

PORTLAND

lifestyle & family

EDUCATION / PARENTING / MARCH 1, 2016

Ask Ariel: My Kid Doesn't Love School



Dear Ariel,

My 8-year-old daughter doesn't love school. She doesn't hate it exactly — she enjoys seeing her friends and making art. Sadly, however, her school doesn't have an art teacher; only music is offered. But she shows little or no interest in any subject that is more academic. How do I get her to be more engaged in school?

—Mom of an Artist

Dear MOAA,

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Not every student is well suited to thrive in the increasingly stressful school environment. The pressure that our educational systems put on students to pass all-important standardized tests can be very alienating. Educators are given "teacher-proof" curricula that can be dry and boring for kids, especially creative children like yours. There are ways to help your daughter connect things she loves to academic topics and I have some suggestions of fairly straightforward ways to do that.

The first thing is to build on her strengths. If she loves visual art and her school only offers music, then seek out other art classes and initiate family art projects. If your family can afford an art class, that is a great way to engage a kid who has some negative associations with a classroom, creating some positive neural pathways in her brain.

My next suggestion is to help your daughter make connections between happy, personal memories and her schoolwork. This will help create positive associations between learning and personal history. Brain science tells us that repeated linking of related memories with new learning is brain glue. For example, if your daughter is learning about Lewis and Clark, you can talk with her about a family camping trip. Further discussions can involve questions like, "Imagine if we were camping through a long winter, like Lewis and Clark did. What would you do for food?" or "What if we didn't have a map and didn't know where we were going while backpacking? What would you do?" By making her schoolwork relevant to her life, you will help her more deeply engage in the materials and perhaps she will enjoy school a little more.

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SHARES

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Ariel Frager is a school counselor and has a private therapy practice that specializes in treating children, adolescents and families. She lives in Portland with her husband, son, dog and kitty cat.



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