

We've now been doing this home schooling lark for a whole week so you definitely deserve the weekend off! However if you have time for a quick read here is an article that I have written that may help with next week. For the past few years, as well as working at Bournebrook, I have been researching how parents and their primary age children can work together on maths. Despite this and being a maths teacher for the last 20 years I have already had both my sons in tears over work during our period of self isolation. So first of all, if you are a parent and you are struggling with this, don't worry, you are far from alone. We will get through it. But here are a few things you should know which might make it a little easier.

### **Getting started:**

First there are the common sense things that are vital but that you might forget in all the panic. Make sure your child has a designated work area with all the things that they may need during the course of the day such as pencils, rubbers, pens and a ruler. Oh and a pencil sharpener. As a teacher I know that nothing can ever begin before sharpening a pencil! Put them all in a pencil case, box or basket so they stay together. Many children use a ruler to count along in maths so if you don't have one at home making them a simple number line (basically a ruler which doesn't have to be accurate) may be helpful. Younger children also often use apparatus to practice adding and subtracting. Wooden blocks, Lego or even coins are useful to have around to enable them to do questions practically.

If possible give your child a choice of when they do each subject. Get them to draw up their own timetable because children are much more receptive if they feel in control of what they are doing.

### **What are you aiming to achieve?**

School is setting daily work but how do you go about it? Do you do it all in one go or have breaks? This will depend on your child. Agree beforehand what they are aiming to do in each session whether that is a certain length of time or a certain activity. Make sure they understand what they need to do and then let them get on with it. We expect them to do the work not you so you really should be able to do something else now.

### **They've got stuck. What do I do?**

At some point every child is going to get stuck. In this situation you are going to be in one of two situations – either you will know the answer yourself or you won't. In either situation it is best to act in the same way, as if you don't know but you are going to find it out together. The following questions are really helpful for prompting children to think:

- Can you tell me what you do in school/did before on questions like this?
- What information do we already have? What do we need to find out?
- Would a picture/graph/diagram/photo help?
- Would any equipment help?
- What if we tried...?
- Why not have a guess and see if it works?
- How could we check that this is correct?

Hopefully this will get them back on track again. And if not you could always suggest they look in a book or “search it up” on the internet as my son would say. This is a great way of teaching them to access resources rather than people if there is no-one available when they are stuck.

### **Flight, fight and freeze – for you and your child**

One of the major problems that we encounter when teaching and learning is the fight, flight or freeze response. This response comes from our animalistic response to a threat. When faced with a predator animals instinctively adopt a position of flight (run away from the predator), fight (turn and attack the predator) or freeze (stay still and hope the predator won't notice them). This is really useful for a threat that is trying to eat you. However when it kicks in with parents and children getting anxious about their school work it is really unhelpful. It usually happens when a child feels overwhelmed by or incapable of doing what they are trying to do and you will probably recognise it. If your child starts shouting at you (or you at them) one of you is probably in the fight mode! Similarly if they start throwing things. If they run out of the room, you've guessed it, they are in flight. And if they refuse to talk to you or go very still they are likely to have frozen up -or perhaps you've just got a teenager! When you or your child is in this state there is really no point carrying on. This is the point at which to take a step back, both go and do something else that you prefer and come back to it later when you have calmed down.

### **Finishing Up:**

When you have finished for the day it is important that you evaluate how things have gone. What went well? What didn't? How are you going to change it tomorrow?

The next few weeks are going to be difficult on many levels. While continuing your child's education is important it is equally important that school work doesn't become a battle ground and source of misery for the whole family. Ultimately remember that while you are in charge of supervising your child's education, it is their education and you need to give them as much ownership of it as you can. Don't feel you have to solve all their problems, if the work they are getting is so hard (or easy) that it is causing tears of frustration on a regular basis then let the school know. But also be aware that this is a new situation for teachers too and while we are doing the best we can, like you, we might not always get it right. In these strange times it is really important that parents, children and teachers work together as a team to ensure that our children cope as well as possible with this break in their education, never mind the worrying things going on in the world outside.

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