

The most important message you can give your child

You are a living legend. You have a brain that is capable of sheer genius. Think of the smartest person you can and know that you have that potential, too. You are just as capable, just as creative and just as clever.

But you can't rely on your brains alone. You are going to have to try, and to keep trying. You won't pass every test with flying colours, or win every competition or be picked for every team. You will need to work and practise and improve.

You do not need to be successful at everything you do. In fact, the times you make mistakes, get things wrong or don't get the results you want can be used to make you even smarter.

There will be times when you will feel like giving up on the things that you want. These times will test you. But you need to keep going. Find the strength within you. It is there; look for it.

There will be things that you will think are too hard for you to do. You will be tempted to not do these things thinking it is better not to try than to fail. Often this will be your anxious brain trying to get you out of something.

If it is something you really want or is very important to you, don't talk yourself out of doing it. Take the risk and even if you don't achieve what you want the first or second time you try, you will learn more about how to achieve it next time.

Learning is some of the best fun there is. Try to find ways to make learning interesting, even the boring bits. If you surround yourself with good ideas, great books, art, films and terrific conversations, your brain will amaze you.

Most times it is easy to get interested in learning something but sometimes the only way is to challenge yourself by seeing how much you can remember or understand.

Introduction

A child is a fire to be lit, not a vase to be filled.

Francois Rabelais

In the great expanse of desert that Aboriginal Australians inhabit, fire plays a major role. As the wet season approaches, dark billowing clouds roll in and the night air rumbles with thunder and crackles with lightning that sparks from one horizon to the other. On these lush humid evenings, Lightning Man dances.

According to Bilawara, an Elder of the Larrakia people, the creation and maintenance of fire has always been important for her people. Making fire takes patience and effort. Sometimes it was obtained from lightning strikes that were seen as a gift from the Lightning Brothers. This gift must not be wasted, so the glowing fire sticks were carried from camp to camp, transferring the spark from site to site.

These rituals can also be likened to unlocking your child's genius. Parents can nourish and feed their child's curiosity and abilities by exploring the world with them and transferring these sparks of genius when possible. At first the task of fuelling genius is time-consuming, but easy. Following a child's interests, watching as they set ideas alight, and encouraging them to take hold and gain strength fills the heart with wonder.

All too often, however, in middle childhood the initial fires of genius that burned so brightly falter and there is a risk that they may become snuffed out. If this happens children dim down, fear trying new things and worry about making mistakes. Sadly, they are left with a stunted version of their abilities – and themselves.

At this time the power of parents to ignite the blaze of brilliance becomes truly inspiring. Fortunately you have at your fingertips the best laboratory for unlocking your child's genius – it's called the world. By exploring, creating and playing in it, you can expand your child's mind. By taking time