

Advice for the Home Team Toolbox

by Dr. Debi Warner



Dear Dr. Debi, I am worried that the children will lose their knowledge in the summer – can I help them out, even though we are renovating? Signed, Studious Parent

Dear Studious Parent,
Summer is a great time to spout our wings and see

what we are capable of outside of the constraints of our ordinary routines. Each of us remembers the joys of warm weather and sunny days – the water and the friendships that give us the whole romance of summer. Why think of school knowledge? There is another side – the practical side of their education, the part where they learn how all that schooling applies to the real world.

As you work on a task yourself, just pay attention and notice the lesson inside the task for you. Many new projects give us lessons as we pay attention. I love to see how math, order, or measuring come together when I am laying out a new patio or tiling job. Just by watching yourself, you may notice the elementary skills that are part of the action on the project. Once you figure out what some of the lessons are in your own project, you can then take just a bit more time and imagine the lesson through your children's eyes. You may be able to show them, or better yet, provide the materials so they can notice the lesson themselves. Some suggestions:

Give the left over pieces from your cutting job to the child to play with or arrange however they choose. They may place them like a pretty jigsaw, noticing patterns, or might make them into little structures, learning inter-relationships. They may want to do some cutting of their own. Just ask them to plan out their cuts, including how & why they want them that way. You will see their thinking develop as they reveal their little goals and the step-wise methods they plan to use.

Ask them if they are old enough to do this and they will brag about how they learned all about it in school. This is great; you will get a chance to see them apply measuring and arithmetic skills and reveal the beginnings of organization that develop into good problem solving.

When they get stuck, they will have a nice opportunity to discover how people solve problems beyond their limitations. Think aloud with them about how you would consider who to turn to. Let them know you do this too. What questions do you ask yourself before you look for someone to help you? Help them learn to ask the same questions.

The child may want to use tools that are beyond them. We all do, so what's new. With the same "oh well" that you tell yourself you can't buy every new saw you see, you can communicate the acceptance of limitations of resources. But later, on break, you can show them how the saw works and can facilitate some cutting for them.

Reading is not just novels – there are some great books on buildings, designs, and plans that can stimulate the imagination of your young builders. Let them look through the books you have, and even stop at the library to get some related materials. Resource hunting is always good for pre-project planning and also life in general. Ask them for suggestions that will relate to those books and listen to them when they run to you with a new idea or design. Help them with their excitement and ask them to make a picture to show all about it. Take some time later on and really look at it and listen to them. They will love it and you will learn so much about their developing imagination.

Shopping can also be a good lesson for the children. Ask them to plan ahead what is needed. Perhaps they can tour the worksite with you and help make a list. Or, they might make an imaginary list for their dream project, then check the prices at the store as you shop. If you do that, you will also need to talk kindly later about not having enough money. Don't worry, it is not cruel, just explain it is a good lesson in connecting our dreams to our realities. But have a nice distraction reward for the experience.

You can piece these many lessons into a folder or notebook that will grow with the summer. Take it out and show it to others. Proudly recount the way your child faced their challenges and how they discovered the applications of math, reading, problem solving, planning, listening, and budgeting – and how you are proud of how they are a growing part of your Home Team!

Dr. Debi

Dr. Debi Warner is the Founder of Renovation Psychology® radio host, and author of the book, Putting the Home Team to Work, available now online at RenovationPsychology.com. Dr. Debi provides advice for greater domestic harmony to folks who are renovating their home – for True Home Improvement. This column is offered for enjoyment and enhancement and is not intended to replace your personal medical care. Photo by Bob Jenks, St. Johnsbury, Vt.

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