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**EXTENSION SPOTLIGHT on FAMILIES**

## Encouraging Curiosity is Key to Active Learning

As parents, we want our children to do well in school. But how can we help make this happen?

One of the best ways is to turn your children into "active learners." As part of your daily family routine, you can make learning interesting, fun and a natural part of your child's life. It's never too late to start the adventure of learning. Curiosity is the key. Do you remember the amazement of discovery you felt as a child? The secret to promoting life-long learning and development is to encourage your child to be curious.

Let your child walk through the mud, climb a tree or take something apart to see how it works. Provide your child with tools — a tape measure, a screwdriver, a magnifying glass, a pile of sand or a blank piece of paper and markers. If it means a little more mess for you to clean up or a break in the precise schedule of your life, then so what?

Ask your child "wonder" questions such as, "I wonder what's inside?" or "How do you think that works?" or "What if we....?" Don't provide the answers. Let the child think and discover. Encourage questions and if you don't have an answer, search for it together.

Adults learn to solve problems by learning the skills they need as children. Play guessing games with your kids. Have them estimate the number of beans in a jar, then count to find out the exact number. Ask questions such as: "What if we didn't have a clock, what would we do? What do people use when they don't have clocks?"

Let your children learn to make reasonable choices. To do this, you have to give up some control and efficiency, but the long-term result is worthwhile. A two-year-old can decide if he wants to put on his mittens or his hat first, but not whether or not to wear his jacket. A 10-year-old can choose which bicycle she wants to buy, even though wearing a helmet is not optional.

Children learn from their mistakes. Part of learning is experimentation. A child should never be afraid to try out an idea. Parents need to help and encourage children when choices turn out to be mistakes. A mistake can become a learning experience or it can lay the groundwork for your child to never try again.

Children need to flex their minds. Teach them to use themes, acronyms and sayings to remember names, dates or other facts. Play games such as Concentration or games that ask you to recall and repeat thoughts or lists. Practice memorization by starting with short, two-line poems or a silly song. Soon your child will be better at these mind games than you!

Parents who encourage children to think independently, challenge them to take chances and help them to use their minds, lay the groundwork for children who do well in school.