

## FOCUS: SUPPORTING YOUR CHILD'S LEARNING

This week we wanted to focus on your child's learning. This seems relevant at the moment as many of us have been trying their very best with home learning during lockdown and whilst some children return to school the majority continue to home learn. We therefore wanted to offer some tried and tested techniques to support your efforts to help them learn at home. We also include some useful guidance on supporting your child's reading as well as ways to help you manage your child's discouragement when learning.



### Fostering Good Learning Habits and Routine

We looked a lot at routine in last week's newsletter and when it comes to helping you manage their home work (or in the current climate home learning) routine is crucial. Things like regulating screen time, mealtime, and bed-time are all important in helping this. Setting up a particular time and space for them to do their learning is just as important too. Below we also look at effective limit setting to help them take responsibility for their learning. This is especially important for older school-age children but is great for young ones to start to learn early-on too.

#### Space

> If you haven't already, set up a comfortable and quiet space for them to do their home learning or homework in. If you have siblings try to keep them sat in the same places each day so they know that is *their* space, this helps to build consistency and a sense of routine.

#### Time/Setting Limits

Most children struggle to organise themselves especially at the moment where structure to the day is lacking and being at home is full of distractions-TV, tablet, gaming, playing, siblings etc. They haven't had to structure their time before like this, and so they will not know how to do so, not without some help from you.

> To counteract distractions set limits, for example if your child wants to play, watch TV etc. explain to them that you expect their work to be done before they may play or use screen time. This is also known as the WHEN/THEN technique 'when you've done your homework, you can then watch TV'. It is also important to explain the consequence of them not doing what you have asked of them (this could be not allowing them to do the free time activity they want to e.g. watch TV-until they've done their homework). Please see the narration below:

SCENE: Mother is reading newspaper and daughter is watching programme on Tablet.

Mum: Vanessa.

Vanessa: Yes?

Mum: I think it is almost time to start X (this could be a piece of work online) it is almost 11:00.

Vanessa: Why?

Mum: I expect you to have finished X by lunchtime at 12:00. Then after lunch you can finish watching your programme. If you don't do it you won't have your tablet. What time are you going to do it then?

Vanessa: Before lunch.

Mum: Ok good plan sounds good.

Here we see that the Mum has made her daughter think about managing her own time and being accountable. The Mum sets out her expectations (work done before lunch) and consequences (no Tablet if not done).

This is an example of effective limit setting. Next we look at following through with these limits once set.

### Following Through with Limits

Of course all children will test the limits and test how important they are to parents-so be prepared to follow through with the consequences. Once children learn the routine and to be accountable for their actions and see your willingness to enforce the consequences they will be less likely to argue with you about it.

Keep the following in mind when limit setting:

- >Make one request at a time
- >Be realistic in your expectations
- >Make requests positive and polite
- >Don't use STOP commands
- >Give warning and helpful reminders
- >Don't threaten use "when...then" commands
- >Give children options wherever possible
- >Make requests short and to the point
- >Praise compliance with requests
- >Support your partner's requests
- >Communicate limit setting clearly and calmly
- >Follow through with limits if requests are not met

### Promoting Reading Skills

In this section we will give some helpful information taken from Dr. Carolyn's Webster Stratton's model of "Reading with Care", this promotes "interactive reading" through the acronym below:

#### Reading With CARE

- C** Comment on what they are reading or reading about using descriptive commenting to encourage them to talk about the subject, story, pictures in the book.
- A** Ask open-ended questions about the characters, story plot, subject, pictures or scenario.
- R** Respond with praise and encouragement to your child's thinking and responses.
- E** Expand on what your child says. Suggest links to other things in the story or help your child imagine what might happen next.



#### Other Suggestions

- > Choose books with topics that interest your child
- >Set up a predictable reading time like in the afternoon or during wind-down time before bed.
- >Encourage your child to act out stories
- >Make reading fun (be playful, using an enthusiastic voice, follow your child's lead and interests, pausing to explore pictures before diving into reading the page. Use different voices for different characters).
- >Be patient (remember learning to read doesn't all happen at once, over time this will lead to independent reading and to fluency).
- >Model reading (you can motivate your child to read by reading books yourself).
- >Tell family stories (tell them stories about your family and experiences you had growing up, and about grandparents, relatives and family traditions. Encourage your child to tell you stories too).
- >Read everything (Read all kinds of things: cereal boxes, street signs, poems, comics, recipes, newspaper articles, maps, greeting cards).

## Dealing With Children's Discouragement

Most children will get discouraged with learning from time to time: some may experience difficulty learning to read, others with maths, or with writing. We all know these skills develop at different rates for different children. However, children become acutely self-conscious if they sense they are not doing as well as their friends or if parents and teachers seem disappointed with their progress. Their anxiety and lack of confidence usually results in discouragement and lack of interest in the subject. Below are some points to remember when encouraging your child's learning:

> Take an active interest in your child's work.

> Praise and encourage your child's efforts in the right direction (not just the end product).

> Set up tangible rewards programs for doing the small steps it takes to learn something new, read, or complete homework (this could be a sticker chart for example).

> Be enthusiastic about your child's work (make positive statements and comments about a piece of work before they start doing it, as they do it, and when they complete it).

> Use positive forecasting statements like, "If you keep practicing your reading with me each night, I bet before long you will be able to read the whole page/book by yourself".

> Focus on your child's strengths, not their weaknesses.

> Share something that was hard for you to learn so they understand it is normal to have an area that isn't as strong as another in their learning.

### Facilitating Children's Academic Learning: Parents as "Academic and Persistence Coaches"

Coaching is a powerful way to strengthen a child's academic skills and ability to stick with a difficult task. The following is a list of academic concepts and behaviours that can be commented on when doing school-related activities with your child. This is especially useful at the moment as most of us are completing school work at home with our children.

Academic Skills	Examples of Comments
Following schedule for work to be done at home  Planning time for reading	"You have followed through with doing your work each day when you were supposed to - well done"  "You have planned well and are reading one page/ chapter a week, you'll be finished the book soon"
Care of materials  Asking for Help	"I like the way you have carefully sorted your stationery on your desk/table so that you can do your work!"  "You are very good at asking for help when you need it"
Working Hard  Persistence, patience	"You are working so hard on that project/piece of work and thinking about how to organise it, brilliant"  "You are so patient and I can see you keep trying the different ways to work it out, keep going!"