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FMI

The Learning Corner

To Parents Helping Their Children Learn

"WHAT DID YOU DO IN SCHOOL TODAY?"

It is an old and familiar question: "What did you do in school today?" The answer is an equally familiar one: "Nothing." This common after-school exchange is a frustrating one for most parents. Should you keep asking and repeat the same fruitless dialogue day after day? Or should you give up?

Happily, those are not your only choices. There are some things you can do to make those after-school conversations more pleasant, informative and meaningful for both you and your child.

First, you have to understand that the question, "What did you do in school today?" can be overwhelming. In fact, children do hundreds of small things in school every day. It's too much for them to sort through, so they take the sensible way out and answer, "Nothing."

There's another consideration, as well. Adults recognize how the transition from job to home can be difficult. You need time to unwind after a workday. Children need that time, too.

*** Breaking the Logjam**

Begin slowly. Don't substitute a question for a greeting, a warm hello, a hug. Share a snack or work on a small project together to re-establish some intimacy. Then you can ask questions -- but make them very specific. "Were you nervous about giving your oral report?" "Did you work out that math problem?" If the conversation is relaxed, your child will start talking on his or her own.

It is also important to remember that young children are moving into a new world. They are relating to other adults -- their teachers --whom they like very much. It's not unusual for them to feel guilty about liking that different world. You just have to show your child that you are happy to see him or her enjoy a wider circle of friends.

You can be confident that if you let your child know that you are interested in what he or she is doing, and if you are supportive and nonjudgmental about problems that arise in school, your child will talk about school without any prodding at all.