

# What to give a child? How about a promising future

- By Eric Johnson

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When I first started teaching over 22 years ago now, many parents asked what they could do to help their children learn. As a teacher, I gave them the standard academic version of helping the child organize him or herself, make sure they are reading every day, have them help estimate cost when shopping and help a child see the real-world applications of academic work. As the years have passed, I would say that while academic concerns are still important, experience has shown that there are more pressing needs that need to be addressed.

I recently read an article by occupational therapist, Victoria Prooday (2017), that resonated with me, and what I have been seeing in our schools. Students have become more and more emotionally unavailable for learning. Refusal to do work, temper tantrums, distraction, and hyper-activity, are all symptoms of a modern lifestyle that have helped create these situations.

The over use of technology has stimulated our children's brains to the point that they cannot sit still and process normal human voice and adequate visual stimulation. The students are bored because they are not being bombarded by video game graphics all day long. The student then struggles with academic challenges.

The ability to delay gratification is a key factor in future success. The article pointed out that to delay gratification means to be able to work under stress. The word "no" has become a foreign word. Children are becoming less equipped to deal with even minor stressors. With best intentions, we are making our children happy in the short term but setting them up for failure in the long run by not teaching one word- "no".

The concept of what a child “needs to do” has become lost. Kids know very much what they “want”. What kids have a hard time with is what they need to do. For example, a child may want to be an A student, but is not willing to study every day to achieve that. I have heard students say often, “I want to be a pro athlete or a star athlete”, but they are not willing to devote the training required to become that.

How many times have you seen, or participated, in running children around from one event to the next. We don’t want our kids to be bored. We have created an unrealistic world for them in which everything should be fun. Life is not all fun! “Writing is too hard, it’s boring!” Students do not see this as part of their endless fun, so they struggle with academics. The brain is just like any other muscle. It gets trained through work.

Many kids have limited social interactions. How many times have you seen a person texting instead of having a conversation? Using social media to vent instead of having a conversation with someone to work out differences. We see this in adults, why would it be different for children? The days of a pick-up game of baseball or football seem to be long over. Video games have taken over going outside to play. Technology does not help children learn to socialize. You need to have some social skills to be able to function in the world.

So, what to do? The beauty of the human brain is that it can be trained. Here are just a few things that can be done to recondition a child’s brain to help them be successful on a social, emotional, and academic level. Limit technology and reconnect with your child. Limit the amount of time and monitor the content your child is seeing with technology. Have a family game night, or just talk with your child. Train delayed gratification by making your child wait. Increase the time between “I want” and “I get”. Don’t be afraid to set limits or say “no”. You are the parent- think of what is good for your child. Parenting is a hard job- be a parent and not a friend! The friendship will come later as you have prepared them for life. Have your child do chores such as setting the table, picking up their room, making their bed, as it lays the foundation for future work. Lastly, teach them social skills like saying “please” and “thank you”, taking turns and the interacting with all types of people in a variety of situations.

As we head into the holiday season, what do you get a child for a gift? Give of yourself because relationships matter. Parents, you are your child's first and most important teacher. Help train their brain. Give your child the gift of a promising future.

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