

Aware Parenting 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. They benefit from an approach that allows choices and self-direction.
3. Concept formation and abstract thinking arise naturally out of concrete experiences. Children learn best by discovery through hands-on experiences rather than direct verbal instruction.
4. Play is the primary mode of learning during the first eight to ten years. It has three major functions:
 - Play helps children acquire physical, social, and intellectual skills.
 - Play helps children understand and assimilate information.
 - 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, animals, natural environments, ideas, music, games, and real-life activities.
6. The best toys are 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. It's normal for children to lag behind in some skills while they are busy mastering others.
8. There are many kinds of intelligence, and it cannot be measured with a single score (such as an IQ test score). Children who are weak in one kind of intelligence may be strong in others. Children can benefit from educational opportunities that help them use and develop all forms of intelligence.
9. Children under eight years benefit more from hands-on learning than from digital educational activities. Furthermore, too much screen time can interfere with the learning process by stifling the imagination, promoting passivity, and using up valuable play time.
10. Stress and trauma can interfere with the learning process by causing confusion, anxiety, grief, anger, and difficulty concentrating. The learning process is enhanced when children are allowed to release painful emotions through the natural healing mechanisms of play, laughter, and crying.
11. Children learn best when they have a warm, supportive relationship with their parents and teachers. The learning process is enhanced when parents and teachers:
 - Show acceptance and love while giving children good quality attention.
 - Use encouragement rather than praise, rewards, or criticism.
 - Have age-appropriate expectations (neither too high nor too low).
 - Use a non-punitive approach to discipline.
 - Encourage children to ask questions and be independent thinkers.
 - Accept children's painful emotions and allow them to cry.

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The titles of her books are *The Aware Baby*, *Cooperative and Connected*, *Tears and Tantrums*, *Raising Drug-Free Kids*, *Attachment Play*, and *Healing Your Traumatized Child*.