

Ways to encourage my child to join in with learning tasks at home

If your child is refusing to participate in home learning tasks, or if getting your child to complete tasks makes them, and you, upset and frustrated, don't worry, you are not alone!

We are all working in unique and unusual circumstances and your child probably feels very unsettled by all the changes that have happened recently, which may affect their emotions. Please bare this in mind when organising your day. Although children continuing their learning is really important, we also have to make sure that they are happy. No-one wants learning at home to be a battle.

I have put together this document to give you some advice on how to make learning at home a more enjoyable experience for both your child and yourselves. These are a mixture of tried and tested strategies used by myself and fellow staff members, but also recommendations that have been given to us in the past from outside agencies, such as Specialist Support Services and our Educational Psychologist. You do not need to put all these strategies in place, please pick a couple that best suit your child's needs, as some strategies may work for one child but not others.

1. Let them know your expectations

Young children do not have a very good understanding of time, so when asked to complete a task, some children may feel that it will last forever. Helping children see that they will only work for a short period of time, may make them happier to participate. This can be achieved by the following;

- Use a clock/ timer to show a start time and end time
- Let your child know what the expectations are (eg. "We will do 3 sentences")
- Have a finished box, where finished tasks can be placed
- Use 'now and then' language / visual aid (see website for more details) so your child knows to expect a reward afterwards ("We will do work 'now' and 'then' your can do that)
- Make sure that you stick to what you say. (If you say "we are going to do 3 sentences" or "we'll stop when the timer beeps" make sure you do stop when that comes. This will help your child build up trust in what you say, and your child will become happier to participate next time)
- For children with short attention spans, make sure your expectations are reasonable. If a child can only concentrate for 5 minutes on a task – only set a

timer for 5 minutes. If a child finds writing sentences difficult and it takes them a long time to complete – only ask them to do 1 sentence.

2. Give lots of warning

For children who like routine, being asked to leave what they are doing straight away to come and complete an unknown activity can be very distressing and frustrating for them.

For children like this, preparation is key, and you can do this in the following ways:

- Tell your child each morning what they are expected to do in the day (give visuals if needed, information can be found on our website)
- Give them 5 minute and 2 minute warnings before they need to do their tasks. These can be verbal or, if needed, visual (timers). This way children have time to put the finishing touches on what they are doing and prepare themselves for the change in activity.

3. Little and often

For children with short attention spans or for children who find activities difficult, breaking tasks into small manageable steps with regular learning breaks in-between, is the best way to achieve the best possible outcomes. When children become distracted or unmotivated learning rates drop and this becomes frustrating for your child and yourselves. Short activities allow children to take in the most information and the regular breaks allow for a small release that refocuses the mind.

- If your child has short attention spans they may need regular 5-10 minute breaks during a task
- Breaks work best when they are physical and active
- For children who are finding the activity difficult – doing something in the learning break that they find fun and rewarding will boost morale.

4. Visual aids

For children who are struggling with the change in routine a daily visual timetable may be a good resource to help them prepare themselves for learning times. Ensure that visuals are stuck to, as inconsistency can make things worse. Visual Aid information and resources can be found on our website.

5. Make tasks fun and interesting

As your child is still very young, they will learn best through play. This is why we as a school have been trying to set practical activities for your child to engage with. Even maths and writing can be fun, just think outside a box a little and rely less on worksheets!

- Make activities practical
- Use dress up and role play
- Use different materials to record (laptop, chalk, models, photos etc...)
- Use your child's interests (ie. stick pictures onto pencils, link activities to interests)
- Record children participating in activities to send to relatives/teachers
- Use indirect instructions – "I bet you can't ..." or "I need some help with ..."
- Make activities multi-sensory (active, tactile, auditory, visual)

6. Give your child some control

Some children work best when they feel that they are in control. Current circumstances have taken children out of their comfort zone and many children will be craving control. The following recommendations are great ways to make children feel they are in control in relation to their home learning tasks.

- Explain to your child that the activity that they need to complete today is ?, but they can decide when they do it. You as parents then need to ensure that they stick to this, making sure that warnings are given beforehand to remind them and help them prepare.
- Give your child a choice of 2/3 activities to choose from.

7. Try and prepare a good learning space

- Somewhere quiet
- Somewhere with minimal distractions (for example not near anywhere that has people walking through regularly, not by toys, away from the tv etc..)
- Make sure you have all the resources that are needed for the task to hand, so time and concentration is not lost when collecting resources.
- Break tasks up into smaller chunks and have regular learning breaks
- Use lots of praise and encouraging words
- Make it fun!

8. Rewards

Young children absolutely love being rewarded. This is a great way to encourage children to participate. Rewards do not need to be big, but special enough to your child to make them want to receive it.

- Use regular rewards throughout (ie. verbal praise and encouragement/ stickers)
- Have a reward ready for when your child completes their task (let your child choose this reward. This does not need to be big or expensive – it might well be having time to play a game with you)
- Make a reward chart, where they collect stickers in the day when they participate when you ask them to. A reward can be received at the end of the day. (use this for work only, **do not** take away stickers for unacceptable behaviour – a different chart needs to be used for behaviour if this is an issue)

9. Things to remember

Most children like to separate their home lives from school and are probably finding it very difficult for those two worlds to come together at this time, so we need to give children space to adjust. When some children feel overwhelmed or unsettled they can become emotional or frustrated. In order to provide the right balance it will help to think of the following:

- Home learning should not be delivered from 9am to 3pm. Short bursts of activity throughout the day in-between family time and free play, is a perfect balance
- Don't worry if you have days off – If your child is having a day where they are finding things difficult, don't worry you can try again tomorrow.
- Try not to worry that your child is falling behind and put more pressure on yourselves. All children are 'in the same boat', and teachers will be prepared to pick learning up where they need to when schools are back up and running.
- Use this opportunity to spend time as a family and teach your child important life skills like cooking, cleaning, gardening.
- You can do this!

If you need any more advice please do not hesitate to get in contact with your child's class teacher or myself on hayleyt@waynfleteinfants.co.uk

