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# Experiential Learning

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Experiential and hands-on learning techniques are designed to allow the participant to learn through doing. An ancient Chinese proverb once stated, "Tell me and I'll forget; show me and I may remember; involve me and I'll understand," sharing a new element to how others learn. Experiential techniques and hands-on learning can impact learning and growth by increasing interest, enhancing motivation for the topic and reducing resistance. These educational approaches are beneficial to all children, especially those with ADHD or learning disabilities. A core component of experiential learning, according to Kraft & Sakofs (1985), is that:

- The learner is a participant.
- Learning activities require personal motivation in the form of energy, involvement and responsibility.
- Natural consequences are involved.
- Reflection is part of the learning process.
- The learning must have present as well as future relevance.

Traveling to places that your child is studying about, like Gettysburg, Yosemite, or Washington D.C., may be a great way to increase your child's educational experience and enjoyment of different subjects. When the child has a positive emotional response to a situation, they may also have a better ability to process it, understand it and apply it. You do not need to go far to find experiential learning in South Florida. Take your family to the Fort Lauderdale Museum of Discovery and Science to learn about recycling in the Go Green Exhibit, the Miami Seaquarium to discover Marine Biology, or the Flagler Museum to understand Florida history. Many organizations such as the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts of America or athletic programs tailor their approaches to hands on learning as well. Beyond the enriched experiences, this learning also presents social interactions, mentoring and enhanced self-esteem through accomplishments and group participation.

At home, utilizing multi-sensory instruction and incorporating verbal cues, visual information, or the use of manipulatives can help supplement learning. Your child may struggle to understand a topic by only reading about it. If they see examples, look at pictures, watch a

movie and/or visit locations associated with what they are learning, their level of comprehension may improve. In addition, devising experiential experiences can help create "mini-labs" to help increase your child's investment and understanding of a concept. Some examples of this would be:

- Having your child keep statistics at a baseball game.
- Tracing spelling words on a tray using cornstarch, salt or sugar.
- Enlisting them to help cook (age appropriate) or prep for a meal to learn math, chemistry, or art.
- Decorating a room on a budget.
- Engaging them to survey their friends and create a graph.
- Acting out a scene from a book or play.

Experiential and hands-on approaches can be effective ways for you as a parent to engage your child and allow them to understand topics they may usually avoid. Individualizing the activities towards your child's strengths and interests can help improve their overall learning experience. Coming up with engaging experiential activities can be a challenge, though, it can also be viewed as a creative and enjoyable outlet for you. Don't forget about the numerous websites, including the association for experiential education ([www.aee.org](http://www.aee.org)), that offer information about the learning experience along with relevant activities and/or lessons to implement. By becoming a participant with your child, you can improve their educational experience and hopefully make the learning process enjoyable and productive.

**This approach will now take you into the "Green Living" feature that is offered this month. Hands on learning from the garden to the table, revolutionizing the child's learning experience. Enjoy!**

Kraft, R., & Sakofs, M. (1985). *The Theory of Experiential Education*. Boulder, CO: Association for Experiential Education.

*Dr. Anthony W. Tanona is a Licensed Psychologist and an Executive Director of Delta Psychological Group in Aventura. He completed an internship with a focus on experiential therapy and utilizes experiential therapy methods in counseling for those with ADHD, behavioral disorders, Learning Disabilities, depression and anxiety. For a free phone consultation, or for other concerns, he can be reached at (305) 933-5733 or at [DrTanona@yahoo.com](mailto:DrTanona@yahoo.com). TPN*