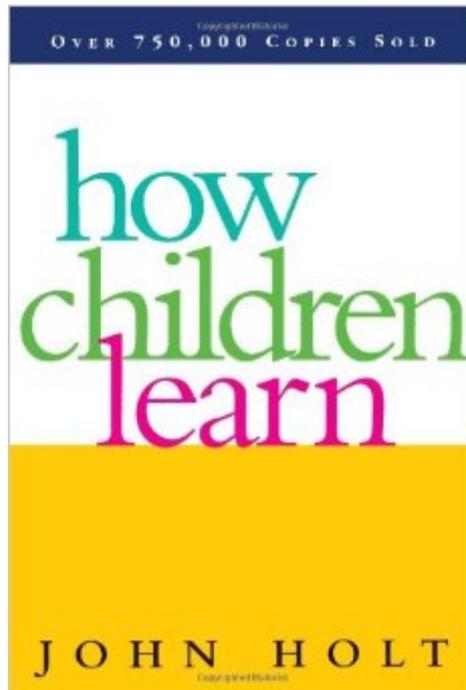


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# How Children Learn (Classics In Child Development)



## Synopsis

This enduring classic of educational thought offers teachers and parents deep, original insight into the nature of early learning. John Holt was the first to make clear that, for small children, learning is as natural as breathing. In this delightful yet profound book, he looks at how we learn to talk, to read, to count, and to reason, and how we can nurture and encourage these natural abilities in our children.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

**How Children Learn** By John Holt 5 stars Holt didn't have children of his own, and his first opinions of children and learning came from being a schoolteacher in an elite private school, where he taught math to 5th graders. He was exposed to younger children and babies who were friends and relatives, and began forming different opinions about learning, which he shares in this book. Holt is fascinated by the notion that children accomplish so much before formal schooling begins and realizes that the way school is set up goes directly in opposition to what is natural and has worked for these children up to the point they are sent off to school. The beginning of the book covers the age ranges from birth up through age 3 to 5, that is, before children go to school. Holt talks about a certain type of important learning that takes place up until the time a child enrolls in school at which point the experience of schooling changes their personality. The book starts off with how children succeed in learning many important things and huge feats such as speaking and with proper grammar and pronunciation and walking without formal schooling and that children accomplish

much learning without an adult being the facilitator of it. In general the style of writing is that Holt describes a situation and then gives his opinions of the learning experience. Sometimes Holt does little experiments such as introducing a toy or a non-toy (such as a typewriter) to young children to see how they react to it and what they do with it. Holt observes with delight and amazement, these young children who are friends and relatives (they are not his students or participants in a research projects). It is clear that Holt enjoys these young children and he respects them and relishes the time he spends with them. This revised edition makes clear which text is original then what was added-which is new perspective as he had spent more time around children and his theories matured and changed a bit. Seeing the two perspectives clearly was very interesting and educational. Regarding the discussions about babies and toddlers there are good observations here and I appreciate them. As a stay at home parent, I have already witnessed much of this (and more) and for some of the chapters I felt I wasn't learning anything I hadn't already witnessed with my own two eyes. However, readers who are childless will definitely learn much about how learning happens from infancy and up. I highly recommend that anyone interested in going into the profession of teaching read this book, or any current teacher who is childless. Holt gives the children much-deserved respect for their innate ability to learn and figure out the world around them. Later chapters get more analytical as Holt integrates his own observation of schooled children (about grade 5 and below) and compares and contrasts with other educators, scientists and child psychologists. (It doesn't seem to me that Holt is analyzing preteens or teenagers.) Here is where Holt exercises his ability to write clearly and concisely drive home his point in a convincing manner. Again and again Holt shows how a child to is forced to "learn" things (such as in public and most private schools) is actually having their personality changed in the process. The act of being forced to do things and to prove oneself over and over via testing and not being trusted by adults changes their personality. Holt feels the schooling procedures have negative consequences on all children; albeit some children are more negatively affected than others. The child can develop anxiety, mistrust, and fear of all adults not to mention self-esteem problems or just killing their curiosity or interest in learning. Great quotes from other books on education and learning are included here with Holt's reactions. A short list of books on school reform is included. The summary alone is almost worth the price of the book. For more specific information about what goes on in school and how children learn to play the school game and how forced teaching is not always effective, read Holt's "How Children Fail". This would make a great gift for expectant parents, I feel it would point out to them that babies deserve a lot of respect for being able to figure out the world around them. This notion of being in awe of and respectful of children starting at birth is seldom

written about...so many of us were under the misguided notion that an adult must be the one to force learning onto babies and children (me included until I birthed my babies and saw firsthand how smart they are).

I discovered "How Children Learn" when my own children were already on their way to their teens. I wish I'd had it when they were born, or soon after. John Holt opens our eyes to the absolutely astonishing efficiency with which pre-school children learn so many things. And he does it without any of the language of "educationese," the gobbledygook that so often clutters books about educational issues and makes them opaque and unpleasant tasks to read. Everything he says is immediate, concrete, and down to earth, drawn from specific observations of particular children, working effectively to learn whatever interests them. This is a book that I regularly now give as a gift to my friends when they become parents for the first time. I know of no other that will fill THEM with wonder over the ensuing five years or so, as their children learn to come to grips with the world.

The only thing that disappointed about this book was learning that the author is deceased, so I couldn't tell him how moved and inspired I was. I was the converted, already strongly leaning towards homeschooling when the time comes, but this book gave me insights that have changed how I interact with my 10 month old daughter, to my own great joy. How refreshing to read the words of a man unafraid to admit his errors and his regrets. His compassion also moved me, sometimes to tears. This book is a validation for any one who needs one, of the choice to homeschool. It is an eye-opening inspiration for a parent seeking greater understanding of their toddler. This book, and the "companion volume", "How Children Fail", should be required reading for education legislators, and given out with diaper packets in maternity wards. If you have a first edition, get the latest one with Holt's further thoughts and self-critiquing updated commentary.

There must be a thousand books out in the world for parents right now. How to do this or that with your baby/toddler/child, OR How to get your baby/toddler/child to do this or that. From pregnancy through college there is a guide for every problem, or perceived problem, that you may possibly have. How Children Learn, though, is not a guide. It is simply a demonstration, through the journal of John Holt, that children are smart and know how to learn, from the moment they are born. He shows that by giving children the space and freedom they need to explore things that interest them, we allow them to develop thinking skills. We allow them to figure the world out, learn that things work in certain ways, and that the world is generally a predictable and benevolent place. Holt shows through

his experiences that not only do we not need to force children to learn, or to teach them much, but that teaching (and especially coercion) are counterproductive to learning. It would be impossible to explain in a short space the thinking behind *How Children Learn*. By sharing his experiences, Holt shows us about children, not educational philosophies or theories. Get this book and read it. It will change the way that you think about children and learning forever.

If I had read this book in college I would have saved myself so much agony in learning about children. After I read this book: I started to learn about children. Forget the terminology; forget the theories - take a look at children and learn how they learn. While reading the reviews posted here, I realized that this is the perfect gift for expectant parents.

When this book was written John Holt gave the world a fresh look at how children learn and how we should be educating our young. Holt's premise is a simple one, that learning is a natural process that needs very little adult guidance or interference to take place. It's certainly time to reconsider how our schools function.

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