

Andrew Fuller

Clinical Psychologist
Author and Speaker

www.andrewfuller.com.au
www.mylearningstrengths.com



Key Skills Parents can Build in Children to Create Success at School & Life

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Little kids are a bit like roosters- they get up early & make a lot of noise. Then they start to ask weird questions like, *'Why aren't frogs purple?'* or *'do clouds talk to one another?'*

Childrens brains are like sponges soaking in all they can about the world. Learning is the best & most fun game in town. This is driven by the wonderful imagination & creativity of children. Our aim is to keep it that way.

Four ingredients of success

Your love for them helps them to feel safe & secure and is the basis for everything.

The language and perspective of parents is incredibly influential. Parents provide a lens through which their children see the world.

There are four additional skills that every parent can help their children develop to provide the basis for success in school & in life:

Showing up
Opting in
Being interested.
Thinking clearly

Showing up

It's hard to be successful in any area of life, if you don't show up. Being present is pretty well an indispensable aspect of success.

Showing up ready for action takes care and preparation. Being well prepared requires sleeping well, eating well, moving well, laughing well, loving well, and living well.

This applies to you as well as to your children. Being there for your children makes a gigantic impact. When we aim to keep ourselves in tiptop form, in the best state we can, we show our children that looking after ourselves is important.

Families need routines to help everyone not just survive but thrive. This means the adults need to be (kindly, but clearly) in charge.

Now before parents go on a collective guilt trip for not having been attentive to every single micro-second of their child's lives, we need to remind you of Vilfredo Pareto. You might be asking, *'who?'* Pareto who worked out that 80% of our impact comes from 20% of what we do, known as the 80/20 principle.

Great parents don't have to be available for every moment. They do need to be dependable & present for their children when they are with them. This involves stepping back from your phone, showing up & getting involved.

None of us would ever want to give our children the impression that we value our devices more than our time with them.

The way we show up is also important. It makes such a difference if we greet our children (and each other) with kindness and enthusiasm. Practice exuberant greetings.

When there are problems or differences of opinions, showing up with a clear intention to work things out rather than to find out who is to blame, demonstrates that we can get over difficulties and empowers children to know that they can solve issues between people when they arise.

Opting in (rather than opting out)

Having a go, having at crack, nothing ventured-nothing gained, this is the spirit of trying things out.

Hesitancy can easily slip into avoidance before collapsing into fear. If this happens we have a child who lacks confidence & restricts their activities to those they already feel competent in.

Taking on challenges is good for us. It not only builds determination & courage, moving into action in new areas helps us to lower our levels of anxiety. Taking challenges also strengthens a specific part of our brain called the anterior mid cingulate cortex that is related to willpower.

Being interested

I'm not sure if curiosity has ever really been solely responsible for the demise of a cat, but the lack of it has certainly stifled a lot of people's lives.

Build curiosity and creativity in your child by being intrigued. Find new ideas. Discover new concepts. Seek out new positive opportunities and experiences.

Thinking clearly

Once we have children showing up, opting in, and getting interested, we can really help them to develop their thinking skills.

One of the quickest and most cost-effective ways of improving your child's life is to help them to think more constructively. Doing anything better requires effective thinking.

This is one of the best lessons of life. It is much more important than getting the best marks or being the youngest to achieve anything.

Smart thinking helps more people out of tricky situations than determination, luck, positive thinking, or motivation.

I can't compress an entire course on thinking into a single paper, but here are a few key ideas.

To teach thinking, parents don't need to have all the answers, but it does help to have a lot of great questions.

Not every thought is true.

It is estimated that people have about 90,000 thoughts every day. Many of those thoughts are valuable but some are just rubbish. Some of our thoughts are a waste of time. They do not deserve to be believed in. Some should be taken out the back and thrown out.

The way to get good ideas is to get lots of ideas and throw away the bad ones-

Linus Pauling

Think again.

Teach your child that while their first thought is great, if they take some time and delve deeper, their second thought will often be even more wonderful.

You can grow your brain.

Our brains are alive and are growing all the time. Overtime, brains wire themselves to become more connected as we think and learn. Sometimes thinking feels hard. It is like a muscle that is sore after exercise. While it feels tender, it is growing and getting stronger. Struggling with new ideas makes us smarter.

Sorting into groups

A lion, a tiger, a kangaroo, and a horse are all...?

Which one these doesn't belong- a spoon, a plate, a bowl, and an antelope?

Learning to identify how to group different things together or to see how something might be different from the others is the basis of identifying similarities and differences. This is one of the most powerful ways of increasing marks at school and expanding memory.

What's the main idea?

This question sets up success. The world has a deluge of information and a scarcity of wisdom. Being able to pick out the main message or idea builds understanding and knowledge-

What is that story/ show/ game/ movie about?

What is the main message?

Who is the most important character?

What was the most important moment?

This is the basis of prioritisation. Being able to work out the importance of different tasks or ideas is not only an essential thinking skill, it also reduces anxiety.

Next step thinking

Learn that actions have outcomes or consequences. This might seem obvious but linking actions with outcomes helps (a lot!)

If we do ... what do you think will happen next?

If we did (something different) what do you think might happen?

Next step thinking puts you in the driver's seat of life because you are able to predict likely outcomes and reconsider what to do.

If yes, then...?

Just as actions and outcomes are linked, ideas are also connected. Most complex ideas are a web of connected smaller ideas. A simple example is, flowers are blooming, the temperature is getting warmer, there is blossom on the trees- it sounds like springtime.

In a world of opinions, develop curiosity.

Aim forwards, Plan Backwards

This is like creating thinking or planning trails. Start with the end in mind. The plan backwards the steps to achieving that outcome.

Weighing up Probabilities

This is a big one. Asking children which option is the most likely helps them to think in terms of probabilities. If they are reluctant ask them to make a guess and then ask them, 'What makes you think that?'

Daily weather forecasts are a way to help children begin to understand probability- what are the chances of rain today?

Get it wrong in order to get it right.

Clear the clutter- seek out the essential information. As the fictional detective Sherlock Holmes once stated, 'Once you eliminate the impossible, *whatever remains, no matter how improbable, must be the truth.*'"

Most great ideas had very small beginnings that built over time. Very few great ideas or inventions came first time. People had to take the time, make mistakes and then, figure them out.

John F. Kennedy proposed on May 25th, 1961, that by the end of the 1960's a person should have been to the moon and safely return. On May 26th the National Space Council did not suit up an astronaut. Their first goal was to hit the moon. Three years later, NASA smashed Ranger 7 into the moon at a velocity of 5,862 miles per hour. It took 15 iterations before the successful moon landing of Apollo 11 on July 16, 1969.

Deepen conversations.

What makes a good question? Asking good questions relates to thinking and creates opportunities for learning. Open-ended as opposed to closed questions are generally advocated as a means of pushing beyond knowledge and skill and opening up discussion.

Encourage a love of learning: Parents can cultivate a love of learning in their children by reading to them, providing access to books, and exposing them to a variety of learning experiences. Discussing new ideas and inventions Shows children that learning is something we all do throughout our lives and that it is interesting.

Parents can also show interest in what their children are learning at school and help them see the relevance of what they are studying to their everyday lives.

More information

Email

inyahead@aussiebb.com.au

Andrew's websites

www.mylearningstrengths.com has helped over 100,000 young people discover their learning strengths.

On face book:

andrewfullerpsychologist
Learning Strengths

Books for Parents

Unlocking Your Child's Genius
Tricky Behaviours
The A to Z of Feelings (Amba Press)

Books for Teachers

Guerrilla Tactics for Teachers
Neurodevelopmental Differentiation-
Optimising Brain Systems to Maximise
Learning

