Tips to Encourage Learning at Home

1. Create a Schedule
Create a schedule outlining the activities for the day. The schedule can be made up of pictures or text; select whichever is most appropriate for your child. Try to mix in a variety of different activities into the schedule (e.g., work time, outside time, etc) and a mix of preferred and less preferred activities.

2. Set Up The Workspace
Select a space with minimal distractions to be used as the "work space". Try to select a space that has indirect natural light, or soft white light and minimal noise. Use the same space each day. Use a chair that allows your child's feet to rest on the floor or use a stool or a stack of books to support your child's feet.

3. Establish Clear Expectations
Select three to five rules that are most important to your family. Rules should describe the behaviour you WANT to see, not what you don't want (e.g., "Sit at the table when eating"). Review the rules prior to starting a work task. It may be helpful to display the expectations in a visible place. Acknowledge your child for following the rules!

4. Motivate Your Child
Consider incorporating your child's interest into the activity or task at hand, when possible. Use novelty to maintain your child's interest. This can be done by using different materials and presenting concepts in a variety of formats. Another way to keep your child motivated is to schedule a preferred activity following a non-preferred activity. In addition, a points system or reward chart could be used to have your child earn points to access desired items or activities.

5. Break Down Tasks
For new or complex tasks, try breaking it down into smaller steps. Determine the steps in the task by running through the task yourself or watching someone do it. Begin by teaching one step at a time. This will make the task more manageable and less frustrating for your child. You can start by teaching the first or the last step, as long as you teach the steps in order.
### Setting Up The Work Place

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Where</th>
<th>Visual Schedule</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When setting up a space for your child to do schoolwork, think about where and when you will be using the space. It is beneficial to use the same place and assign it as the work room.</td>
<td>Using a consistent schedule for when work will be completed will help increase predictability for your child. Place this schedule in a place where it is easy for your child to see. This schedule does not need to be written in stone and can be flexible when required.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Lighting</th>
<th>How Long</th>
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<tr>
<td>Indirect natural light or soft white light is best (vs direct sunlight or fluorescent light).</td>
<td>There are two different ways to approach defining how long you want your child to work. The first is setting a goal for work completed, for example after your child has completed 3 questions. The second is setting a timer with the amount of time you expect your child to complete work, for example expecting your child to read for 20 minutes. (Ask your teacher for suggestions for how long your child should be expected to work.)</td>
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<th>Sound</th>
<th>Seating</th>
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<td>While some students are able to tolerate random background noise, it is often more beneficial to work in a quiet space or to use calming or predictable music or sounds. If it is difficult to find quiet in your home, you could consider using ear plugs or headphones. Many white noise or calming music apps are available for free.</td>
<td>If your child is most comfortable completing work at a table, consider the size of their chair and height of their desk. If you need to, a stack of books makes a great foot rest. Working in other positions can be helpful for some students. Some prefer standing, working on a vertical surface, sitting on dynamic seating like a large exercise ball or laying on the floor. Changing positions throughout the day or work period can also help to maintain focus.</td>
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<th>Easy Access</th>
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<tr>
<td>Try to have all the materials you need within reach, such as pencils, erasers, glue, scissors and any other work materials. This will make schoolwork more convenient and keep the work momentum moving.</td>
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When teaching your child to complete tasks or routines independently, greater success is often achieved when the task is broken down into smaller steps.

**Breaking Down Tasks**

**Step by Step**

By breaking down a task into smaller steps or chunks, your child can be successful in learning that task because it is taught in a systematic, sequential order.

**One Step at a Time**

When teaching your child to independently complete a task, focus on building independence with one step of the sequence at a time. You can start by teaching the first or the last step of the sequence, as long as you teach the steps in order.

**Break It Down**

If you are unsure of how to break a task down into smaller steps, try running through the sequence yourself, listing all the substeps you do to complete the overall task.

**Use Visuals**

To help teach the steps of the task, it may be helpful to provide a visual breakdown of each step. You can use pictures, written steps, or a checklist. You may also consider using a video to demonstrate.

This Tip Works Great for Multi-Step Tasks Like:

- Self-Care (hand washing)
- Daily Living (making a sandwich)
- Chores (cleaning your room)
- Communication (making a phone call)
- Social Skills (asking a friend to play)
- Routines (transition into class, bedtime)
- Academics (proofreading your work)
**Establish Clear Expectations**

When setting up for learning time at home, it is important to establish clear rules and expectations for your child to follow. This allows the child to know what is expected from them during this time.

**Select the Rules**

Select the rules that are most important to you and your family. Choose three to five rules and frame them in a positive manner. Think of the behaviours you would like to see your child engage in, instead of the behaviours you do not want your child to engage in. It may be helpful to ask yourself, “what would I like my child to do?” instead of “what don’t I want them to do?”. For example, “use kind words” instead of “no swearing”.

**Create a Visual**

Present the rules in a visual format (picture or text), so they can be seen and referenced by the child. Place them in a location that the child can easily reference throughout the day.

**Review the Expectations**

Before starting a task or work period, go over the rules with your child. It can be helpful to model the behaviour you want to see.

**Use Positive Reinforcement**

Acknowledge that your child is following the expectations by:
- Pointing it out “I was able to get my work done because you were so quiet.”
- Praising “Wow, you worked together on that!”
- Providing a small token or special reward.
Be Flexible

Parents working from home may need to include more independent activities that children are able to do on their own (e.g., play time, creative time, independent reading, chores). If you have multiple children at home, you may want to look at coordinating the children’s schedules, so they are engaging in similar activities at the same time.

Include Variety

Mix in a variety of activities – learning time, play time, physical movement. Try to balance your schedule between preferred and less preferred activities. Consider rotating or alternating activities (e.g., chores on Monday, Wednesday, Friday and family board game on Tuesday and Thursday).

Use Timers

A timer can be used to help your child monitor how much time they have with an activity and to let them know when it is time to move to the next activity. A timer may be particularly helpful with setting time limits around preferred items (e.g., iPad, TV, other electronics and favourite toys).

Giving Choice & Surprises

Consider adding special activities a couple of times per week (e.g., camp out in the family room). Provide a choice of activity and order of activities, where appropriate. Add in surprises where you can, such as doing school work on the front porch or having a pajama day!

Use Visual Supports

Providing a visual schedule with words or pictures, allows the child to continue to see the schedule for the day, after the verbal explanation has been provided. The visuals could lead to an increase in independence with completion of activities.
## Motivate Your Child

### Choosing Motivators

Consider your child’s current interests and what items may motivate them to participate in daily activities. This may include favourite toys, treats, and activities. Your attention may also be a strong motivator for your child! Reinforcers will vary from child to child, and from day to day.

### Use Their Interests

Incorporate favourite characters, sports, and activities into your day. For example, counting the number of soccer balls, practicing writing using chalk on the sidewalk, or writing an essay on a preferred topic. Incorporating your child’s interest will increase their willingness to participate.

### Limit Free Access

Consider reserving access to motivating items and activities for learning time. These items could be used during learning time or provided directly after. This will maintain the value of these items and increase your child’s motivation overall. If preferred items are always available, your child may quickly lose interest in these items.

### Use Novelty

Use new and different material to teach a concept. Try to rotate activities and items presented to your child to keep learning time exciting. Present concepts in a variety of ways or formats. Explore different modalities for teaching: kinesthetic (moving), visual (seeing), auditory (hearing), and tactile (touching).

### Sequencing of Events

Increase motivation by placing a preferred activity after a non-preferred activity. Try to break up difficult tasks or subjects so they are not presented back to back. Consider scheduling movement breaks across the day.

### Reinforcement System

Consider a points system or reward chart to help motivate your child. This is an opportunity for your child to earn points to access a variety of rewards. The child should be aware of the expectations and the value of rewards should be determined in advance.

![Points System](image)