Bayerisches Staatsministerium für
Familie, Arbeit und Soziales

Eight Things ...
giving education more power.

EDUCATION MAKES YOU STRONGER

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How can education be defined?

First of all, it has to be said that education is a task concerning not only parents but everybody within a society. Education should manage to make children stronger in a variety of points: It should be a great help in defining their path of life, in accepting and making the best of challenges, in becoming and being able to go into and have interpersonal relationships, in coping with bad situations, in accepting opinions differing a lot from their own, and in many more aspects. During the first years, bringing up a child mainly means to provide him or her with all necessities of life, such as food and clothes, a feeling of security and the possibility to "explore" the world.

To acquire a huge knowledge and amount of skills, it is also very important that boys and girls face up to difficult and/or new situations and learn to cope with them on their own. To find and take their place within a society, it is crucial that children are allowed to make their own experiences and to go their own way being accompanied by reliable people to support them if necessary. In their environment, children have many role models: parents, pedagogues in kindergarten, at school, at the nursery or at youth clubs, other people they meet in their normal course of life as well as characters media introduce to them.

Without doubt, for adolescents parents they live together with play the most important role in this context. Therefore, the parents' behaviour is of a special importance as they bear the biggest responsibility for their children's welfare. Education

Education is a vivid and exciting process. Sometimes it can be quite stressful, without doubt. However, we should not forget that this process also gives a lot of pleasure to the people involved and that it is very important for the society we live in. In an environment where children are brought up and educated according to the rules of a high-quality education, both children, their parents and friends can profit a lot. A "strong education" is a very important basis here.

includes both certain duties and rights. Just as children have got a right to live under optimal conditions, parents have got a right to be supported by the society they live in. To educate their children in a good, successful way, families need optimal basic conditions: They need enough space to live in, safe jobs, financial support, good opportunities of child care as well as a family-orientated and friendly environment.

We must not forget the following when it comes to help and support:

- It is the basic right of every parent to relax and to be relieved from life's burdens from time to time. In some cases, families can help and support other families.
- Moreover, friends, colleagues, relatives and neighbours are of an utmost importance to support families with their understanding, advice and help. It is not at all a shame if on bringing up their children families come to "their wit's end" in certain situations. Youth welfare services, institutions offering seminars in parent education or marriage and family counselling are here to help individually.

Eight things giving education more power.

Which are the main "content points" of a "strong and high-quality education"? Nowadays, parents are confronted with a flood of newspapers and books providing advice concerning these questions. We definitely do not want to add another guidebook here. The experts who have initiated the Campaign "Education makes you stronger" have just defined eight crucial points containing the main features of a "strong education".

EDUCATION MEANS ...

... giving love.
... being allowed to quarrel.
... being able to listen to somebody.
... to set boundaries.
... to grant self-determination.
... to show feelings.
... to spend time with somebody.
... to encourage.

Education means ...
giving love.

Loving a child means to accept him or her the way he or she is, reacts, etc., and to show your child that this is the case. Children and adolescents need this feeling of security to develop self-confidence and to learn about their own strengths and weaknesses without being afraid. However, it sometimes seems to be all too difficult for fathers and mothers to show and express their love. So, how does "giving love" actually work?

- The most direct way of giving sympathy is to be physically close to your child or adolescent. No matter whether you hug your child, crawl his or her back caressingly, give him or her a smile, nudge him or her or just tap on his or her shoulder, your youngster will precisely know what you mean.
- The older children grow, however, the more important other forms of sympathy become. Teenagers, i.e. both boys and girls, sometimes enjoy very much if their parents hug them, even if for kissing they search for somebody else later on.
- To spend time with your child, to show interest in his or her sorrows and life and just to be there in sad situations are the best prove of how much you love your children. Tell them that you love them and that you are proud of them, totally independent from any special achievements.
- Giving love, however, does not mean that parents do not have a right to be on their own and relax from time to time or to forbid certain actions to their children.

Education means …
being allowed to quarrel.

To have an argument is normal and happens in every family. It is also quite normal if such arguments sometimes turn out to be a little bit louder. To go for one's goals, to say "no" in certain situations, to cope with stress, to recognise other people's needs, to convince them but also to look for compromises and find a common basis to be "friends" again is good practice of children's social skills. Arguing is also a learning process. To solve a conflict as well as to avoid causing additional stress, some basic rules should be obeyed:

- Basically, no topic is forbidden to be discussed. Children are allowed to show negative feelings such as antipathy or anger without being punished.
- Often, adults have the whip hand in such situations. Therefore, they should not hurt their children by using bad words or other forms of violence but take them seriously with their wishes and requests.
- As long as people are not angry with each other, it is even possible to be of two completely differing opinions after an argument.
- Both children and adults learn to be tolerant in such situations. Children must be allowed to quarrel with each other without parents interfering immediately.

- However, if they react in an unfair way towards weaker ones, adults should tell them in a loving but clear way to be thoughtful. Adults are important role models. If children experience their parents arguing in a respectful way, they learn a lot from such situations. Children suffer from smouldering conflicts, violent disputes or hurting accusations within a family. Depending on children's age, it is possible that parents explain to them what an argument is about without influencing them in their opinion.
- Both being allowed to quarrel and to be friends again are equally important. In an argument which has got stuck over a longer time period, parents could even support their children by giving them advice. However, arguments within a family should be finished and the involved persons should reconcile before children go to bed.

Education means ...
being able to listen.

To listen to somebody means to give him or her one's time and attention as well as to take his requests seriously. Adolescents who experience new things day by day and who have to orientate themselves to find their place within this world, especially need their parents listening to them. There should be time in every family to talk, no matter whether such talks take place on the occasion of a "family conference", of dining together or just on putting the children to bed at night. Without doubt, listening to somebody can be difficult but here is some helpful advice:

- Sometimes, a kind of information can be found in the end of a sentence which would not have been expected in its beginning.
- Therefore, let your partner, child or other family member finish his or her sentence in any case! Jumping to conclusions, comments or advice does not help at all.
- Children feel being taken more seriously if parents try to find solutions together with them.

- To avoid misunderstandings in their very beginnings, make sure that everybody has understood the points of a discussion.

- Furthermore, switch off your TV set and do not answer the phone, just let it ring! If children, however, talk about their experiences in an all too detailed manner, it is also allowed to interrupt them or slow them down. Moreover, children who normally do not talk a lot should be encouraged to talk, especially if they seem to be even more quiet than usual.

Education means ... to set boundaries.

To set boundaries and to stick to them consistently is both the most important task for many parents and the greatest challenge in education. Children and adolescents are born masters when it comes to testing their parents' patience and consistency. As a consequence, children need boundaries for two main reasons: Firstly, they help to protect children from dangers at home and outside home. Secondly, reasonable and transparent rules give the child a feeling of certainty. Sometimes it is really difficult for parents to act against their children's will, however, in the long run it is easier for both parents and their children if they know where boundaries are set. Here, certain rules should be obeyed:

- Boundaries have to be defined precisely and clearly. Adults should think carefully about the reasons of establishing a certain rule. Children at higher age understand a rule or prohibition better if adults explain its reasons to them.

- People who define rules should, however, stick to them themselves as well. It goes without saying that this does not mean that mum and dad also have to go to bed after "Sandmann" has sent the children to bed.

- But on brushing one's teeth, for example, parents are the children's greatest role models. It does not make any sense to establish rules and not obey them later on. Consistency is the best proof of reliability and gives children a feeling of being taken seriously.

- If a child does not obey a defined rule, adults should react in a clear and consistent way. Children understand conditions and situations much better, if rules established by their father, mother or other persons involved in their education are similar concerning basic aspects. It does not matter, whether in detail these people bring the children up in a differing manner.

- In certain situations, a clear "no" or a prompt note are not enough but it is necessary to take consistent steps. Such steps, however, should be directly related to the situation they result from, as most of the time, children understand "logical punishment" quite well. Parents must obey certain boundaries in education as well. It is important to say that any kind of violence is a strict taboo. This includes not only physical and mental violence but also the refusal of taking care in a loving way.

- There is no rule without exceptions. To change a rule because of changed circumstances or just because it does not make too much sense any longer, does not at all mean the "end of education". Children and adolescents, for example, do not stop respecting boundaries set by their parents just because of once being allowed to stay up a little bit longer.

Education means ... to grant self-determination.

Children need rooms which they are allowed to arrange things according to their own taste. From about the age of one year, they start winning more and more self-determination. So, for example, they learn to eat on their own, to go to the toilet without help, to be apart from their parents for longer time periods, to deal with their own money and many more things. Self-determination is crucial to become an independent person as well as to take responsibility for and make the best of one's own life. Parents should think of the following when having to decide between looking after their children or just releasing:

- Young people feel the strong need to test their environment's tolerance. Boys and girls involved in families and their everyday life and routine learn a lot for their own future lives. When being allowed to look over mum's or daddy's shoulder from time to time, young people will soon be able to read a city map or to repair the own bicycle. This way, children learn to cope with self-determination step by step.
- Pupils attending first school class and already being allowed to handle a small amount of weekly-paid pocket money, will in their teenage years most probably be able to deal with an own bank account on which their parents transfer their pocket money or even a fix amount for school equipment or clothes on a monthly basis.

- Such and other methods of help and support give children and teenagers a certain feeling of safety on testing new topics and limits. An 11-year old girl, for instance, who has got her own mobile phone for cases of emergency would not feel as uncomfortable and endangered on visiting her best friend in another part of the city as she would without most probably. And her journey would not be as thrilling for her parents either.

- Everybody knows that members of two or more generations do not always agree upon certain questions of taste. No matter, whether it is about hobbies, haircut trends or related to the selection of friends, children should be allowed to make their own decisions – as long as boundaries set by their parents are obeyed.

- Tolerance comes to its limits when the children's welfare is endangered. So, for example, there is neither any use nor a positive effect on their health if teenagers start smoking. Within adolescence, many young people claim much space and freedom and even those who have been nice and calm so far seem to turn into rebels against their parents' rules. To avoid them losing ground below their feet, both boys and girls need to experience that there is no freedom without boundaries. Parents, however, should help them to go their own way and to grow up.

Education means ...
to show feelings.

Feelings such as love and happiness, being sad, angry or hurt belong to a normal family life. Children have different ways to express their feelings. While some prove their sympathy by huddling against their parents, others prefer to paint a picture for somebody they love. Within the process of growing up and developing his or her mental and physical skills, it is very important that the young person realises the way he or she feels and that he or she learns to handle such feelings. There is a very important rule applying here:

- Children are allowed to show both positive and negative feelings. Furthermore, every child is allowed to express feelings in his or her very special way, no matter whether this happens loudly or quietly.

- The times have definitely gone in which boys where not allowed to cry and girls were not allowed to be in a violent temper. In spite of this, however, adults can consider their children's emotional releases to be inappropriate in certain situations. It goes without saying that in such moments children can definitely be asked for a certain degree of self-restraint.

- Then, it is very important to let the children know then that it is not their feelings but their behaviour which is inappropriate. Children and adolescents want to be taken seriously as it regards their feelings. In moments of smaller or larger "catastrophies", they are not able to react as wisely, experienced and

therefore as calmly as adults would do. Being an adult, the best way to react here is proving composure.

- Some boys and girls prefer to not talking about things they worry about. If such young people turn out to be even more silent than usually, parents should look for possible reasons. Especially shy children sometimes need to disburden their hearts.

- As even in the world of feelings children learn from adults, parents are allowed to show and explain their feelings in a way their children would understand. Everybody knows that, anyway, it is not possible to "fool" young people. Feeling that something is in the wind which adults do not explain, causes fears in children. We furthermore know that neither parents nor children are immune towards inappropriate accesses of rage, so it is crucial to apologise afterwards. Admitting to have made a mistake is not at all a sign of weakness!

Education means ...
to spend time together.

On playing with other children or family members, talking with each other, reading, discovering "the world" as well as on many other activities children share with their family, they learn a lot for their future. Furthermore, time spent together strengthens the relationship between children and their parents. There are many children and adolescents who wish their parents would spend more time together with them. The following ideas show how families can succed here:

- To spend time with each other does not necessarily mean to have to spend a lot of money on expensive activities, too. So, for example, to go swimming, on excursion to the local zoo or to go on a bicycle tour together with the whole family are greatly appreciated by many children. Hobbies which can be shared with other family members are a good opportunity to spend one's spare time together.

- In many cases, duties and joyful activities can be combined here. If not declared as an annoying duty, for example, housework can be done together and even be enjoyed. Some families totally switch off so-called "time-eaters", i.e. equipment such as TV or Playstation, for a certain period. The additional time, which otherwise would have been spent in front of such media, can be filled by realising many good ideas and spare-time activities.

- Children need their parents' time and support especially when having to do very difficult homework again or if, for example, the bike is broken. "Customs" such as reading bedtime stories may be time-consuming, but for children they are very important.

- Parents who can spend less time with their families because of being demanded in their jobs very much, do not need to have a bad conscience as it is crucial to spend the available time together and using it wisely. It is definitely not a shame for parents who are short of time, if grandparents, an aunt or friends stand in in certain situations.

Education means ...
to encourage.

For everything new which children have to learn or responsibilities they have to assume, especially young people need a huge amount of courage and self-confidence. In this process of learning and exercising their duties, they learn to take responsibility, to go for their own goals and establish themselves as well as to not being unsettled by others so easily. To develop courage and self-confidence, there are two basics young boys and girls mainly need: satisfaction about their own achievements and other people's recognition of their achievements. But how can parents best encourage and support their children?

- Young people want to be loved because of themselves and not only because of their achievements. You can encourage a child as fast as you can unsettle him or her. It is, therefore, necessary that adults are quite careful in dealing with them.

- One of the main preconditions of taking courage is the experience of having succeeded. Children who are allowed to try things out and to make mistakes, will even accept scratches and small "accidents". Young people can be encouraged by being allowed to take over small tasks and responsibility.

- They need praise which sometimes should be given not only for the achievement itself but for the effort made to achieve certain aims already. To keep praise's value, however, complimenting children on their achievements and success should be done in the right amount.

- Support in certain tasks can avoid children to get frustrated. On buying clothes, for example, you can choose articles of clothing which children manage try on themselves.
- In this context, an important rule applies: Adults which allow children to make mistakes, are allowed to make mistakes themselves as well.

Advice and help for strong families.

It is impossible for human-beings to work like “educational engines”. Living with “the perfect father” or “the inerrable mother” would most probably even be a nightmare for every child. Therefore, in the end of these explanations we hereby would like to encourage you to stay a “non-perfect family”. It seems to be normal for parents to get to their limits from time to time. For this reason, it is very important to have somebody to listen, to encourage and to grant the necessary degree of freedom in such situations.

- Be honest with yourself and admit if you have come to these limits, as this is not a shame but a first important and very brave step! From time to time, allow yourself a “holiday” from everyday life in education!
- It can already be of great relief to have some hours on one’s own, i.e. without the children, just to relax, to attend a course at an parent education centre or just to meet friends. Taking care for your partnership is also essential to get new power for the whole family.
- Tell people who you trust if you need help and support - neighbours, relatives or friends as well as helpdesks or information centres are there to help you.

USEFUL LINKS:

In Bavaria:
www.baer.bayern.de
www.elternbriefe.bayern.de
www.erziehungsberatung.bayern.de
www.familienbildung.bayern.de
www.familienhandbuch.de
www.familienstuetzpunkte.bayern.de
www.koki.bayern.de
www.stmas.bayern.de

Government links:
www.bke-elternberatung.de
www.bzga.de
www.familienportal.de

We hope to be able to support you in your educational task with our "Campaign around education". Moreover, we would like to add two more important points to our "Eight things giving education more power": Everyday life in education can be planned and arranged in a far more easy-going way by keeping a huge portion of common sense and humour.

BAYERN. GEMEINSAM. STARK.

www.stark-durch-erziehung.de

Die Kampagne „Stark durch Erziehung“ will alle, die an der Erziehung junger Menschen beteiligt sind, unterstützen und stärken. Das Thema soll verstärkt ins Gespräch gebracht werden. Die Broschüre kann in 16 verschiedenen Fremdsprachen unter www.stark-durch-erziehung.de heruntergeladen werden. Wir danken dem Jugendamt Nürnberg für die Entwicklung des Projekts, das mit Mitteln des Staatsministeriums für Familie, Arbeit und Soziales gefördert wurde.

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Bayerisches Staatsministerium für
Familie, Arbeit und Soziales

Winzererstr. 9, 80797 München
E-Mail: oeffentlichkeitsarbeit@stmas.bayern.de
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Bürgerbüro: Tel.: 089 1261-1660
E-Mail: buergerbuero@stmas.bayern.de
Web: www.stmas.bayern.de/buergerbuero

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