

Supporting School Work at Home

Parents are a vital component to helping children learn to cope with change. Experiencing change and developing appropriate skills to manage these occasions aids in developing resiliency. Children learn a great deal from the adults in their lives, through modelling ways to manage change and stress, parents can support children in building valuable life skills. The Covid-19 Pandemic has caused drastic changes in all our lives and given the changes children are experiencing, they are likely to exhibit some old and new behaviors as a means of expressing these feelings. I wanted to share some of our most common strategies we use at school to support children when they exhibit challenging behaviors. My hope is that these strategies will help build resilience in children and support parents. There is no one size fits all approach but hopefully you find some of these suggestions beneficial!

I want to start with acknowledging that parenting and 'homeschooling' is very hard right now. We have competing demands placed on us as parents. Several articles in the media have referred to homeschooling as crisis schooling. There are good days and bad days and doing what is best for your family and your child as a learner will look different for everyone!



Validate – Change can feel overwhelming, and unpredictable. It's okay to feel uncomfortable, nervous, confused or any other feeling that children may be experiencing. These are all normal feelings that we all have when we are faced with changes, big and small. Allow them time to talk and ask questions.

Environment – As much as possible, find a work space that is quiet and distraction free. Turn off any technology not being used to complete school work, have siblings engaged in other activities when possible. Have all your required supplies ready to go so the session can be as productive as possible.

Sleep - Keep bedtime to a reasonable time. The National Sleep Foundation recommends school aged children between 6-13 years get between 9 and 11 hours of sleep per night. Getting up a similar time each day will help maintain this routine and ensure children are tired at an appropriate time.

Maintain Routines - Maintain routines as much as possible. Getting up at a consistent time each school day, scheduling the allotted time for school work, scheduling mealtimes, play times, and outdoor play. Include children in making the schedule. We are more likely to complete our tasks when they are scheduled.

Transitions – When transitioning between tasks, provide a 5 minute warning and then a 1 or 2 minute warning. For example, “after breakfast we are going to start your school work, you have

5 minutes to finish”. Children are very familiar with this strategy in their school day. This is especially helpful when transitioning from a preferred activity to a less preferred activity. For example, “In 5 minutes, it’s time to turn off the TV and get ready for bed”.

Clear Expectations and follow through – Set out clear expectations for tasks. Children are more likely to comply with a request when it is clear and understood. For example “we are going to fold the laundry and put it away and then go for a bike ride” Children are less likely to fight putting away their laundry if they know what is required and the activity to follow. Follow through as a parent is equally important, if you say you are going to do something, try your best to follow through and complete that request, whether it is a positive or negative request. When children know parents may not follow through or keep their word, they are less likely to comply with the request.

Maintain an active lifestyle – When children have had an opportunity to move, burn energy and be active, they regulate their bodies better when required to sit and attend to tasks. There are youtube videos on children’s exercise programs for limited spaces. Getting out for walks, bike rides, doing yard work, and scavenger hunts in the yard are all ways to incorporate physical activity and some fresh air!

Breaks – If your child is having difficulty completing the task in one session, chunk the session into mini sections. For example, math problems, 3 minute break, write 2 sentences, 3 minute break, read book.



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Give children a voice – Include children when possible in making decisions and allowing choice. For example “would you like to start with math or reading?” The choice is not whether they are doing the work but what they are starting with. There are lots of opportunity during the day for children to make choices, this empowers them and develops self-efficacy. They can help with meal planning, daily schedule, wardrobe choices, chores, when they complete their school work, etc

Choice – Similar to above but it’s so important, I want to make sure it’s stressed! Asking “Would you like to start with your math or reading today”, is important. As adults we can help children figure out their best strategies. Sometimes to get started, choosing an easier task to transition, eases them into the work and once they have started, they forget about their resistance. For others, they may choose to get the challenging work out of the way first. Allow choice when possible, these are opportunities for students to learn how they work best.

Align with your child – Saying “the instructions are asking **US** to...” rather than saying “**I**M asking you to...” They are less likely to argue with you if you are not the one asking them to do the school work! You’re in it together!

Manage screen time - We know children are getting more screen time now than ever and in some cases it is necessary for various reasons, such as parents working from home. That said, reducing it when possible is healthier. Watching children’s posture on devices, how closely they hold it up to their eyes, monitoring behavior when it’s time to disengage or go to bed are helpful

strategies to know if it is impacting them negatively. Monitoring what they are doing on the technology is also important and who they are engaging with. Video chats with friends can be a great stress reducer and help children feel connected to their peers.

Connection – Allow them opportunities to connect with you in fun ways, playing games, baking, dancing, etc. When children feel connected, they are more willing to please and regulate their emotions. Allow them to connect with others outside of the home with video calls to grandparents, friends, and cousins. Connecting with peers and others helps children feel positive about themselves. It also provides an opportunity to practice conversation skills such as greeting and ending a conversation, asking questions, listening to others and sharing an interest in a topic. Also know that not all children are into this new way of communicating and that's ok too, not all of them are. Mine took a while to warm up!



Rewards help with motivation – Rewards, preferred activities and verbal praise help to motivate all of us, children are no different! We respond better to a less preferred or difficult task if we know we have a motivator or something to look forward to after. Paychecks are motivators for going to work. Children often respond better to rewards than consequences. For example, if children complete their school work, they get extra screen time. Sometimes, as parents, we take things away as a consequence for negative behavior and then hear kids say, “I don’t care, take it away”. We can get into a cycle of having nothing to offer if we have followed through on our taking away end of the deal. Consequences have a place, but keep in mind, behaviors are more likely to happen again when they’ve been followed by a positive experience rather than a negative. Some examples of rewards/motivators are candy/edible treats, screen time, time with an adult, video games, verbal praise, or access to a preferred toy. Often times, kids favorite activities make good motivators. Change it up as well so the motivator stays motivating! The trick is to have the less preferred task come before the reward!

Resources - Children often follow an adult’s lead with how they are coping and regulating themselves. Dr. Jody Carrington, Ross Greene and Marc Brackett all have very good books and information on their websites on this topic. When behaviors surface, it’s hard to keep our cool, especially with our own children! Take a time out, take deep breaths, take a break, say you’re frustrated and acknowledge that it’s hard. By modelling how we regulate ourselves as adults, children, over time and with practice, adopt our strategies. But they have to be shown how to regulate, they aren’t born knowing how to manage their emotions and feelings. I have included two sites below with great information:

<https://www.understood.org/en/learning-thinking-differences/understanding-children-challenges/simple-changes-at-home/7-ideas-for-using-rewards-and-consequences>

<https://www.therapistaid.com/worksheets/rewards-punishments.pdf>

When children look back on this time with you and their family at home, my wish is that they remember playing family games, having extra time with siblings, eating meals together and not the battle over school work. Some days are difficult, and downright hard, but in the end, it's how we made our children feel during these uncertain and challenging times that matter the most.