

Preparing for School: How You Can Help Your Child Thrive

by Melissa Kay

I can still remember my summers as a child; playing for hours in the backyard of my home, eating barbecue in the evening, swimming, talking to the “little fairies” on our hillside and in the bushes, building forts made out of lawn chairs and towels, staying up late, and going to Disneyland with my grandparents. I felt so free, so comfortable, and so safe. My family knew who I was and we all knew what to expect from one another. Luckily for me, my parents did not expect much in the summer! However, every year, my carefree summer ended and I had to start getting ready to go back to school.

This was always a bit of a drag for me. I was a sensitive, passionate child and desired, more than anything else, to be free to do as I pleased, learn what I wanted, when I wanted, and focus on doing what I loved. For sensitive children school can feel very restrictive – it certainly felt stifling to me. I did not always feel comfortable or accepted and encouraged. Although I had many gifts to share, they often went unnoticed since we had to follow a specific curriculum and schedule that I was not always enthusiastic about.

Parents of sensitive children can help to ease their children's discomfort with going back to school. During this time, there are many issues children face when going back to school that are challenging for them. In my work as a therapist with elementary through high school students I often hear the same concerns that affected me when I was growing up. Perhaps this is the reason my path led me to become a therapist that helps children and teens. One of the related concerns they have regarding school is being liked by others and making friends. This is especially challenging for sensitive children that enjoy spending time by themselves, or people they feel safe with. Often the energy of others feels very



intense and “off” to a sensitive child. Going back to school is a challenge for them because they are now in an environment where they are expected to be social, and may have parents or teachers that encourage them to be more so, even finding friends for them to be with. Children can even experience social anxiety where they become panicked about choosing friends and being liked.

Parents are role models for the way their children create friendships and bonds. Although you would like to help your children find and maintain friendships, there is a fine balance between being a parent who is too involved in your child's friendships and being a parent that

is encouraging, loving and supportive. You want to empower your children to know they can attract friends who will like them for who they are.

Often the friendships children create are the very ones they need to grow and learn from — just as we pick relationships that teach us something.

The way you interact with your child is very crucial to the relationships they choose. Just as we often pick mates and friendships that remind us of our mothers and fathers, our children do the same. To help your children create and maintain good relationships, it is important that you take the time to nurture yourself. When you take the time to feel good, deserving and worthy, you are teaching your child to do the same. Words alone do not teach. It is through your example of what you are living and your balanced energy that a child responds to and mimics. When a parent feels good about themselves, they also feel good about their children. When a child feels good this reflects in their positive friendships, behavior and life circumstances. Only

when you are happy and joyful, can you uplift and inspire others, including your children. So it benefits a child's relationships immensely when a parent feels good.

When your home is happy and uplifting, this also helps children choose friends that feel good. If a parent is often unhappy, angry, chaotic, anxious, or depressed, the child usually takes on those emotions and projects them out, or finds friends who are similar to their parents. The thoughts and feelings we project out are what manifests in our lives. So if you want your child to feel good about their self, and have better relationships, it is worth it for you to feel good and inspire this in your children. Our children are naturally joyful. Encourage this joy and show them how they can attract what they are wanting, including good friendships, through your example of feeling good.

Another concern children have about going back to school is academics. Because our schools usually teach everyone the same thing at the same time, there is not much room for different learning levels or the way in which someone learns. Personally, I am a very visual learner; I learn best when watching someone do it first, or by seeing pictures or diagrams. When someone is lecturing me I tend to tune out. What type of learner is your child?

The support you can provide to your child when they are going to learn something new is to, again, feel good about yourself first. You can only inspire from a place of connection to who you really are. When you feel good about you, you can see your child succeeding and worthy, then they will also see it in themselves. Acknowledge with them that there are many different ways to learn. Most children are curious about life and want to learn. The challenge is that you receive information best when you are asking for it. When it is given to you, or forced on you, and you are not asking it is much more difficult to retain. Be authentic with your child about this and how challenging this can be. Having one person on your side supporting and believing in you can really help the learning process.

Growing up, my sister had a difficult time in school. My parents were going through a divorce and there was a lot of anger, fighting and pain. The teachers and staff had a meeting and told my mother they did not think my sister was going to make it very far in life, and that she would have to find some alternative way to make a living. I admire to this day the way my mother stood up for my sister. She believed in her ability to succeed in something she was passionate about. Although my sister wanted to be done with school many times, my mother never stopped encouraging her and her talents, and gifts. Because of my mother's unwavering support, my sister graduated from a great university and works in a field that she loves.

Even as adults we are excited and eager to learn something we want to learn, or love to do, and turned off by learning something that we are forced to learn or do! When I was growing up I always loved to read. That stopped when I felt forced to read books that I was not interested in. I lost my initial love of reading for some time. After graduating from psychology school, I came across a subject matter that I could not get enough of: spirituality. Because of my passion, I read every book that interested me, looked into authors that I loved, researched the topic, and continue to this very day.

What is your child passionate about? Help them to discover it, even in school where it is not always invited. Remind your child that they can do the school work as part of their path to get where

they want, but that it does not have to be the deciding factor on where they are going, their self-worth or purpose.

Recently, I watched a movie about teens that wanted to be magicians. They had a passion for magic. Although they went to school and studied what they had to, almost all the teens spent their free time learning magic. One of the individuals was from a remote part of Japan. He found only two books on magic, taught himself, and used nature around him, such as leaves and rocks, as part of his magic tricks since he did not have access to anything else. He found a picture of the Magic Castle in Los Angeles, and put it up on his wall, along with the words, “I am a successful magician.” His journey led him to a competition in Las Vegas where he won first place and got to work at the Magic Castle. Currently, he is studying English in Los Angeles, and is successfully touring around the world with his magic show.

It does not matter what your child chooses to do. What matters is how passionate they are. As parents, you can help them tremendously by believing in their dreams and by being encouraging and supportive. Remind them that they are unique and have something that no one else has. Help them find their voice and magic in their life! I once heard that doing what you love and are passionate about gives you energy, while doing something that you don't like depletes your energy. Are you feeling energized by what you do? Remember you are your children's biggest role models. Help yourself so you can help your children. We can only give away that which we give to ourselves.

The best way you can help your child prepare and have a successful school year is to have a successful home. Children behave the way they feel. If home is a place of unconditional love, joy, nurturing and support, this will carry out into school and into all that your child does. No one ever acts out or behaves in a way that is “bad” when they are feeling good. This is the reason it is crucial that you take care of yourself first. It's like being on an airplane where they tell you to put your oxygen mask on first. When you have oxygen, love, kindness, confidence, worthiness, compassion, and joy first, then you can inspire others to their good feelings.

Children respond to life the way their parents do. If we are positive and excited about something, our children will also be that way. If we are calm and know that all will be okay, so will your children. They are looking to you for what to expect. Children will rise or fall to meet your expectation of them and their life. See the good in yourself and your children. Speak words of praise often, see their worthiness and gifts, and remind them that this will be a good school year. See them thriving and finding friends that enhance their lives. See them making good grades and finding activities they enjoy. See who they truly are, listen and know their worthiness. Then they will see this in themselves and truly thrive this school year and for years to come.

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