

Everyday is a new slate for you and your child

As a primary school teacher of over 15 years, I thought I would have it all sorted when my almost 6 year-old son could no longer go to school due to Covid-19.

Although he was a mere 8 weeks into his school career, his strong start, early love of learning, amazing teacher and the fact I had been teaching for so long all gave me confidence that this was going to be a breeze.

Well, 'breeze' is not quite the word I would use to describe our home-learning experience. Finding the balance between teacher and parent took a while, and I will admit, a few tears from both of us.

My expectations needed to change, my patience needed to grow and I had to keep reminding myself that he is young, his (and my) world has been turned upside down, and he needs me to be his mum more than he needs me to be his teacher. So, I had to practise what I preach as a teacher and a school leader: *we need to change the conditions and the learning environment, not the child.*

For the sake of the whole family, all at home together (working parents and a pre-schooler included) it was time to implement some changes that I hope, even as we gradually return to school and a sense of 'normality', we can adopt as our new normal.

The following 5 strategies I have since shared and adapted for friends' kids of all ages.

This time is unfamiliar and it is not our choice to be home-schooling. We need to support our kids, and our kids' teachers, but our number one role is to be a parent: to guide, support, encourage, laugh with, cry with and continue to set boundaries for our children so they feel safe and ready to take on life's challenges.

I invite you to consider these your highest objectives when caught up in the day-to-day of supporting your child's learning at home:

- How do I foster a forever love of learning?
- How do I encourage exploration, experimentation and expansion of thinking?

Feel free to connect, ask questions and access resources. We are here to help, lean on us.

I would encourage you to remember: **Everyday is a new slate for you and your child.**



Jo Edwards

LittleScribe Literacy Educational Specialist and home learning mother of two children

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Jo's 5 tips for home learning

1. Break up the day into short periods of time

Short periods of engagement are much more effective and impactful for learning. Scientists, psychologists and educational researchers generally agree that children can concentrate on one task for 2–5 minutes for every year of their age.

Application

- So, for my 6 year-old, I should only expect him to attend to a task for 12–30 minutes.
- And even children who are in secondary education should only be spending 30–60 minutes on a task.

Outcome / Impact

- Writing one sentence or one paragraph where your child has been completely engaged in the task is going to be more beneficial to their learning than slogging away at a whole task in one sitting.
- Small bursts produce better outcomes, motivation, enjoyment and pride.

2. Include physical activity breaks throughout the day

They don't sit in their classroom at a desk for 6 hours a day! Our children are used to movement and flow being part of their daily routine. For us, that is going outside to practise handball skills (an essential skill in Australian schools), a short Go Noodle dance video (yes, Mum joined in too) or a bike ride down the street.

Application

- I encourage friends with pools and trampolines to build those into their daily home-learning plan.
- For older children, go for a walk with them, be surprised what you learn when you step away from the home-learning environment.
- For those indoors, stretch, move around, make a drink or a snack.

Outcome / Impact

- Teachers manage student engagement, focus and behaviour by getting kids to move.
- Transition between activities allows the child to reset and refocus.
- There are some great yoga and movement videos on YouTube - an effective way to help recalibrate, even 5 minutes is effective.

3. Start with what your child loves and move to everyday things

There has been a lot of Lego building and creation during our period of home-learning. By about Week 4, I was an expert at weaving Lego into every activity and learning task set by my son's teacher! By **applying your child's interests to their work** their engagement will increase and they will **see purpose** in what they are learning. And this is exactly what a teacher does with their class.

Embrace everyday activities. These are rich learning environments. Gently add connections, count, use new words, ask questions. Explore - I wonder what direction the water goes down the bath and why?

Application

- Write about sport, movies or animals, design a new video game or Minecraft world
- Create a giant board game with chalk outside or

Outcome / Impact

- Deeper Engagement. At one point, I even had my child randomly requesting to create a poster about what could and could not go into the compost bin.

→ Build a model of a playground with the contents of your recycling bin.

→ Go with interest thread. It was not a task set by his teacher, however he was developing his knowledge, he was writing, drawing, considering his audience and he was motivated to achieve success.

4. Show interest in your child's capability

A huge learning curve for me was to STOP being a teacher, and to just be my child's mum, helping with his home-learning. This meant NOT constantly correcting his mistakes or pointing out what he was doing wrong; my role was to **encourage, support and cheer** him on. I had to show him that I am **interested in his knowledge, ideas and understanding** and want to **celebrate his achievements with him**.

Application. How to ask questions:

- Wow - how did you come up with that idea?
- I love your use of...
- I am amazed that you included...
- Would you mind if I shared with you?

Outcome / Impact

- A desire and motivation for the child to keep learning.
- Great reinforcement of learning outcomes, built on curiosity not 'interrogation'.
- A unique insight to how your child thinks and goes about sharing that knowledge.

5. Change the learning environment

So many of us are working from home at the moment, which definitely has its advantages. However, there can be that feeling of groundhog day with us living, working and playing all in the same space.

That is how our kids will be feeling too. At school they would be moving classrooms, visiting the library, the gym, the science lab or the art room. Consider **changing locations** for their learning environment at home. Including changes in their **mode of learning** is important too, and can help to reset concentration and engagement.

Application of Location

- Can they create a reading nook in their bedroom?
- Can they lie on the balcony or grass outside to write a story?
- Create a space for a topic, try maths sitting at the kitchen bench and history at their desk.

Application of Mediums

- If your child has been spending time on a screen, change it up by having them present their learning using pen and paper, build a model, cut out and stick with glue or head outside to take photographs.
- For older, independent children it is just as important. Encourage them to read from a book and hand write notes.

Outcome / Impact

- Memory is increased significantly when children (and adults) take handwritten notes and draw their ideas; [see the research behind why](#).