



7 Building Blocks for School Success

If you are a parent you probably already know that academic success starts at home. It is true that schools, supplies, teachers, and textbooks matter. But if a child is not prepared at home learning is much more difficult. The kids that show up ready to learn usually go on to be successful students and in turn, successful adults.

“Ready to learn” is not a cut-and-dried concept. Many different methods, values, and parenting styles can produce a child who will be successful in school. What all successful students have in common are what I call the Seven Building Blocks for School Success.

There are many elements in a family’s life that can keep kids from getting some or all of these building blocks. One of the most preventable – and most powerful – of these factors is an unhealthy media diet. According to the Center for Media Education, by mid-adolescence the average child has watched 15,000 hours of TV. This is more time than they have spent with teachers, friends or parents. The Seven Building Blocks require real human interaction and resourcefulness, exactly what TV and other media prevent and discourage.

Here’s how to give your child the foundation of the 7 Building Blocks for School Success:

Sense of Curiosity – Children are naturally curious. If a child spends the national average of 25 hours per week in front of an electronic screen (screen-time), there isn’t enough time to be curious. Don’t use screen-time as an indiscriminate babysitter.

Imagination – Your child’s imagination is a powerful learning tool. Overexposure to TV and many other electronic media stifle and restrict a child’s imagination because they don’t ask for participation. Instead of screen-time, help your kids play games, make projects and read books.

Ability to Focus Attention – Children need to be able to pay attention so they can learn what is being taught. Reading, art, science and building projects, as well as outings, are all activities that reward your child for paying attention.

Ability to Maintain Attention – Too much fast-paced media trains children to expect constant sensory stimulation. Their attention wanders when they don’t have it. Avoid extremely fast-paced programs, movies and games, especially when children are very young.

Persistence – Sometimes it takes real persistence to complete a school assignment. TV, video games, and other media provide instant gratification, affecting a child’s ability to stick with an activity when things get frustrating.

Language – The ability to use spoken and written language well is essential to school success. Video games, movies and TV are not language-based, but are picture-based. From their earliest days engage your children in conversation and expose them to the wonder of books.

Inner Speech – The ability to reflect and to have a private conversation with ourselves helps us think things through and control our impulses. Most electronic media do not engage critical thinking and therefore do not develop this skill.

Making sure your child has the building blocks to be successful in school is not an easy task. But when it comes to success in school, a healthy media diet is just as important as what your child eats. Do your kids a favor: turn off the electronic screens and make sure your home is **MediaWise**.

National Institute on Media and the Family, “**MediaWise** with Dr. Dave.” www.mediafamily.org

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