



**Guide 1**

**Introduction:  
Helping Your  
Child to Learn**



**Help your child  
to learn** with  
**Mike Gershon**

# Introduction

**You are your child's greatest asset.**

**You.**

**Say it to yourself.**

**Repeat it.**

**Remember it.**

**It's the truth.**

**You are your child's greatest asset.**

**Let me say that again:**

**You are your child's  
greatest asset.**

**You** have knowledge and understanding of the world and how it works.

**You** know what language is and how to use it.

**You** have a mind filled with memories, ideas, words and experiences.

**You** have been a child – you know what it's like.

**You** can use things, do things, analyse and change things.

**You** can remember, judge, demonstrate and explain.

**You** can solve problems, talk about things, question things and use your imagination.

And that's just for starters.










In this course, I'll show you how to help your child to learn. You don't need to be an expert. You don't need to have studied teaching, psychology or child development.

This course is written for parents.

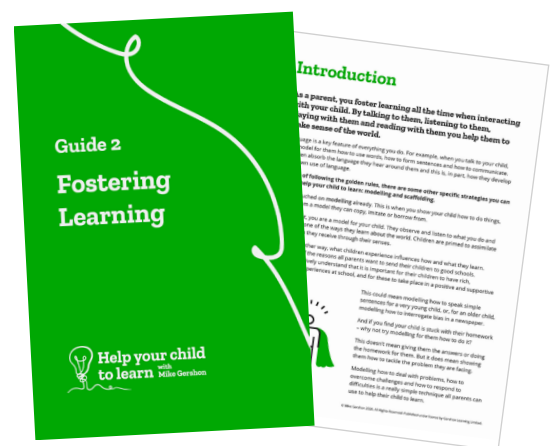
It shows you how to use all the things you already possess to help your child to learn.

# Course Overview

The course is divided into ten sections. This one, our first, is an introduction. Then we have sections covering:

- |   |                                      |   |  |
|---|--------------------------------------|---|--|
|  | <b>Fostering Learning</b>            |  | <b>Mental Maps</b>                           |
|  | <b>Thinking Tools and Techniques</b> |  | <b>Telling Stories</b>                       |
|  | <b>Speaking and Listening</b>        |  | <b>Creative Thinking</b>                     |
|  | <b>Language</b>                      |  | <b>Learning Together: You and Your Child</b> |
|  | <b>Playing</b>                       |   |  |

For each section, there are videos and a written guide. The videos help you to understand why this area of learning is important. The guides give you practical strategies, activities and techniques you can use to help your child to learn.



How you use the course is up to you. You can watch all the videos, then read the guides. Or, you can watch the videos from one section before reading the accompanying guide. Alternatively, you can read all the guides first, then watch the videos.

I have set the course up so it flows from start to finish. However, if you want to jump ahead to some of the sections that stand out for you, then feel free.

The most important thing is that you find the way that works for you.

# The Golden Rules

As you work your way through the course, you will discover dozens of strategies, activities and techniques you can use to help your child to learn. You can use these as they are described, or you can adapt them, modify them and develop them so they are personalised for you and your child.

Whether you're watching videos on language or reading the guide to mental maps, there are three golden rules that underpin everything the course covers.

These are the fundamentals. These are the three simple things you need to remember to help your child to learn. And, chances are, you already know them and you're already doing them. You just might not have thought about them in this way.

- 1. You are your child's greatest asset.**
- 2. Give your child three things: Love, Time and Praise.**
- 3. Do four things with your child: Talk, Read, Play and Listen.**

Those are the golden rules. Simple!

Everything in this course is based around these principles.

**Here's why they're so important:**

## Golden Rule Number 1

**You are your child's greatest asset.**

As a parent, you have all the tools and experiences at your disposal to help your child to learn; to guide them; to teach them. Remembering that you are their greatest asset means remembering that you can and do support them in so many different ways, every day of their lives. And through doing this, and thinking in this way, you can and do help them to learn.

**You**

## Golden Rule Number 2

### Give your child three things: Love, Time and Praise.

**Love** is about support, care, nurture and kindness. It is about generosity, affection and warmth. It is about placing someone else at the centre of your life. It is about giving without an expectation of return.

**Time** is what we have. Time is what we can give. The more you are able to give, the more you can help your child.

**Praise** feels good. It tells us that we are doing the right things and that we are a good person. It motivates us and gives us a reason to succeed. Never underestimate the power of praise. Praising effort means saying that effort is good. It tells your child that their hard work and effort can bring success. It can.

## Golden Rule Number 3

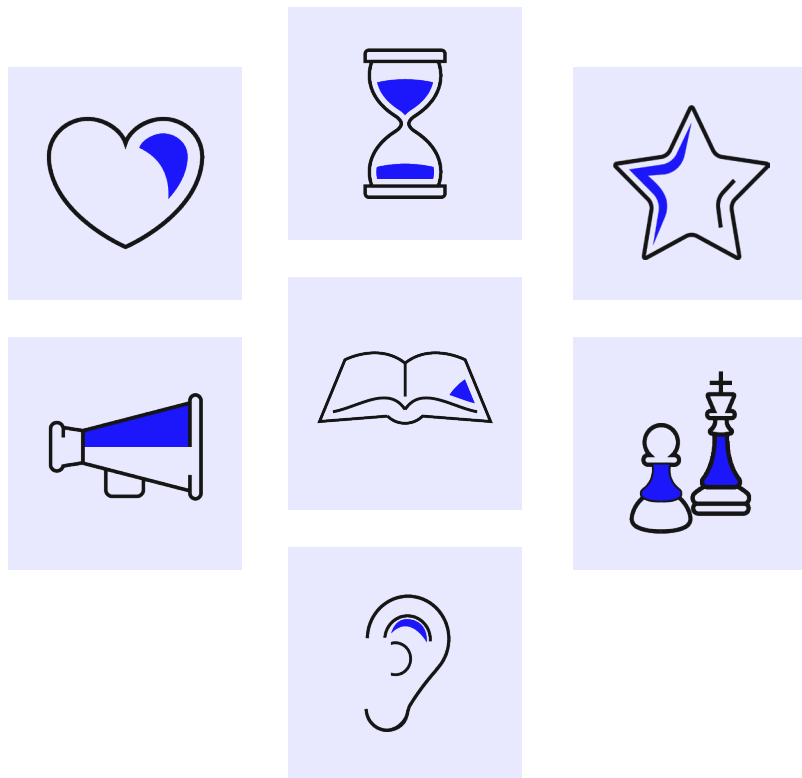
### Do four things with your child: Talk, Read, Play and Listen

**Talking.** Words are our main way of communicating. They allow us to say what is inside our heads. They are our window into society and culture. The more you talk to your child the more you are making them aware of this and the more you are teaching them about language – what words sound like, how they are used and how they help us to communicate with one another and make sense of the world and our experiences of it.

**Reading.** Reading with your child is as important as talking. Do it as much as possible. Make it fun. Make it exciting. Make it moving. If you enjoy it, so will your child.

**Playing.** Playing is one of the key ways in which we learn. This is true even of adults. Play is like a testing of the world before we deal with it seriously. Play does not always have to involve laughter and excitement. Play could mean careful or deep thinking. Playing is also a great way to spend time with your child.

**Listening.** Everybody likes to be listened to. When you listen, listen properly. Look at your child. Think about what they say. Analyse it. If you are not sure what they mean, ask questions. When you respond, respond to what they have actually said. Make sure you don't respond to what you think they have said. This, as much as anything, will help your child to develop.



How easy is it? Love, Time and Praise; we can all give these, no training required. Talking, Reading, Playing and Listening; they are all fun – it's not even like any of this is going to be hard work!

**Remember the golden rules. And, most of all, remember that**  
**you are your child's greatest asset.**

# Tailoring the Course for You and Your Child

We are all individuals. As a parent and as a person, you are different from your friends, just as they are different from you. Children are individuals. They are different from each other. We all have personalities and, as we grow, we have different experiences, think different things and come to understand ourselves and the world in different ways.



At the same time, there is much we all share. We are all humans. We learn in similar ways. We think and talk and play with each other. We interact. We are social beings; we are part of families, communities, cultures and societies.

In this course, I look at learning in general and present strategies, activities and techniques that all parents can use to help their children to learn.

But these aren't set in stone. They are a starting point. Trying them out with your child means seeing how they work for the two of you. Sometimes, they will work perfectly first time round. Sometimes, you might need to practice using them. And sometimes, you will tweak, modify and adapt them so they suit the specific needs of you and your child.

A particular example here is age. The age of your child will influence how you use, modify and adapt the different strategies, activities and techniques. If your child is quite young, you might focus on some of the simpler ones. If they're a bit older, you might take some of the simpler strategies, activities and techniques and make them more complex or more challenging.

You know your child better than anyone. So feel confident in adapting and developing all the ideas I present so they are a best fit for you and your child. Look at the course as a starting point. One that you should feel free to tailor and adapt so it works for you.

And don't forget, learning is fun. It's exciting. It's stimulating. It's challenging and rewarding. It's about pushing back the boundaries of what we can do, what we know and what we understand. It's about developing and growing. It's about making sense of the world and of ourselves.

So when you're helping you child to learn, have fun with them. And don't be surprised if helping them to learn means you also end up learning new things as well. After all, learning never really stops for any of us.

# Helping Your Child to Learn: Strategies, Activities and Techniques

## i. Talking Together

In order to think with other people, we need to talk to them. As a parent, you already know how important talking is for helping your child to learn. Pretty much every strategy, technique and activity in this course involves talking of some sort. It is this interaction between you and your child that allows you to think together.

Here, we'll look at two approaches you can use when talking to your child about a specific topic. Both are explained below. Before we get onto that, I want to make a couple of points that demonstrate how talking works and why it is so important.

**First, let us consider some of our own experiences of talking.** Experiences that we have as adults. I will give you three examples from my own life:

- 1.** When I was deciding whether or not to apply for a new job I spoke at length with a friend. We discussed my options and the reasons why I was thinking of moving on. He put various ideas to me, asked questions and listened to my thoughts. At the end I felt much better. I felt like I knew my own mind more clearly and that I was now able to make a decision with which I was comfortable.
- 2.** Recently I met up with some friends I had not seen for a while. We went out for dinner and drinks in a local pub. We spent the whole evening chatting. The conversation ranged over shared experiences and interests, mutual acquaintances and the things we had done since we last saw each other. It was a lovely evening. By the end we all felt happy and content.
- 3.** Some time ago I came up with an idea for a book about teaching, behaviour and psychology. I contacted two of my friends who have expertise in these areas. We met up and discussed the proposal. The appropriate phrase is that 'the book started to take shape'. Through discussion we came closer to defining how we could work together and what content we could put into the book.

In each of these examples I was able to think in ways that would have been difficult, maybe impossible, to achieve on my own. My mind was interacting with other people's minds. Through talking we were communicating two things:

That which we had  
experienced.

That which we had  
conceived.



**We were able to create new thoughts, ideas and experiences through our interactions. In each situation, all of us left having added to our selves. We possessed things that we did not possess before – knowledge of what other people thought, experiences of the conversation and ideas stimulated by the communication that took place.**

**The second point I want to make about talking is to do with the processes it calls upon.** Here is a list of some of the different things we do with our minds when we talk:

**Introspect.**

This is where we 'look inside' ourselves and try to work out what it is we think and feel. We often do this automatically but, sometimes, we have to make a conscious effort to do it.

**Analyse.**

As above. We analyse our own words and those of other people.

**Assimilate.**

We take in what we hear and it becomes part of our minds. This is why we can speak to someone, leave, come back and continue the conversation. We remember what they said and can use it to carry on talking to them.

**Assess.**

We assess our own thoughts and feelings as well as the way in which we choose to communicate them. We also assess what other people say.

**Create.**

We create sentences and extended strings of sentences that we use to communicate what we are thinking. We also create new ideas as a result of the conversations we have.

**Because talking comes so naturally to us, and because we do it all the time, we often do not notice that we are doing these things. By making explicit just how much thinking talking actually involves, I want to emphasise what an important thing it is to do with your child.**

**Here are two types of discussion you can have with your child.** The types of talk they involve were identified by Neil Mercer, Emeritus Professor of Education at Cambridge University, in his books *The Guided Construction of Knowledge* and *Words and Minds*.

## **Cumulative Discussion**

A cumulative discussion is just what it sounds like. You and your child take it in turns to share your thoughts with each other and the conversation gradually accumulates a lot of different comments. This type of discussion involves giving your opinions and listening to the opinions of others. For example, you might start talking with your child about their favourite television programme. A cumulative discussion would see both of you taking it in turns to say what you liked about the programme (as well as other programmes), how it made you feel, what you think about it and why you like to watch it.

**This is a particularly good way of encouraging your child to talk at length about what they think, feel and believe. By doing this, they will be reaping all the benefits outlined above.**

## **Exploratory Discussion**

An exploratory discussion tends to revolve around a question and involves a bit more challenge than a cumulative discussion. In an exploratory discussion, you and your child might try to answer a specific question or spend some time thinking carefully about it (after all, some questions have no final answers). For example, you might ask: 'How do you think we should do this?' or 'What should we do about...?' The purpose here is to encourage your child to analyse the situation and to use reasons, examples and their own knowledge to try and make sense of it.

In exploratory discussion the idea is that you can challenge what is said. This is different to cumulative discussion, which is a sharing process. By challenge I do not mean anything harsh or confrontational. Instead, I mean asking questions about what has been said. It involves thinking critically and encouraging your child to develop their ideas.

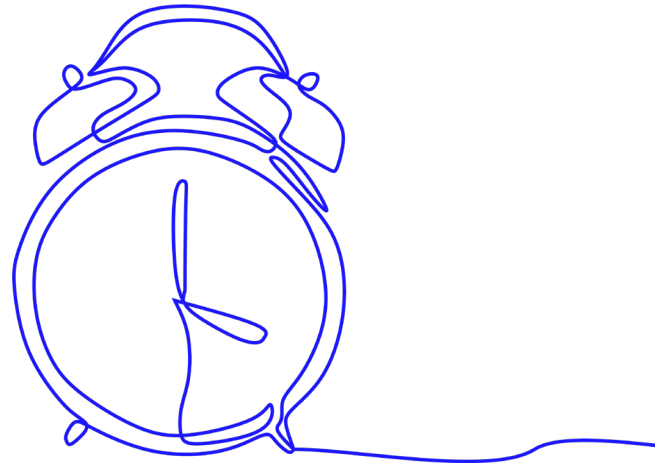
**You might use some of the question types from the 'Socratic Chat' technique in the 'Fostering Learning' guide to help you with this.**

Keep these discussion types in mind and use them when opportunities present themselves. It may well be that you do so already and that this serves to give you some names to attach to the types of discussions you are having.

## ii. Looking for Answers

Every day, we spend time asking questions and searching for answers. Often, we find these answers easily. For example, if someone asks us the time and we are wearing a watch.

Yet, even simple processes such as this have to be learned. None of us are born with the knowledge of what a watch is or how one can be used – in fact, when we are born, we don't even understand what time is. All those sleepless nights parents have to get through are evidence enough of this.



Let us go back to the question: **'What time is it?'**

Consider how difficult it would be to answer this if you did not know what time was, or how to read a clock, or how to describe in words what you see when you look at a clock (quarter to twelve or forty-five minutes past eleven?).

Probably, you would not even understand the question. It would not make sense. It would be like gobbledegook. You would need to learn at least a few different things before you could begin to make sense of it.

Now, what if the question was more complicated or less clear-cut?

Children are constantly faced with these sorts of questions as they grow older and start to think actively about the world:

**Why is the sky blue?**

**Why do plants grow?**

**What stops clouds falling down to earth?**

As they grow older still, other types of questions come to the fore:

**Why are some people rich and other people poor?**

**How do cars work?**

**What's the right thing to do in this situation?**

The thing that makes them similar to the 'What time is it?' question is that they are all based around wanting to know. A desire to understand, to find meaning.

They are all about filling in the gaps.

If someone asks the question 'What time is it?' we can assume they know what time is and how someone could tell the time.

What they want to know is what the actual time is right now. They want to fill gap in their knowledge. They want to add to what they already know. They want to extend their understanding.

**Children are exactly the same. They have some knowledge about the world – that the sky looks blue, for example – and they want to know why. They want to fill in the gaps in their own knowledge and understanding.**

Parents loom large as figures of knowledge in a child's mind – just as teachers do when they are at school. Adults appear at ease in the world; they are independent and can do what they like (or so it seems). Naturally, children direct questions towards them, assuming this will be a quick and successful route to understanding. It often is.

**An alternative to answering all your child's questions, though, is if you can show them how to find out answers themselves. This helps develop confidence and a sense of agency. It helps them to feel independent. And it gives them skills they can use in lots of other situations.**

Of course, this is not to suggest you should refuse to answer your child's questions. Parents answering questions, sharing knowledge and talking about the world are absolutely vital to any child's development. This method is an alternative. It gives your child a new option. Here's how it works:

Creating a **reference corner** in your home is a good place to start. A child-friendly dictionary, thesaurus, atlas and encyclopaedia will all prove useful (as well as long-lasting). If there is a computer or tablet and your child is able to use it then researching age-appropriate sites and saving them to favourites is also a good idea. You might even like to decorate the area, perhaps using posters or pictures of people, places and ideas.

Initially, you should model finding the answer to your child's questions. Take them with you to the reference corner and show them how to use the materials there. It may be that working together goes on for a lengthy period, or it might be that your child takes over relatively soon. Either way, great progress is being made in helping them to learn about the world and about how to answer questions.

When your child has found out an answer on their own, ask them to come and tell you what it is and to explain it. You can then have a discussion. This conversation will cause your child to think further about what they have found out. It will also encourage them to manipulate the information in their mind. This helps them to understand it better and to remember it more easily.

You might like to record all the questions and answers your child comes up with on a sheet of paper or in a log-book. This provides something nice the two of you can look back through, and for you and your child to talk about, at various points in the future.

If your child is older, a specific reference corner might not be necessary. Instead, you could have a section of your bookshelves that contains some age-appropriate reference works. Or, your child could look up the answers to their questions online.

**Two ways of developing the activity for older children are as follows.**

### **First**

You and your child can both look up the answer to a question at the same time. This means the two of you can then share your answers to see if they are the same or different. It also means you can check whether or not your child has identified answers that are relevant.

### **Second**

Your child can look up the answer independently, bring this to you and the pair of you can then have a discussion about it. In this example, your interaction with your child focusses on exploring and analysing the answer they identify, reflecting the greater level of independence they will have if they are older.

### iii. Active Practice

Practice and repetition are essential aspects of learning. When we practice and repeat things we become more familiar with them. Part of this involves us transferring information from our short-term (or working memory) to our long-term memory.

Continued practice helps reinforce our long-term memories, making them stronger and easier to access.

The same is true of muscle memory. Consider how practising something helps that process become, over time, automatic. A classic example is tying shoelaces. When a child first learns to tie their shoelaces, they have to think hard about what they are doing. Over time, as they practice, they have to think less about the process. Eventually, they get to a point where they can tie their shoelaces automatically, without having to think about it.

#### **Let's look at some further examples that illustrate the importance of practice.**

When young children learn their times tables, they often do this through rote learning. Rote learning is a specific type of practice. It involves children repeating the same things over and over again. The aim is to help them internalise the information and therefore remember it. I'm sure you had experiences of this kind when you were at school. Maybe individually, in groups, or as a whole class, you chanted your times tables in a rhythmic manner.

Rote learning is beneficial in some settings, but it can also be boring and unmotivating. In addition, rote learning can see us memorising information without really understanding it.

But practice and repetition doesn't have to be boring or unmotivating. For example, a football coach might set up a circuit of five passing drills for their players. Each drill involves a slight variation on the main technique that is being practiced – that of passing accurately over short distances. Players work in pairs and spend sixty seconds on a drill before moving on. They do each drill three times, meaning the whole activity lasts fifteen minutes.



In this example, the players are engaged in a series of repetitive processes, the aim of which is to help them embed the muscle memory required to play accurate short passes (something they will need if they want to be successful in a game of football). However, the repetition is made more interesting and engaging through the use of five variations of the same drill. This creates a sense of dynamism within the activity and means the challenge subtly changes each time a pair switches from one variation to the next.

As a final example of the role practice and repetition play in learning, imagine you and your child are discussing the meaning of a new word, including how it can be used. Part of discussion is verbal rehearsal. This is where we practice our thoughts. We verbally rehearse our thinking by repeating our ideas in different ways. This helps us to become more familiar with them.

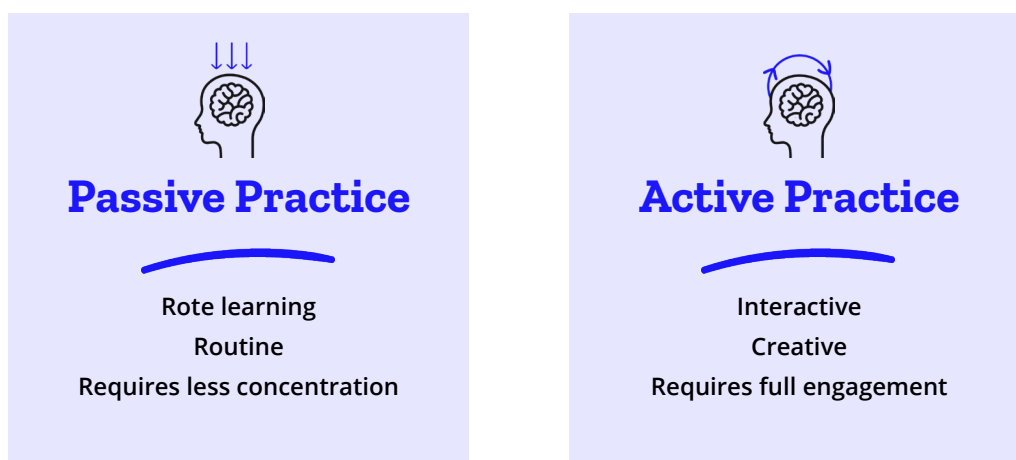
As you and your child discuss the new word, your child repeatedly uses the word. They practice saying it and they practice using it in different sentences.

In addition, they hear you using the word. They hear you explaining the meaning of the word. And, through this, they practice making sense of what you are saying.

Through this practice and repetition, covering both speaking and listening, they become more familiar with the word, transferring it from their short-term memory to their long-term memory. And so they learn, developing their knowledge of language.

In these three examples we see repetition and practice forming the basis of learning, but doing so in different ways.

**A final point to note is the difference between passive practice and active practice.**



Passive practice is when we practice doing something but don't really think about what we're doing. We go through the motions. We watch the clock. We count down the seconds until we can finish and then say, 'Right, that's me done'.

Active practice is where we are fully engaged with what we are practising. We are thinking about it as we do it. We are concentrating. We are focussed. Our attention is on the thing we are practising.

This is more beneficial than passive practice. Focussing on what you are doing while you are practising usually leads to more learning than if you aren't focussed, or if you are thinking about something else while you go through the motions.

Active practice is an idea you can build into your interactions with your child and that you can talk to them about, helping them to understand what it means.



Active practice is an idea you can build into your interactions with your child and that you can talk to them about, helping them to understand what it means.

Many of the strategies, activities and techniques throughout this course involve creative ways you can help your child to actively practice – whether that means practising language use, practising applying new information, or practising different ways of thinking.

**So as you read on, bear in mind that practice and repetition are essential features of learning and that active practice is better than passive practice.**



## iv. Mistakes are Good!

Learning involves mistake-making. You know this, I know this. Everyone who has ever learned anything knows this. It's simply not possible to go through life and learn everything perfectly, first time round. And if you did have that experience, could you really say that you had been challenged? That you had pushed yourself to go beyond what you could do already?

I'd argue that when we are challenged, we often make mistakes. Or, we go through a process of trial and improvement, until we work out the best way to meet the challenge.

**Many children, at some point in their lives, start to see mistakes in a negative light. They start to associate mistake-making with failure and, as a result, can feel less ready to take on challenges, to push themselves, or to risk making mistakes in their learning.**



It's a real shame when this happens, because it can make learning less enjoyable for children. If your child fears making mistakes and getting things wrong, their experience of learning may end up being shaped by this perception. For example, they might find themselves faced with a challenge and, instead of seeing the potential for learning, see only the negative consequences of not being able to do the challenge and the potential problems that might arise if they attempt it and things go wrong.

There are lots of ways you can help your child to maintain a positive attitude to mistakes.

Through doing this, you are helping them to recognise that mistakes are an important and inevitable feature of learning. But, also, that mistakes are nearly always a fantastic opportunity to learn. After all, when we make a mistake we have a chance to find out why the mistake happened, and to think carefully about what we could do differently in the future.

**Here are five techniques you can use to promote a positive attitude to mistakes and to help your child see that mistakes are a normal part of learning:**



## 1. Good Mistakes vs Careless Mistakes.

Not all mistakes are equal. Some mistakes are more useful than others. There are some mistakes we can learn from, and some mistakes that we make because we weren't paying attention. Good mistakes are the mistakes we can learn from. Careless mistakes are the mistakes we can fix ourselves by paying more attention to what we are doing. Good mistakes come when you are learning something, trying hard and seeing what happens. You can talk to your child about this idea and help them to understand the difference between good mistakes and careless mistakes. You can share good mistakes you have made and that you have learned from. You could even create a good mistakes wall where you record the good mistakes you and your child make during a week, a month or longer, including the learning each one inspires.



## 2. Good Mistakes Stories.

There are lots of examples of people, both real and fictional, who have learned from their mistakes. For example, Thomas Edison reportedly went through 10,000 trials and improvements before finalising the design of his lightbulb. The lightbulb went on to play a huge role in people's lives throughout the world. Edison didn't give up when things went wrong. Instead, he used mistakes as a learning opportunity. You can talk to your child about stories like this and use them to show that mistakes are a normal part of learning. Another option is to use fictional stories, or to share your own experiences of making mistakes. For example, you might dig out your old schoolbooks and show your child that you made lots of mistakes when you were at school, but that these mistakes helped you to learn.



## 3. Model How to Respond to Mistakes.

You are a model for your child. They observe your behaviour and listen to your language. They take in what they see and hear. It becomes part of them and helps them to develop their own behaviour and use of language. If you model how to respond positively to mistakes and setbacks, you are giving your child an example they can then follow themselves.



#### **4. Examine Mistakes Together.**

You and your child can sit down together and examine mistakes as a team. For very young children, this might mean sitting down and talking about a mistake a character made in a story-book. The two of you can think together about why the mistake happened and what the character learned as a result. This is a good opportunity to reinforce the idea that mistakes are a normal, and useful, part of learning. With an older child, you might sit down and examine a mistake they've made in their schoolwork. The two of you can discuss what happened, what caused the mistake and what can be learned from it. Through this discussion you can again model for your child how to see mistakes as something useful, as opposed to something negative that must be avoided.



#### **5. Trial and Improvement Activities.**

You and your child can do an activity together that is all about trial and improvement. For example, you might decide you want to drop an egg from a first floor window, while trying to ensure it lands safely, without breaking. Together, you will need to construct some kind of vessel or parachute that will prevent the egg from smashing when it lands. This is a great opportunity for trial and improvement. You will probably need to go through a number of different trials before you finalise a design that works. Each attempt that fails is an opportunity to learn. Through activities like this you can show your child the benefits of learning from mistakes and help them to adopt a positive attitude to their own learning.

## v. Open-ended



**Closed questions** limit the answers you can give. Here we might say: half-past ten, right, and mind your own business! These questions echo many tasks we ask other people to do: put the washing on please; take me to the shops; peel the potatoes while I chop the carrots.

Clearly, these types of questions and requests are very useful. We already know a lot about what is going on in these situations (we know that it is always a specific time, we know you can go left or right at a turning, and we know that a person's age is the number of years they have been alive) and so limiting the options is simple and, often, necessary. It would seem a bit silly to say 'deal with the potatoes however seems most appropriate'.

**When a question is open, there is nothing to limit the answers someone might give:**

- **What might be the best way of dealing with this?**
- **What are your thoughts on this?**
- **How could we achieve our goal?**

Open questions encourage people to think, to try out alternatives, and to be creative. They give people the opportunity to come up with different, innovative responses. They allow people to answer in ways that are personal and that take account of their own knowledge and experiences.

Understanding the differences between open and closed questions means you can help your child to learn in two particular ways.

First, ask your child open-ended questions where possible. Doing this means encouraging them to think carefully and to construct longer, more complex answers than if you only ask closed questions. In addition, you are signalling to your child that it is important to think for yourself, to explore ideas and to be creative.

By leaving questions open, you are placing the onus on your child to decide how to answer. This is instead of you providing them with a small range of answers from which they can choose (for example, and as is the case with many closed questions: yes, no or maybe).

**A great tip is to use the word 'might'.**

For example:



becomes...



In this second question, you are actively encouraging your child to think, rather than to try to guess a correct answer.

Let us look at two imaginary conversations that demonstrate the influence the little word 'might' can have on how you and your child talk together:

### **Conversation 1.**

**Parent:** Why do you think leaves are green?

**Child:** Because green is a good colour for animals to hide in.

**Parent:** Ok, but the real reason is...

### **Conversation 2.**

**Parent:** Why might leaves be green?

**Child:** Because green is a good colour for animals to hide in.

**Parent:** Hmm, interesting answer. Why else might leaves be green?

**Child:** Maybe because grass is green as well and they need to fit in.

**Parent:** Why might they need to fit in?

If you use the word 'might' – if you keep your questions open – you are giving your child the opportunity to explore their ideas, to think about different answers and to give different reasons. This tends to create a richer dialogue. It stimulates more thinking and, as a result, more learning.

The second way you can use your understanding of open questions to help your child to learn is by applying it to activities. **Give your child open-ended tasks or challenges to complete. For example:**



**1.**

Provide a range of materials (cardboard boxes, string, newspaper, cartons, plastic bottles) and ask them to build something (for example, a castle) however they think is best. Or, to be really open-ended, ask them to make whatever they like!

**2.**

Ask questions such as: Can you invent a game we could play in the car when we go on our next long journey? The game can involve anything you can think of.

**3.**

Or: The television schedule has a gap: what might a new show be like that could fill it?

Not only are these a lot of fun, but they also give your child an opportunity to think creatively, to experiment, and to connect different ideas together; all of which are highly worthwhile things to be doing.

## vi. Praising Effort

Here's a reminder of something from the introduction:

### **Golden Rule Number 2**

**Give your child three things: Love, Time and Praise.**

We said that praise is important because it shows your child that you recognise the good things they've done. Praise reinforces positive behaviour and sends a signal to your child that what they are doing is good and that they should keep doing it. Another aspect of this is that praise shows your child that you are aware of them and what they are doing. It provides affirmation and strengthens your relationship. Praise makes us feel good; it is motivating. Praise shows us that our actions have been acknowledged. It gives us confidence and belief. It connects us to one another.

**When it comes to learning, one thing to think about is how you give praise to your child. Saying things like 'You're a genius', 'You're so smart', and 'Aren't you clever?' can have unintended consequences.**



All of these phrases are said with good intentions. However, if a child hears these messages again and again, they may start to believe they really are a genius, that they were born smart, or that everything they do is clever. The risk is that if they start believing this, they will struggle to motivate themselves when things get difficult – when their learning moves onto the next level.

For example, imagine a child who has been told hundreds of times that they are a genius. This has always been done with good intentions. But, it may be that the child hears the message so often that they start to believe it. And what do we expect of geniuses? We expect that they can do things effortlessly, without having to try. Their genius puts them above other mere mortals, ensuring they are always successful and that this is simply a result of who they are.

So what happens when this child encounters a difficult challenge? They may take the challenge on, struggle with it and eventually succeed. Or, they might give up. Why? Because

they've come to believe that they are a genius and so, as a result, they should be able to do things first time, perfectly. If they can't, there's no point trying.

This is a deliberately extreme example, but you see the point I'm driving at. The messages a child hears can influence how they perceive themselves.

## So, what's the alternative?

Well, let's think about why children, and adults for that matter, are successful. How do children learn? How do adults learn? How do they succeed with their learning?

The answer is simple. **They do things. They make choices.**

And the easiest choice any of us can ever make that will help us with whatever learning we are trying to do, is the choice to put in effort.

Praising effort means drawing attention to the fact that your child has worked hard. It means positively reinforcing in their mind the link between trying and learning. It means helping your child understand that the choices they make, and the effort they put in, are what help them to be successful. That success is not a function of who you are, but a function of what you do.

So this technique is one you can add onto Golden Rule Number Two.

When praising your child, one option is to focus your praise on the effort they put into their learning. Doing this provides positive reinforcement, encouraging them to continue putting in effort in the future. It also helps draw a connection in your child's mind that being successful in life, whether that is with learning or anything else, is not about who you are, but about the things you do and the choices you make.

