Raising Joyful Lifelong Learners

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How to Support Children's Natural Learning Processes

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Shining Star Press ✭ Goleta, California

Published by Shining Star Press
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Goleta, California 93116, U.S.A.
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Website: www.awareparenting.com (The Aware Parenting Institute)

Book design: Studio E Books, Santa Barbara
Cover photo credit: iStock.com/RuslanGuzov

First printing 2025

PUBLISHER'S CATALOGING INFORMATION
Solter, Aletha Jauch, 1945–
Raising joyful lifelong learners: how to support children's natural learning processes / Aletha J. Solter
Includes bibliographical references.
ISBN: 979-8-9865429-4-2
1. Child psychology. 2. Child rearing. 3. Educational psychology. 4. Learning, Psychology of. I. Title.
Dewey Decimal Classification: 649.1
Library of Congress Control Number: 2025907861

This book is dedicated to my parents, who gave me the freedom to play and explore my interests, to the many wonderful teachers who inspired me, to my children, who have taught me so much about the learning process, and to my husband, who has supported me on my lifelong learning journey.

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my appreciation to the following people who read the manuscript and gave me constructive feedback: my husband, Ken Solter; my son, Nicholas Solter; and my daughter, Sarah Solter. I am also grateful to my son and his children, who allowed me to interview them for this book, and to the following Aware Parenting instructors who shared their personal experiences: Christoph Geiger (Germany), Joss Goulden (Australia), Rico Heinisch (Germany), Marion Rose, Ph.D. (Australia), Françoise Somers (Belgium), Corinne Sprecher (Switzerland), Nathalie Trudel (China), and Vivian Viester (Switzerland). Finally, I would like to acknowledge the researchers and educational reformers from many countries whose work has inspired me.

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List of Charts

Warning/Disclaimer

As an educational resource for parents, this book offers information about approaches to education based on children's natural learning processes. These suggestions may not be appropriate for children suffering from certain physical, neurological, developmental, emotional, or behavioral problems. This book is not intended to replace professional educational advice, diagnoses, psychotherapy, or medical care from competent professionals. If your child is struggling to learn, it is advisable to obtain professional advice and treatment.

The mention of specific educational approaches in this book is for informational purposes only and does not constitute an endorsement by the author. If you are looking for a school for your child, it is important to visit the school, fully understand its teaching and discipline approach, and carefully review the teachers' credentials.

The author and publisher make no guarantees regarding the effectiveness of the suggestions in this book, and they shall have neither liability nor responsibility to any person or entity with respect to any damage caused, or alleged to be caused, directly or indirectly by the information contained in this book.

Raising Joyful Lifelong Learners

Introduction

THIS BOOK describes children's natural learning processes and the best teaching practices to support their learning from birth to age twelve. I wrote it primarily for parents, but teachers will also find the information relevant. Both parents and teachers play a vital role in educating children and shaping their attitudes toward learning.

I question many cultural assumptions about learning, which manifest in outdated and ineffective teaching methods. Some teaching practices cause stress for children, and some can even be harmful. I am not placing blame on teachers, who often have little freedom or training to implement approaches that differ from those mandated by educational institutions. My goal is to highlight educational practices that are ineffective, stressful, or even damaging, regardless of how loving and well-intentioned parents and teachers may be.

If you experienced ineffective or harmful teaching methods as a child, you may have a clear idea of what to avoid when raising your own children. However, you might struggle to envision alternative approaches that are both effective and nurturing. This book provides numerous examples of teaching strategies that foster learning without compromising children's motivation or self-confidence. I have also included guidelines to help children recover from stressful or traumatic learning experiences at school, at home, or elsewhere. With emotional support, children can heal and regain their eagerness to learn.

The learning approach described in this book is part of a parenting approach I call Aware Parenting. My other books explore various aspects of this approach, which consists of three key components: attachment-based parenting, nonpunitive discipline, and tools for helping children recover from stress and trauma. Although you don't need to read my other books to benefit from this one, familiarity with the Aware Parenting approach may help you implement some of the suggestions more easily. Certified instructors in over 25 countries offer Aware Parenting workshops, consultations, and support groups.

I have identified twelve principles of learning, some of which are not widely recognized, that can guide and support children's education. A large body of research in psychology, education, and child development supports these principles. In my first draft of this book, I summarized the twelve principles of learning in one of the first chapters. While revising it, however, I realized that this book itself is a form of teaching and that it might be useful for it to be structured in alignment with the principles of learning, one of which is learning by discovery. I therefore rearranged the order of the chapters to encourage readers to discover the principles of learning before I explicitly describe them. Several of the first chapters include examples and experiences (including my own), with the goal of inspiring readers to think about the learning process, especially those who have not previously encountered some of these ideas.

I have had unique learning and teaching experiences. By sharing my personal experiences, I illustrate my own journey of discovery, specifically how I gained insight into the learning process. In addition to my own experiences, I have included those of my children and grandchildren, whom I interviewed for this book. Several Aware Parenting instructors (including some who are teachers) have also contributed their personal examples and experiences. With their permission, I have used their real names.

The principles of learning are summarized in Chapter 8, by which point readers will already have a basic understanding of them from reading the previous chapters. I realize that my approach of

illustrating the principles before explicitly explaining them may not appeal to everybody, so please feel free to read Chapter 8 first if you would like an immediate overview of the principles of learning. You can also find them on the Aware Parenting Institute website at the following link: http://www.awareparenting.com/learning.htm. The reference section at the back of the book provides supporting studies.

The following chart summarizes the basic assumptions and themes of this book.

Basic assumptions and themes

1. **Children are born with an innate desire and ability to learn. They are naturally curious, and their brains automatically absorb information while striving to make sense of their experiences.**
2. **Twelve fundamental principles of learning align with children's natural learning processes. These principles, supported by research, apply to all children.**
3. **Educational approaches that honor these principles foster deep, meaningful learning. In such environments, children feel engaged and enjoy the learning process.**
4. **Educational approaches that deviate from these principles can hinder children's motivation and ability to learn. Such environments can cause stress, frustration, confusion, anxiety, anger, or low self-confidence, making learning an unpleasant experience.**
5. **Children can recover from harmful teaching methods and regain their innate motivation and ability to learn.**

By following the guidelines in this book, your children can learn and thrive, whether you teach them at home or they attend a public or private school. Please remember that your situation is unique, and your application of this information will be shaped by your own experiences and the children in your life. If you carry emotional wounds from your own stressful school experiences, your child's painful experiences may trigger long-buried memories of your childhood. If this happens, the exercises at the end of this book can help you identify the root causes of your emotions and heal from those stressful learning experiences.

You can support your children's learning effectively regardless of your financial situation, education level, or teaching experience. I hope this book provides you with ideas and inspiration to help your children become confident, joyful, and lifelong learners.