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IS SUPERPOP**

Turn kids' questions into opportunities to learn

Have you ever said to your child, "Now eat this, it's good for you," and the child responded: "What do you mean?" It seems clear enough what "it's good for you" means. Kids, however, are hungry for more than the generality of something. They crave exhaustive explanations, as those of you who have young children know full well.

The fact that children ask questions and want detailed explanations means they are becoming more secure with the knowledge of the world around them and developing capabilities to act more independently. Some of you, however, may think that your son or daughter just asks questions for the heck of it—just to aggravate you. There's no doubt that our children learn very early in life to ask questions because they want the attention of mom and dad. It is up to us as parents to recognize this behaviour and to give more generously of our time, patience and talent.

As parents, we should try to turn our homes into learning centers. Everything we do, particularly with our very young children, should be accompanied by an explanation or conversation. What the child sees and hears will give meaning to the situation and assist him or her in moving onto the next level of understanding.

Being as concrete as possible is a prerequisite in the beginning stages of learning. Try some of these helpful hints at your home when you want to teach language, math and social skills:

Reading skills can be improved by:

- creating a home language notebook that the child each night can put pictures in and write the appropriate word next to;
- encouraging the child to read signs on the roadway, in stores, at movies, etc., extending the feeling that through the ability of reading you can do things that make you happy;
- parents reading in front of the child (as an example, mom can demonstrate the importance and value of reading by having a recipe when baking and reading it aloud and being excited that she can understand what ingredients are needed); and

● encouraging the viewing of educational television as much as possible.

Language usage can be improved by:

- encouraging a relaxed atmosphere with conversation either at the dinner table, in the living room or while in the family car—through discussion of the day's activities will come the use of words that have been learned;

● asking questions of your child in complete sentences and being patient when he answers (be sure to answer your child's questions in complete sentences); and

● introducing words to your child through your conversation and then asking him if he understood their meaning. Explain the meanings when necessary and then try to reuse

the words as well as encourage the child to use them too.

Math skills can be improved by:

- associating numbers to real things (for example, 3 apples take away 2 apples has more meaning than the abstraction of $3-2=$);
- having the child count things for you and give you the total, such as how many glasses are on the table;
- playing games that require the use of numbers on dice, in moving objects or counting play money; and
- playing time games. This will teach your child about the watch, orient him to the day, associate certain numbers and times with certain parts of the day and make him feel that he can rely on the watch with its numbers to help him be on time for the things he likes.

Social skills can be improved directly through imitation of the parents and the attention given to those that are seen using good manners:

● no double standard is to be tolerated—if the child is supposed to give his/her seat to an adult, daddy should be prepared to give his seat to a lady; and

● games should be used to encourage sharing and group participation. Game playing and exercises can allow the child to "let off steam," which has been referred to by professionals as "nature's tranquilizer."

Making learning fun

It's not going to be long now when the computer toys, laboratory sets and microscopes will be plucked



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from beneath the Christmas tree and you will have to assemble them and then explain their use. Will you pull a hair off your head or a letter from newspaper print and put it under the microscope?

Learning will occur if it is thought of as fun, it is recognized as necessary, it takes place in a relaxed atmosphere and the material is interesting. This should be coupled with having your child in good health and receiving adequate sleep; an

alert mind can best deal with learning.

As a family, take advantage of the public library, museums, zoos, parks, historical sites, all as places of learning that can add understanding of ourselves, our country, and our heritage. This can be expanded to include friends in the neighborhood that may be knowledgeable in certain areas. Visit them and start a friendship.

When you take your child to the

doctor or dentist encourage him or her to ask questions about his or her health and the instruments being used in the examination.

And above all, be a loving and honest parent. You will make your child's work at learning about the world around him much easier and certainly more enjoyable.

If you have a special way of making learning fun and interesting at home, send it to me in care of this newspaper and I will share it with my readers.