

# 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 a variety of learning styles based on seven forms of intelligence: verbal, logical/mathematical, visual/spatial, kinesthetic, musical, inter-personal, and intra-personal. Traditional schools usually emphasize verbal and logical/mathematical learning styles. Children who do not learn well in traditional schools may benefit from an approach that emphasizes other 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.

**Aletha Solter, Ph.D.**, is a Swiss/American developmental psychologist, parenting consultant, founder of the Aware Parenting Institute ([www.awareparenting.com](http://www.awareparenting.com)), and the author of six books for parents. She studied with Dr. Piaget in Switzerland before earning her Ph.D. in psychology at the University of California (Santa Barbara). Her books have been translated into many languages, and she is recognized internationally as an expert of attachment, trauma, non-punitive discipline, and developmentally appropriate education.

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*.