

CULTIVATING INTELLIGENCE

Intelligence is not a measure of how much we know how to do, but of how we behave when we don't know what to do. It has to do with our ability to think up questions and then to find ways to get useful answers. (Teach Your Own, by John Holt, p. 232)

Intelligence can be stimulated. Although we are born with certain capabilities and limitations, our upbringing will either encourage or hinder our mental capacity. From the womb, intelligence is developed, and every age level offers its unique stages of development in which parents can nurture their child's intelligence.

During pregnancy, mother is responsible for her physical and emotional well-being. Eating healthy food provides the nutrition that the growing baby requires. Regular exercise not only promotes a fit body for mom, but fresh air combined with exercise is an important ingredient to emotional stability. A peaceful mother passes that peace to her child. Soothing music and reading aloud further ministers to the developing baby. All these factors facilitate proper development of the unborn child, enabling baby to reach his fullest potential once born. Sadly, pregnant women who abuse their bodies through drugs, alcohol, tobacco, and poor nutrition might not only stunt their children's intelligence, but also cause physical disabilities.

While an infant, skin-to-skin contact with Mom and Dad is essential to a baby's emotional well-being (1). During this time, babies spend most of their waking hours observing the world around them. To include baby in their world, parents can talk to him. Carry on a conversation with him as if he knows just what you are saying. Since babies learn by listening, avoid "baby talk" because they will repeat what they hear. Music stimulates the brain. Besides singing to baby, parents can play music while baby entertains himself. Playtime with toys makes up an important part of baby's day. Show your little one how to operate a toy, but avoid doing it for him. Every development involves a time of frustration before the new skill is mastered, and **it is that very struggle that cultivates intelligence**. As your baby matures, you can read picture books to increase his attention span. At this stage, reading to your baby involves pointing out and naming the pictures in the book. During your walks or while baby crawls around the house or yard, touch and name the things you encounter. Use every opportunity to increase your child's awareness of the world around him.

From ages eighteen months to three years, your child will often ask questions just to hear you talk. Answer his questions and converse with him throughout each day. As you talk, emphasize the names of things and watch his vocabulary grow. To improve your toddler's responses, play various games with him. For example, try placing a baseball on your dinner plate and wait for your child's reaction. These delightful games will bring not only laughter to your home, but also the child's awareness of the world around him. Reading to your youngster is essential, and as his attention span increases, you can read for longer periods. Stories before naps and bedtime will always be treasured. Create opportunities for your toddler to explore outdoors. He needs to touch, taste, smell, hear, and our marvelous creation. Using the full range of senses stimulates the brain and develops curiosity. For inside playtime, include activities such as finger painting, play dough, cutting and pasting, and cooking with mom. Arts and crafts books along with online resources are loaded with simple, creative ideas. Moreover, it is crucial that you allow your child the freedom to struggle while he undertakes a new obstacle. Balance your guidance without interfering with the process of discovery. In summary, the keys to nurturing your toddler's intelligence are to encourage his curiosity, talk and read to him daily, and let him struggle in the learning process.

Story telling makes up a vital part of those years between ages three through seven. While this involves reading to your child, it also includes "made-up" stories. After story time, encourage your youngster to retell the story. If you child reads to you or tells you a story, then *you* can retell it. Try preparing index cards with ideas for "made-up" stories (i.e., This story begins with a mysterious forest or a red shoe, etc.). At supper time, the family can share many laughs by making up a story with each person adding his part. These exercises produce creativity, concentration, and the ability to sort through information (the story) and relate it back to you in order.

As your child matures, fine-tune the previously mentioned activities to match his ability. Verbally sharing his insights and experiences about the world around him, equips the child to articulate his ideas, formulate questions, and summarize information. When these skills are combined with an unhampered curiosity and encouragement to venture through that stage of "struggle before mastery," you have fostered the seed-bed of intelligence.

Thomas Edison stated that "*there is no such thing as genius. What people choose to call genius is simply hard work – one percent inspiration and ninety-nine percent perspiration.*" Called an idiot by his elementary school teacher, Edison's mother removed him from school and taught him at home. After mastering reading, writing, and arithmetic, she allowed him time to explore and develop his curiosity. His mark on the world is history today.

One young lady who was mildly retarded was also taught at home because the special education classes were not helping her. It took her longer to graduate from high school than most, but she persevered. Undaunted, she enrolled in college. After six years, she graduated with a degree in elementary education. The principal of the school at which she practice taught was so impressed with her teaching ability that he hired her to teach first grade. She excels today because of endurance.

Considered a genius in his day, Isaac Newton commented, "*I seem to have been only like a boy playing on the seashore and diverting myself in now and then finding a smoother pebble or prettier shell than ordinary whilst the great ocean of truth lay all undiscovered before me.*" Curiosity . . . endurance . . . concentration . . . verbal skills . . . Mix them together, bake them in the oven of life, and present the world with children whose intelligence has been cultivated.

Notes:

1. *The Continuum Concept*, by Jean Liedloff.