

Creating structure and routine at home

I know that there can be apprehension regarding teaching your own child and parents can be concerned regarding whether they are doing things right, but remember this is your child and you know them better than anyone, trust your knowledge of your child. The importance is that you maintain a consistent approach in your interactions. In school, your child works with a whole team of staff members, each of those staff members will work slightly differently with your child, how they praise efforts and interact will vary. As your child bonds with each staff member, their working relationship develops and it becomes predictable and familiar to the child. Once we are predictable in how we present work, praise effort and reinforce good behaviour you will begin to find it easier to do school work with your child.

For many of our pupils doing school work at home will not be the normal and creating predictability and routine around home school activities will be half the battle. *Remember routines do not fall into place overnight* it takes a number of days and sometimes weeks of consistency before your child (and you!) will be familiar with the new routine.

Setting up the Environment

1. **Visuals visuals visuals** - If you do *nothing else* at home other than look at your family's typical activities (eat, sleep, watch tv, play, walk the dog, go to shops) and implement a *simple basic schedule* for your child it will make a world of difference to life at home over the next few weeks. We are all using visual prompts at the moment with this huge change to our daily routines. Anyone working from home is relying on calendars,

schedules, to do lists and systems to help us do our new activities. Our pupils need this too.

2. **Define where the work space will be.** As much as is practical **use the same area laid out in the same way** for work activities. Where possible choose a space that is distraction free. Consider certain props you may use to **visually 'cue' that it is work time.** *For example if you are using the kitchen table consider using a particular mat on the table along with a clock/timer & child's schedule. When these items are present it will signal that it is work time.* All of a sudden a place which used to just be for eating, maybe watching iPad with very few demands has had a huge change in function, you need to support your child in understanding the new activity which will be happening in this area.
3. Try where possible to stick to some form of **schedule** and go through this with your child visually **each time an activity begins and ends.** This establishes trust, the child knows when an activity will end and what will come next. This is particularly helpful when a preferred activity (eg iPad time) comes after a non-preferred activity (work time). When the child knows that something they enjoy is happening next you are more likely to get through the work task.
4. When your schedule is established *make small changes to the schedule* and don't be afraid of this. Changes occur to our daily routines all the time, your child needs to learn the skills to cope with this also. You will help your child by making this change with your child on their visual schedule.
5. **Natural Environment teaching** - Not all learning happens at the table. Natural environment teaching can occur throughout the day. This is teaching that occurs in an environment that the learner is motivated by. The key to successful learning and natural environment teaching is....FUN!

It is essential that the teacher or parent working with the child identifies what the child is motivated by and ensures that they frequently offer choice and assess the child's preferences. ***Play is a key part of a child's development and it can be used to teach children many important skills.*** Opportunities for skill acquisition can be created throughout a child's day and incorporated into almost any activity. *For example: if your child is learning to count this could be incorporated into lego play, you could ask your child to give you 4 lego blocks etc.*

6. **Pairing and reinforcement** - Pairing is when fun, preferred activities are "paired" with lots of fun, animated interactions with the teacher or parent who in turn becomes reinforcing to the individual. If we are reinforcing to the child, making the learning sessions fun and reinforcing, this will increase the child's motivation to learn and to follow instructions given to them by the parent or teacher. **It is important that when a child completes a particular task or piece of a task that reinforcement is delivered immediately.** This can be in the form of social praise, a token or something preferred such as a few minutes with a favourite toy.

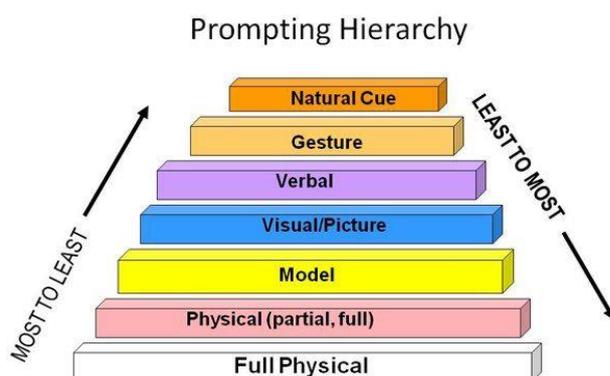
Setting up a work task

1. Use your defined work area you have decided upon above.
2. **Only the materials required for the task** and your child's schedule showing them what comes next should be in the teaching area. Anything else is a distraction and will disrupt the task. If you are using a token board keep this visible also.

3. Visually lay out the materials in a logical way working left to right where possible. For multi-step tasks only offer one item at a time initially. For example in a matching task only present one piece to the child at a time.
4. **Model & Prompt** -For new work (and most work from the work packs will fall into this category) remember *you need to teach the child the logistics of the task first*. This can be done by you **modelling the task first** so that the child can see how the task works, *for example with a writing task you may draw the first shape and then hand the pencil to the child and say 'your turn'*. For prompting a new task we like to set our pupils up for success and we often use '**errorless learning**' this means that we ensure that **the first few times a child engages with an activity we make sure they get it right**. When using errorless learning, provide the prompt directly after the natural or teaching cue. *So if you are working on identifying blue, you would say, "touch blue" and then immediately move the students hand to the blue card. Then you provide praise and a reinforcer.*
5. For **work tasks your child is more familiar with** generally **least to most prompting** will work best. *For example in a colouring task. You may have a picture of a bucket and a ball. You will have only a picture and one crayon on the table. You may say 'colour the ball', allow the child a few seconds to respond. If no response you may repeat the instruction but gesture to the crayon, if the child fails to respond we may partially physically move the child's hand toward the crayon, you may increase prompting up to a hand over hand prompt, remembering all of the time to quickly fade out of the prompts as your child grasps the concepts and becomes familiar with the task. As parents you naturally fade in and out of prompts with your children as they grow and learn new skills, it is likely that instincts will take over, it is just important that we are aware of how we are*

prompting our pupils as we want to avoid our pupils becoming prompt dependant.

6. As your child becomes familiar with a work task after a few days they may start to complete some or all of the task independently, this would be a good time to **slightly increase the difficulty** or introduce a slightly different task working on a similar skill.



Remember the initial stages will require the most work and effort from you as parents, but some intensive work initially will reap more rewards later. Creating a routine and predictability for your child will foster independence, reduce anxiety (for all of you), reduce behaviours of concern and create more time for you and your family to enjoy each other's company.

Consistency is key!

I include a link below to a video on **structure and routine**, this is a video which I have used for teacher training in the past. It is for teachers to structure their classrooms, however many of the messages may be useful or inspiring to you in the home to help understand how important it is for your child to have predictability in their day.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2YOeIbLryrU&t=21s>

I have also included a link to a video on *prompting*, which explains levels and forms of prompting that you may use with your child

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PcDYikyEg&list=PLaNcwbUxolMjt747OBC1-y9bQCoeQb2eq&index=28&t=0s>