

Three Big Things Parents can do to help with Home- Based Learning

by Andrew Fuller

Co-ordinating two school projects, one involving glue and a major construction of the solar system while simultaneously reacquainting yourself with the delights of Year 10 trigonometry is living the dream isn't it? At the same time, you are wrestling with zoom, WebEx, teams, hangouts and a series of passwords and codes. Just to ramp up the pressure a tad more, you might have your own conference calls to make, not to mention arranging snacks, breaks and schedules.

So, it's not whether your kids will survive this period of being more 'close and personal', the big question is how do get through with your sanity and dignity largely intact.

Many kids have been living and loving the online lifestyle for some years now. They've put in the training and are mostly coping well. The people I am most worried about are parents.

The first thing to point out is that you've been doing home-based learning with your kids ever since they were born.

Also, you are not a teacher. Let me repeat that - you are NOT a teacher. Even if you possess teaching qualifications, in your own home you are NOT a teacher. Your kids need you to do your most important role of being a parent.

Let's join a few dots. NAPLAN has been ditched for the year, assessments are few and far between and Year 12 exams aren't happening anytime soon. This year is like nothing any of us can remember. The usual rule book has been thrown out.

For parents who feel anxious about their child missing who knows how much school, I have one question for you. How much of your own schooling do you really remember? If your answer is 60% or more, you are doing better than most. Of the 13 years of school available to be completed about 5 years is wiped from the memory banks. I would be the first to say there is much more to school than just knowledge recalled. Even so, 5 years! Deep breaths. Relax.

What works

Let's turn to the people who have been doing remote learning for years - computer game designers. What they know that works is:

- Visuals win every time.
- Interaction equals interest
- Create a contribution- vote, poll, choose the best idea, make a judgement and explain your reasons
- 3 strikes & they are out- 3 consecutive failures and most kids give up
- Start with mastery and back-fill the details.
- Increase the number of individual requests.
- Make rewards random- emojis, sound effects, avatars, praise but the best type is utilising their expertise.
- Develop a sense of flow (fun challenges)
- Kids love to talk- let them (in bursts).
- Kids love to be acknowledged- use learning strengths to do this.

Using these ideas will increase your child's engagement in remote learning.

What doesn't

This is really easy -long, endlessly repetitive lectures about complex topics that drone on and on are presented in really fine print that no one can be bothered reading- ever.

Ok, so what should parents do?

The Big Three

Three key factors predict long-term success and results and they are inter-linked: emotional regulation, motivation and academic self-efficacy.

These are all factors that parents can make powerful impacts on this year.

Emotional regulation is the ability to calm yourself down when you are upset and rev yourself up when you feel dejected. This helps you succeed in careers, in relationships and keeps you on track in the senior years of school. This is keeping kids emotional 'ship' steady Calm, kind parenting.

Motivation is a slippery commodity that is largely driven by passions and experiencing success. Unsurprisingly, we are more motivated in areas where we taste the sweet fruits of success and less so in areas, we find dull and difficult.

Little kids have an enormous motivation for learning and then often it lessens. Parents who have watched their interests and passions over years can use this time to rekindle motivation.

Academic self-efficacy is the belief that students have that they can do well. Kids who feel they can be successful are more likely to succeed. Go figure!

How to do this - find their learning strengths

Go to www.mylearningstrengths.com and complete the analysis. Begin by completing the analysis for yourself. You will be emailed a free letter outlining your top learning strengths and suggestions about how to use these to increase learning in other areas.

Knowing your own learning strength profile will help you to see how to help your child towards success.

Once you have an understanding of your own learning strengths, ask your child to complete the analysis and discuss the letter with them. For children younger than Year 4 you may need to do it with them. For very young children, you could complete it on their behalf and treat the results as a rough guide as they develop and mature. You can repeat the analysis as many times as you like but generally once every six months will be most useful.

A full learning strengths report outlining a detailed pattern of learning strengths is available. This report provides detailed strategies to assist you and your child towards success.

It includes a detailed analysis of:

- Spatial reasoning
- Perceptual and motor skills
- Concentration and memory Planning and sequencing
- Thinking and logic
- People smarts
- Language and word smarts
- Number smarts
- How does knowing learning strengths help me to help my child to learn?

There are a number of ways this knowledge benefits your child:

Overcoming a fear of 'failure'

Success in life is not about being good at everything. Success is about discovering what you are good at, developing those strengths and applying them to other areas where possible.

Some children believe that unless they are good at everything, they are not smart or successful. If this belief persists, they lose motivation, fear making mistakes and avoid learning.

A child's whose parent knows how to help them discover their learning strengths and how to use them to build success in other areas is much more likely to remain confident and motivated.

Awareness

Knowing your own learning strengths and your child's patterns assists you to consider similarities and differences between you both. Not every child shares the same strengths as their parent. Valuing strengths your child has, that you do not share, is a voyage of discovery for most parents.

Planning activities

Parents are powerful teachers of their children. By focusing on activities that your child already has learning strengths in, you are likely to get greater engagement and enjoyment.

Extending activities to develop learning

Learning strengths starts with what is strong to improve what is not yet strong.

For example, if your child has a learning strength in perceptual-motor areas (sport, dance, craft, construction) and you wanted to improve their strengths in number smarts, you might find ways to discuss how numbers play a role in those areas.

Concepts such as arcs, trajectories, sports statistics, percentages, right angles and number sequences all become more meaningful when we relate them to something a child is already good at.

At home, a child who has concentration and memory learning strengths but is yet to develop planning and sequencing strengths may struggle to clean up their room. A parent could help them by using what they are already strong at (concentration and memory) by turning room cleaning into a memory game i.e. 'what we need to do next?' This will make learning a new sequence easier.

Success creates success

The fastest way to help children to become passionate about their learning is to have their early attempts and successes acknowledged. The Learning Strengths letter and full report are precisely designed to do this.

Involvement at school

Completing the analysis and report empowers parents to take this knowledge to parent-teacher meetings and use it to proactively and collaboratively plan with teachers what strengths to build upon in the next term and also how to use those strengths to develop in other areas. Learning happens fastest when parents, teachers and students collaborate together.

Pursuing passions

There is a strong overlap between our learning strengths and what we are interested in. A child's learning strengths may change as they mature but in the long-term, knowing about learning strengths helps young people choose the courses or careers that suit them and where they are most likely to experience success.

Linking home-based learning to your child's strengths gives you a far greater chance of developing their confidence and their motivation.

Andrew's book, "Unlocking Your Child's Genius" (Bad Apple Press) provides an extensive approach to developing learning strengths in 2-18-year olds.