#) show an increased incidence of bullying in our schools, which is horrifying.

Schools should be a place our children can go to learn and feel safe. Society should be a place where we all feel safe.

But it is not. I'm not sure that enough is being done to deal with the problem. There are policies and discussions, and systems in place, yet bullying continues to escalate.

Bullies attack those who are vulnerable and different, so they feel more powerful.

Therefore, the simple solution would be then to raise empowered children - those who have a healthy relationship with their power and energy, so they don't feel inclined to steal it from others.

It comes down to self-love. It's every parent's priority to raise children who love themselves. Those who have their cup full of love can spill it over on to those who enter their path.

Our schools are not doing enough to combat bullying because they are trying to deal with the symptoms. Putting rules and systems in place that further imprison people. True liberation comes with self-love.

Teach our children to love themselves. Teach them to believe in their goodness and the power they hold within them to live their best life and practice kindness.

To many this may sound so Utopian and unrealistic.

Why do we think that? Why is it so difficult to think we can't teach our children self-love? They are born not really knowing anything else. They come from love.

We love them to an unexplainable depth the minute they are born. We need to show our children they are beautiful and important, even when they mess up. They need to know they can make a difference; they can learn and grow, and when things go wrong for them they can turn to their inner strength for guidance, they can turn to mentors and a source of higher power. They don't have to steal it from others.

I try to spend every day building this foundation for my daughters. But, I know they will meet people in their life who have no self-love and so don't know how to show it to others.

I also know that my daughters will mess up and hurt someone else. We have to teach our children how to handle the hurts and how to do better, so they don't negatively impact another person's self-esteem.

Bullying is not a one-off mistake; it is the consistent persecution of another. So, until my Utopian world exists, what can we do if our children are victims of bullying?

1. **HAVE CONVERSATIONS WITH YOUR CHILDREN**. Help them to know they can come to you for anything. You must keep those channels of communication open.
2. **PUT THE POWER ON YOUR CHILD**. If my daughter tells me something another child does to her, my first statement is, *"Did you say: Stop it I don't like it?"* They must believe they have the right to say this.
3. **TALK THROUGH THE INCIDENTS WITH YOUR CHILD**. Be open to hearing all sides of the story including the possibility your child is not innocent.
4. If you believe your child is being bullied, speak with your child's teacher to discuss the issues.
5. **HAVE A STRATEGY PLAN IN PLACE WITH YOUR CHILD**. Discuss all the possible solutions to the issues.
6. **IS YOUR CHILD PLACING THEMSELVES IN THE LINE OF FIRE?** I have seen it over and over again in schools. A student will be having difficulty with another child, yet they will continue to try and befriend them. They must stay away from the attackers. Help them to see they are not their friends and they don't need them in their life.
7. **HELP YOUR CHILD TO BUILD STRONG RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER CHILDREN**. They only need one or two good friends. Arrange play dates and talk positively about the relationships they are developing in school. My teacher radar was on and detected troubles ahead with a relationship my daughter was developing. I subtly encouraged the relationship with another girl in class who I knew was gentle, calm and kind. It wasn't long before they became the best of friends. It's a loving, happy relationship and there are none of the problems present in the other friendship.
8. **DISCUSS 'FRIENDSHIP' WITH YOUR CHILD**. What makes a good friend and why? How can you be a good friend? What can we do if we argue with our friends? What can we do if we see someone not being a good friend to others?



9. **WORK ON BUILDING YOUR CHILD'S SELF-ESTEEM.** Think about self-defense classes. We all know about Karate Kid--that stuff works. Self-defense teaches more about discipline and inner strength than it does using your hands as weapons.
10. **WHY IS YOUR CHILD A TARGET?** I know this is extremely hard to contemplate. I've been here myself. It's the best way we can help our children. Bullies will pick on those who are vulnerable. It's the only way they can get power. It's so important to think why your child could be vulnerable and then work on strengthening that. This doesn't mean changing your child. They could be vulnerable merely because they are different. You want them to continue expressing the beauty of their difference with confidence and self-love. This is a very difficult thing to do when peer influence is involved.
11. **TEACH YOUR CHILDREN TO BE INDEPENDENT THINKERS AND TO STAND UP FOR OTHERS AND FOR WHAT IS RIGHT.** A lot of bullying occurs within a group—people following the so they won't be singled out. We want our children to feel confident enough to be the leader that says no and demands the fair and compassionate treatment of all people.
12. **BE AN OUTSTANDING ROLE MODEL.** Bullying is not just a school issue; it occurs in every aspect of our society. Use kind thoughts and words to those who cross your path, so your children learn through your modelling.

# THE PROS AND CONS OF BEING A SPORTS STAR AT SCHOOL

I have called upon the wisdom of my hubby, Craig Makepeace to write this post.

It was my high school graduation assembly. Every student from year 12 was called on stage and given a certificate by the Principal who read out their future aspirations.

"John plans to go on and study computer programming. Zoe hopes to get her Bachelor of Teaching degree. Steven plans to work in his family run furniture business."

Soon it was my turn, except, I wasn't there. I was representing the school at the Rugby League State Championships.

Friends told me what happened when the principal said: "Craig wants to be a professional Rugby League player." The crowd responded with a groaning noise that implies the message "err good on ya hero!"

It hurt, and I was relieved I wasn't present for the ceremony.

The negatives of being a sporting identity

Australians love to find a way to cut down or ridicule anyone who has success and my biggest challenge was having to deal with the 'Tall Poppy Syndrome.'

My first recollection dates back to my primary school days. I was known as the fastest runner in the school, and the kids would often hold sprinting races in the quadrangle during lunch. I didn't want to participate for fear of standing out and getting cut down.

There were many other instances where I shied away from events or contests for fear of standing out. You even go to the extreme of not giving your best so that you don't win, so that you aren't put on a pedestal -a decision that is only detrimental to your success and growth.

Sometimes it was hard to focus on the academics side of schooling. Being absent on tours and at carnivals made it difficult to stay on top of school work, and with football being my passion and number one focus I wonder how I would have fared academically if I applied myself without the distractions. And [when my football career ended prematurely](#), I sure wished I had. I just didn't know what else to do.

There were many students who looked up me, which made me feel good and maybe I received a little more respect by some teachers. But I often wondered if they ever noticed any other qualities, and wanted to know the real me, or just looked at my sporting abilities.

And then there are those who dismiss knowing you because they have this perceived image of you. My wife--who lived in the same town but went to a different school-- tells me that she often thought I was just this football jock and so never bothered to give me the time of day. Sure glad she came to her senses-- can't remember how I charmed her with that first conversation!

## THE BENEFITS OF BEING A SPORTING IDENTITY

There were, of course, many benefits to being a sporting identity at school.

While other kids my age were working at McDonald's, I was getting paid to do something I loved and would have done for free. I often travelled on tours, and we were well looked after off the field as well.

I got to skip classes to attend training sessions and games. And I was often picked first for teams during PE lessons.

Oh and I think it also meant I got more attention from the girls-- no complaints there. What 17-year-old would?

## HOW TO MANAGE BEING A SPORTING IDENTITY

Being a sporting identity can be challenging, but you have to hold your head high and remain true to your talents and your passion. You won't reach those goals if you don't keep pursuing them no matter what anyone else says.

I think it is important to remain grounded and have a close circle of friends who know the real you. They won't let you get a big head, and they'll help you feel normal.

You need to remain humble and grateful; you're having a different experience of school, one that is centered on your passions and talents - that is so unique and something to be grateful for. Use the opportunities that come to you well as there are many others who would love to be in your shoes. I think your peers will respect you more when you make the most of your talents while maintaining a sense of humility and friendliness to everyone.

# TEN WAYS TO SUPPORT YOUR CHILD'S LEARNING AT HOME

Yesterday, Kalyra received her first school certificate for excellent progress in reading. I glowed.

The level of her reading astounds me; she is not only decoding words well, but her voice is expressive and somewhat fluent. She understands the conventions of reading and so has a very solid base to help her quickly learn semantics.

I am a big believer in the power of reading to your children every night. Through my years of teaching, I could quite easily see the children who have been raised in this environment and those who had barely even touched a book.

The most important teaching work is that done within the walls of your home. And it must be started from birth, not from the moment your child brings home their first homework task.

Create an environment that loves and supports the learning process, and you will raise lifelong, enthusiastic learners (battle won). Here's how to do it:

## 1. READ TO THEM EVERY NIGHT

I'm not sure I can ever stress this enough. I've taught so many children whose first experience holding a book happened on their first day of Kindergarten. They were miles and miles behind the other students. Plus, it is a wonderful, quiet moment of imagination and fun to experience with you child.

## 2. MAKE THE EVERY DAY A TEACHABLE MOMENT

Think of how often you use maths, reading and science concepts every day. It's there in the clouds, in the dinner bowl, in the signs, in the environment around you. Ask your children questions, answer theirs, involve them in cooking, shopping and solving problems. You will be astounded with what they can do and what they learn. Small, simple things go such a long way. We learn best by doing, and they have the greatest chance of doing by experiencing life as it is.

### 3. BE PATIENT AND LET THEM DO IT

I know how tough this is, especially when you are in a rush, but make an effort to pause and take an extra five minutes to allow your child to do the task themselves. Let them brush their teeth, get dressed, sweep the floor, climb and down the stairs, draw the pictures, try to read, or sound out their writing words. Empowerment is the best way to continue a lifelong pattern of learning.

### 4. BE THE ENTHUSIASTIC LEARNER ROLE MODEL

I LOVE learning, and I am sure I pass on a positive attitude to growth subconsciously to my children. **Kids learn by imitation** (You know it! You hear your words come through their mouth sometimes and you inwardly shudder!)

Show them how to be a good and passionate learner: be curious, patient and optimistic; persevere through challenges and think aloud your approaches to problem solving; get excited by your achievements.

### 5. REDUCE TV TIME

We all know the dangers of too much TV. There's nothing wrong with it in small doses and at selected times of the week. Excessive TV time steals away moments of lifelong learning and parent interaction. Seriously consider the effects of putting a TV or computer in your child's bedroom (i.e., don't do it.)

### 6. PLAY MORE GAMES

You've shut off the TV; now you can hit the board games. Board games are fun, they are a great way to spend quality time together, and they are full of learning.

### 7. DON'T FORGET DAD'S INPUT

Traditionally mums have been the ones to help out with homework or volunteer at the school, but Dad's encouragement and support is also vital. Dads love it, and the kids adore having this more personal interaction in a different way. They will care more about learning when they know both parents do.

### 8. FOCUS ON PROCESS AND GROWTH NOT RESULTS

Results are an important measure for how we are growing, but it is not the only way. What is far better is to focus on the learning processes and improvements. So when you child comes home with an 86% on a test, but you wished it was a 90%, focus on the applied effort and how it improved from the last test. You can then discuss how you could make it even better next time.

## 9. CUSHION THE CRITICISM

We can't always hide our children from criticism; they do need to know the areas in which they have to step it up. But, if you start with the criticism they will more than likely close their ears. So start with a positive statement, then deliver the criticism (in a constructive way) and then end with another positive statement. That way they know you love and care for them and are helping them to improve.

## 10. CREATE PROJECTS TOGETHER BASED ON INTERESTS

Run with your child's interests. This doesn't happen much in schools. The students are learning what is set out in the curriculum, not necessarily what they want to learn. It's up to you to enhance that for them.

Create little projects around their interests. If they love flowers, design and build their small garden in the backyard. If they show keen artistic talents set up a little art room and create projects they can do. If they want to be a doctor, bring them to your next visit and have them ask the doctor questions. Learning just got so much more exciting. Our Kalyra loves to create vlogs, so we turn on the webcam and let her go. She's hilarious, and we have so much fun watching them back together.

# 20 TRUTHS I KNOW ABOUT EDUCATION

1. Learning is a life-long process that has the child at the centre of it. Foster a love of curiosity and learning in your children and they will never stop.
2. Education needs to nurture the gifts and talents of each individual.
3. Education starts first and foremost with parents. Parents have the ultimate responsibility to ensure their children grow into adults who can function effectively and happily in society (or their version of it).
4. Education is not just about passing a test and getting good grades. Education is the development of the whole self: physically, emotionally, intellectually, socially morally and physically.
5. Positive reinforcement is the best way to mould a child's behaviour, BUT it is essential that we teach children to understand that all actions have a consequence and allow them to experience that consequence, so they learn to do better next time.
6. The best way to critique a child is to sandwich it between positives; it lessens the blow and opens their ears to listen. They'll respect you for appreciating what is good about them and will be eager to do better.
7. Schools may not always be the best way to educate our children. Don't rely on it as the only method.
8. Education around the world is in desperate need of reform to fit with today's way of thinking and living.
9. Teachers are overworked, underpaid and under-appreciated.
10. The best lessons for your child come from life experiences. Do your best to give your child experiences in the wider world.
11. The single best way to help your child get a good start with education is to read to them every night from birth.
12. Bring education into your home: talk about money, measurements, computation, language, rhyming words, songs, arts, craft, and sports.
13. All children have a unique personality and learning style, tailor activities, and

lessons to suit that.

14. Part of achieving means taking risks. Children need a supportive environment that allows them to feel safe to do so.
15. Children need to be actively involved in their learning. Rote learning is not education.
16. Children will learn more if they can follow their passions and curiosities.
17. The best way to have a well-managed classroom is for the children to help set up the rules and procedures. This accountability will help keep them on track to maintain what they created.
18. Children learn best when they work cooperatively. Sharing reaffirms what they know and listening to others helps them to learn new ideas.
19. The 'why' is more important than the 'what.'
20. Children will learn more from what you model rather than what you teach.



# RESOURCES

These are some of the best resources for life and school learning that I use frequently. You don't have to be homeschooling your children to use these. They are excellent programs and games to help reinforce skills learned in the classroom in a fun and interactive way.

Disclaimer: Some of the links may be affiliate links, which means I may earn a small commission should you decide to purchase using the supplied link, at no extra cost to you. That helps me cover the costs of providing free content on our site and in ebooks such as this. Please note I only recommend products I like, use and trust myself.

## 1. READING EGGS

[Reading Eggs](#) is one of my favourite resources for skill based learning.

We used it all the time in school, and it's the core foundation of my Reading and Math's instruction for Savannah (my youngest and beginning reader) I also use it for Kalyra (age 9 – proficient reader) I don't know what I'd do without it.

There are a ton of resources within the site. It's very engaging for the kids, and they can collect reward eggs which they can spend in the store to design their avatar and house etc. Kalyra loves it.

I purchased the math and reading pack for both girls. It has everything I need to teach them what they need to know. Love love love it.

## 2. TESTING MOM

This is my next go-to resource for homeschooling. It's fantastic value and worth it if you are homeschooling, or even if you want your children to have extra practice at home.

It's designed by parents to help other parents and their kids aged Pre-K through the 8th grade develop a lifelong love of learning. The site features fun skill-building games,

challenging learning activities, and test prep materials for all 50 states making it very beneficial for schools where standardized testing (blah) is a huge part of the school system.

[TestingMom](#) gives you access to hundreds of standardized testing for practice (Australia and the US) and resources for those gifted learners. I use it the testing side to check in with my daughter's progress to ensure I am keeping up with grade level. And I will continue to use it as a resource when the girls return to school, especially if testing is involved!

I mostly use it for the access to the many online sites, lessons, videos, books, and games that you get access to as part of the membership. I use it for both Savannah and Kalyra and some of the core programs we use are

**Savannah:** *Hear Builder, Fun Tree, Reading Kingdom, GoNoodle* (dance and movement videos and lessons)

**Kalyra:** *Reflex Maths, Mathletics, BrainPop, Spellodrome, CoreClicks, Wordly Wise GoNoodle, ClayPiggy* (financial literacy)

It is of incredible value and makes homeschooling on the road much easier for me and fun for the kids.

### 3. KAHN ACADEMY

[Kahn Academy](#) is free and has fantastic instructional videos and practice questions for maths, science, arts and humanities. We use it mostly for maths (in Australia, we say maths, not math!!).

I think it's great for breaking down difficult concepts. Sometimes the girls just don't want to listen to their Mumma!

### 4. KIDS COOK REAL FOOD ECOURSE

Savannah and I can often be found cooking together in the kitchen. She loves it (although rarely eats what we make together)

To make our homeschooling lessons reflect real life and follow the girl's passions, I purchased the [Kids Cook Real Food Ecourse](#) helping to teach kids how to cook. There's a program within it to cater to Savannah's level and Kalyra's. We love it!

Savannah is always requesting to do those lessons. She's learning so much about food preparation, hygiene, safety, and health. Plus, all those other benefits like maths, reading, listening and spending quality time creating with her sister and Mumma.

## 5. PARENTING BOOKS

[The Highly Sensitive Child – helping our children thrive when the world overwhelms them.](#) By Elaine N Aron. This book is worth a read if you feel your child may be on the sensitive child. It's a gift worth nurturing. I feel I have two of them and perhaps am one myself!

[What do you really want for your children?](#) By Wayne Dyer My favourite book on parenting by my favourite spiritual teacher.

## 6. TRAVEL BOOKS

### **Lonely Planet Kids**

I adore the [Lonely Planet Kids range](#) Not only do they inspire and motivate children to travel but to also learn about the world they live in. They're so engaging. Kalyra has devoured so many of their books. They even have fantastic [travel journals](#) and their [Boredom Buster book](#) is a hit for the long road and plane trips we take.

### **Leap and Hop**

Another incredible resource for helping your children engage with their travel experiences is the [Leap and Hop travel guides](#). It's a series of travel books that invite curious children to discover and understand different cultures while playing, drawing, scrapbooking, doodling, collecting and observing.

There are guides available for Bali, Cambodia, Hong Kong, India-Rajasthan, Myanmar, New York, Paris, Singapore, Sri Lanka & Vietnam. Kalyra loves her New York one.

## 7. OTHER RESOURCES MENTIONED

- [Rich Kid Smart Kid](#) is a great resource for games and educational tools.
- There are lots of great [yoga DVDs for kids](#).
- [Cosmic Yoga for kids](#) on YouTube is AWESOME (and free)
- I have a few [meditations CDs](#) I play for my children

# ABOUT CAZ



Caroline Makepeace wants to live in a world where people fearlessly follow what's in their heart.

She believes travel is a way to find a deeper connection to the planet, to other people, and to yourself. It also helps you feel a lot of joy and freedom.

Caroline has been living and travelling around the world since she graduated from University in 1997 as a primary school teacher. She's lived and taught in five countries – Australia, UK, Ireland, Thailand and the USA - and travelled through 52.

Her teaching experiences have ranged from K-6 – whole class and small group instruction, ESL teaching (including high school and adults), and leadership roles including Grade Chairperson and Cultural Education Facilitator.

She is the co-founder of one of the world's most influential travel blogs, [yTravelblog.com](http://yTravelblog.com) with her husband Craig and has one of the world's biggest [Pinterest](#) communities [of 4 million](#) followers.

Her work has been recognized and featured by brands such as the Today Show, CNN

online, Lonely Planet, National Geographic online, Virgin Australia, Expedia, Huffington Post, and various radio stations.

Caroline has produced several eBooks and courses to help people create their ultimate life. They include [\*How to create a travel life you love\*](#), [\*Step into Sacredness\*](#), the [\*30 Day Money Cleanse\*](#), and [\*How to move from blog to business\*](#).

Caroline speaks at various conferences on topics related to travel, blogging, social media marketing, and online business.

She often travels with her two children proving that you can create a travel lifestyle no matter your life circumstances. They recently finished an epic 18-month road trip around Australia and are preparing for a 2-3 year road trip of the US called [\*America Unplugged\*](#).

Caroline uses her skills and knowledge as a teacher, and her experiences as a global and life educator to homeschool her daughters. She's focused on helping them to become independent, empowered human beings.

When she's not travelling and writing about it, you can find Caz swinging in a beach hammock at sunset to the tunes of Jack Johnson or buying another crystal to meditate with at a local market. Connect with her on [\*Facebook\*](#), [\*Instagram\*](#), and [\*Pinterest\*](#).