

PRINCIPLES OF LEARNING

By Aletha Solter, Ph.D.

1. All children are born with the desire and the ability to learn.
2. Children learn best when the learning is self-initiated, arising from their own curiosity and interests, rather than imposed on them.
3. Children learn best through hands-on experiences and self-discovery, rather than through direct instruction. Concept formation arises naturally out of concrete experiences.
4. Play is the primary mode of learning during the first eight to ten years. It has 3 major functions:
 - a) Play helps children acquire physical, social and intellectual skills.
 - b) Play helps children understand and assimilate information.
 - c) Play helps children work through traumatic experiences.
5. Appropriate stimulation is important. A rich environment, with a variety of manipulative materials, facilitates children's learning. Children also benefit by being exposed to stories, books, people, places, ideas, music, games and real-life activities.
6. The best toys are the ones that inspire children to imagine, build, create and think.
7. Earlier is not necessarily better. Each child develops at his or her own rate.
8. Different children have different learning styles (example: visual, auditory, and kinesthetic).
9. Too much television & video watching can interfere with the learning process by stifling the imagination, creating fears, promoting passivity and using up valuable play time.

10. Children are better learners when their lives are stress-free. Distress experiences can interfere with the learning process, because painful feelings can lead to chronic confusion, anxiety, lack of self-confidence and an inability to concentrate. The learning process is enhanced when children are allowed to release painful feelings through crying and raging.

11. Learning abilities are affected by the parent/child relationship. Intellectual competence is enhanced when:
 - a) Children feel loved and accepted, and receive good quality attention.
 - b) Children are given encouragements (rather than judgments, criticisms, or corrections).
 - c) Parents have realistic expectations (neither too high nor too low).
 - d) A non-punitive approach to discipline is used.
 - e) Children are encouraged to ask questions and be independent thinkers.
 - f) Parents allow autonomy, and help only when needed.

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Aletha Solter, PhD, is a developmental psychologist, international speaker, consultant, and founder of the Aware Parenting Institute (www.awareparenting.com). Her four books, *The Aware Baby*, *Helping Young Children Flourish*, *Tears and Tantrums*, and *Raising Drug-Free Kids* have been translated into many languages, and she is recognized internationally as an expert on attachment, trauma, non-punitive discipline, and developmentally appropriate education.

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