



BACK TO SCHOOL

By Marilyn Sharpe

BACK TO SCHOOL: A PASSION FOR LIFELONG LEARNING

How is it possible that summer is over? Leaves are starting to change color. We've flipped the calendar to September. The days are getting shorter. The sale flyers in the newspaper say "Back to School". School supplies are purchased, backpacks are loaded, first day of school outfits are selected, parents are urgent about getting on a school year routine, bedtimes are earlier. Some of the kids are incredibly excited, some are apprehensive, some are dreading the start of the school year. So, what can you do that will make a difference to your child or youth, to their learning, to their school experience this year?

First, let's identify the real issue: How do we help the kids we love to develop and sustain a passion for lifelong learning? Look at any two year old. They have an absolutely insatiable appetite for learning. They explore everything. They wonder. They speculate. They clap their hands with glee and excitement. What goes wrong? How do kids move from that enthusiasm to being bored, anxious and turned off about learning? What makes some of our kids drag off reluctantly to school, dreading each day? And, more importantly, what can we do about it?

Here are some ideas for parents and other adults who care about children and youth:

- Model a love of learning. Let them catch you reading, tackling a new topic or interest. Share delight in something new you've learned.
- Be curious together. Learn together.
- Have reference books or computer tools available, like a dictionary, encyclopedia, thesaurus, and others and use them often.
- Listen, listen, listen when they share something new they have learned and are passionate about with you.
- Give each child the opportunity to explore an interest, whether that is at the library, visiting someone who does professionally what they are interested in, taking a class, or visiting a museum.
- Provide support for their learning by creating a space and time that is conducive to learning.
- Make learning fun and playful, not always deadly serious or filled with threats or negative comparisons to other kids.
- Affirm improvement, effort, and persistence, not just perfection.
- Create a refrigerator display or scrapbook to feature interests, learning and accomplishments.
- Learn how your child learns. Some learn primarily from what they see, some from what they hear, some from what they do. Share your insights with your child's teachers. Also share the things that are intimidating and defeating to your child.
- If your child is struggling, get help.

The most important thing that you can do for your children is to love them unconditionally and uniquely ... and assure them that God loves them, too.

FAMILY ACTIVITIES

1. Bless the backpacks of all of the students in your home.
2. Send each child off with a prayer and a blessing, reminding them that Jesus goes with them.
3. Send a little, loving note in lunch bags.
4. Greet each child at the end of the day (not with, "Do you have any homework? Where are your running shoes? Did you hand in your math assignment?", but) with, "I love you. I've missed you today. I've been praying for you."
5. Don't ever stop praying with your child. If there are challenges at school, ask God to be present in the problem and in its solution. If things are going well, say, "Thank you, thank you, thank you."