

KEEPING LITTLE EINSTEIN INTERESTED

by Sally Burgess, Forefront Families LLC

A work colleague told me recently that he was having difficulty keeping his gifted four-year-old child interested in activities. He said he had taken Sarah to gym, music and pre-school soccer, but that she only participates for a short while and then gives up. He wanted to know how he could teach her to be tenacious.

It doesn't matter how smart our little ones appear, they do not have the maturity that experience brings to be able to respond as an older child would do. This little girl is only 4 years old! It is now well known that mental agility does not bring with it social and physical maturity. I am sure we can all remember the 'nerdy' kids at school who spent all their time in books or hanging around other 'nerdy' kids. Could it be that they didn't feel comfortable with the age group they had been forced into? Could it be that they kept trying to become better in what they knew they were good at so they wouldn't feel so inadequate in activities that didn't fit other aspects of their development?

How do you ensure that your 'gifted child' develops a healthy balance between intellectual, physical and social aspects of their life? It is important that they learn to play with other children and converse easily with adults. It is important that they get outside and exert themselves in physical activities such as running, climbing and getting their hands in the soil. It is important that they read, find out about interesting topics on the Internet as well as being inventive in their play. It is important that they are exposed to many different experiences – relative to their age.

If there are other children in the family, then each child needs to be given the same amount of love, attention, praise, boundaries and correction. They need to know that you, as parents, do not have favorites. You need to have high expectations for each child (though those expectations will vary depending on the skill set each child has). The gifted child needs to share equally in family responsibilities like chores as well as being involved in the fun stuff.

How do you teach your gifted child to be tenacious? You can set a minimum amount of time they need to be involved, like six months or one year. They will never learn tenacity if they are allowed to drift in and out of activities when the 'honeymoon period' is over and they experience the toughness involved in learning a skill. Encourage them to set goals. Sarah's dad can help her set very short goals even if she is only 4 years old. These goals will be met when the child really loves the activity and wants to get better at it, or when there is a reward at the end of it. This reward doesn't have to be anything big. Praise from a parent is the most valuable, followed perhaps by a fun activity. Kids learn to meet goals when they see parents achieving goals themselves. The

excitement is very contagious and most people want to experience the sense of achievement they see in others, even little children.

As I have said many times in this column, it is a parent's responsibility to shape their children to become mature, responsible, caring and contributing members of your community. Even little 'Einsteins' can be truly valuable members of society, but they need to be coached by their parents to be humble and to be socially mature. It is very easy for them to develop a sense of unacceptable superiority if their parents or others are constantly touting their skills and virtues.

The need for balance is three way – a balance between the gifted child's personal, intellectual, social and physical development; the equal distribution of value given to siblings within a family; and the balance of contribution that the gifted young adult offers to society.

If you have any comments or questions on this subject, please do not hesitate to contact us at sally@forefrontfamilies.org. We invite you to also check out our website at www.forefrontfamilies.org and our blog site at www.forefrontfamilies.blogspot.com for further assistance.