

Independent Tribune

perspective

A parent's backpack: Supplies for a successful school year

With the start of school, parents receive notices of open house, orientation days, bus routes and student supply lists. What is missing, but could serve as a helpful checklist, is an inventory of items detailing those supplies necessary to equip parents to serve as effective partners in their children's learning adventure.

This list cannot be filled at the local Wal-Mart or Target, but rather necessitates a trip inland, to the heart of a parent's commitment to his child's learning process and an equal commitment to those professionals assisting in the journey.

The following five-item list should meet the needs of most families and a variety of grade levels.

The largest item in the cart of parental supplies would be to select a two-part family routine. First, this routine would include a standard nightly bedtime (or school night curfew) and a specific place to complete homework. An adequate night's sleep supplies children with the physical and emotional reserve for school days filled with learning new skills, facing academic challenges, establishing peer relationships and accommodating physical growth needs.

Re-evaluate extra-curricular activities and trips to the mall. School is your child's job. Homework assignments done on a bus ride home, at the playing field or at a restaurant do not achieve the same bene-

fit as those done in a setting conducive to reflective and creative thought, careful penmanship when necessary and uninterrupted reading time (by the child and/or by the parent to the child.) Ideally, a student should work at a desk where his/her feet can touch the floor.

The second part of this big ticket item would be the establishment of age-appropriate home chores which parallel classroom expectations. A child who is expected to contribute to the successful operations of family life is not overwhelmed by classroom proce-

dures.

Chores are part of the building blocks of both self-esteem and a conscientious work ethic. Making the bed and feeding a pet before leaving on time for school, turns into "Please finish your math paper in 15 minutes" at school. School life, like home life, consists of routines. Routines and fair expectations provide a feeling of security to a child. They are logical pathways to procedural understanding and concept development.

The next item to go into this parental shopping cart would be the regular sharing of an evening meal. This costs less, in pennies, than a meal out and provides a bounty of rewards. Talking together at dinner can increase a child's vocabulary, improve syntax development and expand critical thinking

skills.

Parents can model how they handle peer relationships, work related challenges and convey systematic family values. Careful listening and loving exchanges produce more meaningful information about your child's life and feelings than do pointed inquisitions when trouble arises.

The third item in the basket is costly. It requires a parent to guide, but not to save a child from mistakes. Every student needs to be given the freedom to fail. Insuring your child's academic success by having her watch you do the Science Fair project at 11

p.m. is the equivalent of buying a Chia pet instead of planting a garden. It looks like growth but has no roots.

Students allowed to fail learn much. They learn to listen to directions, time management skills and to ask needed questions in class. Most importantly, they learn that Mom and Dad value them, not for their performance, but for honest efforts.

Fourth in this supply kit for parents, I would add a large "benefit of the doubt" to be extended to teachers, school administrators and school friends in an assortment of uncomfortable situations or tales, retold by your child.

To give adults in authority the benefit of the doubt does not demote the child's opinion.

Instead, it commences a situation with the parent modeling trust in authority. Parents, like teachers, may have to render unpopular decisions on the home front. Emotional muscles of trust develop as children see parents extend to others the ability to agree to disagree without rebellion. Imagine the benefits for a child of being surrounded by adults who respond to confrontations by believing the best in one another.

Lastly, the most fun item to place in the backpack comes in bold, neon, bright colors. It is used every morning, at the end of a long day and serves in tandem with item number four.

It is a sense of humor. There is rarely a day when a smile of encouragement, a bear hug and even a tale told from the parents' past won't lighten a child's load. Finding humor in the day may save more than the moment and will establish elements of trust, forgiveness and hope.

Laughing and smiling use fewer muscles than frowning. Learning to laugh at a situation or even themselves will provide a child the emotional energy to face the hills and valleys of being a student. This item is light and will easily fit in any backpack.

Zip up. A year of memories awaits you and your special student.



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