**E-book – Supporting school work**

If we want our children to become independent workers who embrace learning as a useful part of life, we must honor their capacity to work, and construct a pathway towards their ultimate goal (to become workers in real life) by setting their early learning within the frameworks that are useful for wider working in later life.

These are:-

(in case we have forgotten and think its only about money!)

To ensure the means to live, have enough to eat, the safety of somewhere to stay, the ability to sustain family and the enjoyment of life. As mammals this involves working together with others as social animals.

To contribute to the well-being of the tribe/partnership/household/extended-family/community/society…

Through worthwhile activities that support self and group

To gain enough resources to feel comfortable and have time to include pleasurable elements in life so that it is more than struggle, it is a successful balance of effort and enjoyment.

To feel a valuable part of a wider world – someone who offers skills and expertise or efforts which help to keep the community ticking along.

 The last one is important above as many people, even with enough

 resources give their time and energy to things that matter – with

 payment or voluntarily. Seeking pleasure and ease is not enough.

 Youngsters need to know that their parents play their part in the

 above and that, even as a child, all around the world, kids contribute

 too. For some this means following the work their parents do, farm-

 ing or feeding animals, for others it means schooling.

But kids are not going to become good workers if we simply talk about being responsible, being respectful, being smart, being committed….

These are ideals and sometimes actually get in the way.

We need to help them be ready for work, really have the right attitude and work WITH both their strengths (which often need a boosting) and their feelings (which get messy and get in the way) and including these, together with the management of mistakes, to get going

**Be the trainer not the driver!**

Imagine being your child’s co-pilot on a journey where you could be present as a secure and steadying, but rather passive influence.. You’d be able to have a pre-start up chat to encourage them to see the benefits of both the destination (lifelong learning) and the difficulties of the journey (facing work that is hard, boring, etc), and to remind them to access their own abilities to get this done

-but you’d have to leave the driving to them!

You have the potential to be **alongside** that child, being someone who co-creates plans for how to approach the journey, get started with the right attitude and **stay** even when there are lots of obstacles in the way. Together you could pre-plan for the negative feelings that will arise, to manage them safely, without coming entirely off-road! Acknowledging their progress and persistence along the way would be useful. Recognizing the need for breaking up the journey and pausing to see the small signs of patience and courage used would really facilitate the sense of strengths arising. Someone piloted in this way uses the co-pilot only for emergencies because they learn to trust the system (plans) and themselves (their thoughts and feelings and ability to manage them) more and more, as the journey progresses. Competence and independence arise.

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**Considering yourself as their supporter…..**

**Consider the role of the parent** as ‘helper’ – is this a wise role?

The helper is someone who has more knowledge and ability usually and who can guide and support. It sounds good but it means your children can reach a hand out for ‘help’ too readily, and lean into you before they learn to stand alone and try for themselves and even sometimes resist the help and become hostile towards the ‘helper’, especially if they grow the belief that it is your job to help them manage things more easily! Because, despite your help, negative feelings may still arise within them and you cannot always help eliminate those.

**See yourself as a useful resource for them to turn to**…. This is a better alternative than being ‘the one who helps’ … less their GPS and more a map they can access in moments of difficulty. If you are their GPS they simply feel they need you all the time, whereas the map is consulted only when stuck or lost. Making it clear that you have done your schooling and that it is their job to work their way through the business of learning is important. You don't want them to be doing the work ‘for you’, because resentment will arise. You don't want them doing the work because you care more - because this reduces their care.

A great thing to learn to say, when they seek help, is ‘HOW can I help you right now?’ Figuring out if they need practical knowledge, emotional support or simply your loving presence. Do they need hope, help or simply to avoid helplessness?!!! – Think -what **exactly** is their problem?!

**Be clear about your role as a manager** – someone they access when they need support in the moment. Beware of the danger of being the boss. Bosses tell people what to do and how to do it, they hover and are easily challenged if their subordinates choose ways of working that are not inline with their perspectives. They use a lot of telling and advising and prompting and reminding to keep things to the standard they want. They might call this ‘helping’, but it is really controlling. It both disempowers those who need to do the task and turns them into avoiders.

**Managers have clear expectations about what their workers can achieve.** They make it clear that each have a role – that the worker’s job is to use their own efforts, initiatives and abilities to accomplish their tasks….remembering the learning they have gained to date, stretching through difficulties towards solutions and strengths and being willing to take risks and do things wrong, and see this as a valuable part of learning. Managers who encourage the mind-set that generates good workers are valuable and usually do best when they are imagining the better qualities of their workers, rather than viewing them as helpless or needy. Good managers talk about attitude and approach to task as much as about the work that is required. They harness useful thinking and create a sense of why it is worthwhile to achieve component tasks within an overall job. They generate pride in tasks done, not praise!

**Valuing the journey THROUGH work**

(rather than the destination of getting it finished)

 **Destination**

If we have approached homework with the sense of ‘just get it done’ we will be teaching out kids to focus on the outcome and completion is the end point.

**Journey**

If we approach homework with the sense of ‘building lots of strengths along the way’ and focus on WHY we do homework….

(to practice, to learn to work alone, to think things through, to create ideas, even to face boring stuff or repeat routine tasks, to build stamina… then we broaden their view of work). We can build a sense of value – what is the point of this work? It is more than the outcome, it is the learning along the way.

Too fast - and it is sloppy and careless

Too slow - and it is laborious and full of caution

Just right – means considering the effort needed within the time-frame, and being able to aim for a ‘good enough’ completion.

This requires the ability to

SETTLE STAY SEE IT THROUGH

And this needs inner strength, the ability to RECOVER when things go wrong, is more important than the ability to be right!!!

Developing a sense of ‘I can’ is never achieved by the parent being the cheer leader… they need to be the coach – the one who acknowledges that there is difficulty and there is value in taking the small steps and stages through that difficulty toward the goal of feeling good about work done – just like sport, it is not about winning, it is about the work you put in.

Being a homework hero means being ready to start – and to move into the ‘LESS’ zone…, a place where you get less help, less enjoyment, less right, less interesting, less sure….

And in this place your kids need to give MORE…more courage and patience, more figuring out, more taking risks and more determination! If they are not building these skills in life outside of homework they will not be able to use them in homework. If they live lives that are full of fun they will not easily accommodate to challenge. So making sure our kids get enough moments that are tricky in real life – where they need effort and have to push through doubt, is key.

To avoid the feeling of ‘its all the same boring stuff –don't forget to reflect back on things that used to be hard -so that kids see the movement along a stairway of learning…

 I am able and accomplished

 And find this easy now

 I really feel I know this

 There is less doubt and difficulty

 I am gaining in this learning field

 I see and feel some progress

 I am putting in effort and practice to improve

 It is hard but I am staying with it

 I am struggling, making errors and

 Feeling frustrated and disappointed

 I don't know and I feel uncertain and a bit stuck

 Because this is new to me and I have to make sense of things

I don't want to know – I imagine this too be too effortful and my ability to manage it too low, so I turn away, already discouraged by my own imagination

At the start of this stairway we need some sense of being ‘willing’ to think and be open to confusion and the slow piecing of things together. The first steps are hardest to climb and require willingness to do things wrong and manage the difficult feelings that arise.

In committing to having these feelings and working through them, we are able to find a small ‘yes’ and to ‘stay’ and then learning clicks into place more readily. Then attitude change occurs, and the degree of ‘want to’ grows so that the tasks becomes more manageable and motivation increases.

Help kids to see where they are on the stairway….

If we simplify this for our kids it looks like…

 I can do it easily and enjoy it

 I can do the task and its worthwhile

 I’ll try with patience and courage

 I think I can, allowing some mistakes and feelings

 I might be able to if I can get to ‘ready’ attitude

 I can’t I feel uncertain or incapable

 I won’t, I am resisting

And frankly if the child is at the bottom of the scale you should be working with the feelings inside, not the work to be done!

**Working with readiness requires pre-planning**

If children have to work at a time and place specified by you, you already become the person who sets the rules and then you’ll be required to police them. You’ll likely have to nag them to get to the desk and start, but switching to **joint planning** where you both decide on a time and place, and how to engineer their presence in it, can be very helpful

Getting their commitment ahead of the homework to what their intentions are is a useful way to start the idea of ‘readiness’ to work.

(without this we can remind them that the ‘worst’ might show up – wanting to escape, worrying, whinning, getting upset and trouble!)

**Creating homework choices -** complete way before homework battles begin

My plan a – a time to start

 b- a place to be

Shall mum…

* Tell you/ask/or give a gentle time-check?
* Move you
* Annoy you
* Shout at you …. To get you there?

Will you go with…

* Good will and readiness
* Bad attitude and blaming/complaining
* Delays and distractions
* Drooping and drippy

Will you do your work…

* Slowly
* Sloppily
* Quick
* Careful

Can you manage it …

* Alone
* With help
* With talk through / advice / review
* Trying first then checking with parent

Afterwards will you put it away

* Yourself
* With reminders

Will you feel

* Relieved
* Proud
* Capable

Will others respond with

* Admiration
* Penalties
* Rewards (only the smallest please!)

**Common Problems arising at the start of homework**

**‘It’s boring’**

This may be true but it also covers many problems below. When things are boring it is good to know that this grows our inner patience and that balancing boredom with things that feel nicer is one of the realities of life. So boring is a fact of life and how much you fuss about it is a choice. Submitting to boredom is necessary but developing tolerance for it is grown in the many other small ways (outside of homework) that the child is asked to comply with non-interesting stuff in life.

*The antidote to boredom is breaks and scheduling with breaks that offer physical movement, some silly, singing, jokes, snacks, etc helps*

**‘It’s hard’**

Yes frustration will occur – its an inevitable part of ‘w o r k’ – that effort is put in and does not immediately grow good results! But its antidote again is patience….accepting frustration as part of the work not something that can be avoided. It can be a good thing, it means you care.

*Having a safe place to be frustrated, away from the work, can help. Throw soft toys, scrunch paper, break lego towers, shout a bit… express frustration about the work, don't throw it at the people around the work. Joining your child in expressing frustration reduces their ability to use blame… so allow ‘angry’ expression, safely, and with support*

**‘I don't understand’**

Well piecing things together is hard.. and imperfect, but the thought ‘I don't understand’ is often a product of wanting too much…. More support, more ease, more obvious! Teachers rarely set things that are outside the child’s capacity so courage is required to face the fear of that ‘blank’ that ‘gap’ in understanding, and to fill it with guessing and ideas of what it all might mean.

*Using remembering is good for this one – remember you are as capable as others your age, remember that you have been learning about this lately, remember that most kids work out what is needed if they decide to really figure it out, remember that parents can do all the figuring out for you, remember that feeling stuck feels horrible so you might as well have a go, remember that you can do a bit, or do it badly to start….*

**Dealing with delay/distraction and ‘don't want (defense mechanisms**

* **Visuals help**….If you have a sense of something nicer coming after the homework, it can be good to create a daily schedule so that the child can see that if they delay too long with homework, then they are eating into their enjoyment time.
* **Delay over a prolonged period requires strong decision making** –Parents can only support homework, and if they can’t make it happened, then passing the issue back to teachers is sometimes necessary. Thus it can be useful to decide how much delay is reasonable – honestly anything over an hour and you might as well refuse the child the chance to do the homework and write to the teacher, asking her to deal with that delay – especially if you feel it is a sort of defiance.
* **Get your children to guess the amount of time a piece of homework should take** – so that they have a realistic view of what is expected. Many children inflate the time they believe they will need to accomplish the work, so making sure there is a target time to finish by is often a bit of a motivator.
* **Anticipate and reflect on the work** before and after it– how hard work is/was and how long it should/did take helps children to see the reality…. The sense of efficiency when effort and focus are added, and the sense of endless upset when they don't – this reduces the image they have of ‘too hard’
* **Grade the expected degree of difficulty and link it with parent input.** Eg if the homework lies in the ‘easy, I know it’ category then parents should not be called to help. If small problems might arise be sure you check what ideas the child has to deal with those before you step in with suggestions. And is homework is to be complex, it can be good to figure out how best parents can support with choices – working things out together at the start, or being around to answer questions, or being nearby for encouragement, etc….
* **Leave what is truly too difficult for the teacher to deal with**… get the child themselves to write a note/email or send a text about that, rather than the adult always doing it – you can always endorse or refute what they say.

**Starting from a positive position**

Consider together – how can we start with a SMILE?

* with a joke to lighten things
* with a pillow fight to release tensions
* with a dance or a bit of daring to let some silly in, or encourage some courage
* with a candy or a cuddle to sweeten things up
* with understanding that everyone has to face this – imagining all the kids in the world who have felt like this and how they survive
* with kindness to self, knowing this might create difficult feelings and being ready to encourage yourself and sooth yourself
* with some reality – mum and dad cant do this for you, and they cant fix your feelings, so they can be supportive, with limits
* with brave – knowing that there are so many things you used to find hard when you were a baby, a toddler, a kindergartener… and you have successfully worked through all that, so now you are facing this year’s problems and will find a way through that too
* with belief – that many people have the feeling of lacking confidence and even with that feeling they often manage to do things anyway
* with a plan so that if big feelings arise you know what to do with them
* with an attitude of being capable and determined – that will help you push your way through problems
* or with an attitude of ‘can’t and won’t that will end up with hopelessness and anger that will take a while to resolve and make everything harder and more prolonged

**Talk about being a homework HERO -**someone who  brings along lots of courage and patience and belief in themselves

get anything that can be a cape and have it ready to run around for a moment and remind yourselves of your inner power!

Consider other areas of life they use their strengths in

Play

Sport

Being creative

Friendships

Etc

And talk about times they used patience, courage, understanding , facing things that make them feel unsure, figuring things out, being willing to start by doing things badly getting better bit by bit,

**Build a sense of their inner ‘knowing’**

*Ask questions that they can easily give the answers to…*

Start with **something they know**

What they can see/what they had for lunch/what game they like

Or return to an easy part of the subject they will work on, eg math, asking what is 2=3? English, ask can they spell ‘tree’… just a start !

Move on to **something they need to guess or remember**

What is hard about this subject/what did you learn in class/ how long do you think this will take/what will you do after work

Then really ask them to **s t r e t c h their thinking** (so they know they can) and ask questions they don't know, it reminds them of their ability to pull answers out of the void!

What was I good at at school/what will I eat for dinner

**Wonder what thoughts they have pre-work today?**

Don't want – oh oh its going to be long and full of upset

Worry – well lets face that, and work with it’s reality

Can’t – really? Lets question that and aim to get a better attitude

Brave – that will work and move things along with gusto

Determined – that will help a lot in getting over hurdles that arise

Droopy – shall we start with some energy exercises then?

Distracted – ok, be prepared this is going to take a lot longer than you want … keying into attitudes enables small shifts

**Working with feelings is better than hoping they don't show up**

**Put emotional concerns on the table**

If they are worried, ask –‘what is the worst thing that can happen?’ (they usually say they’ll fail, or the adult will get cross, but keep asking ‘and then what’ and they will track back onward to the possibility of their own upset/ emotional response).

**Make plans which include dealing with the upset**, (or refusal or ) passive non-doing). Because many kids don’t want to get mad or cry, but thinking they might takes up brain space and makes it hard to think about and settle to the work… so normalize and work with this.

**Share the adult worries too** - that it may be hard and patience might be thin so they know that together you might need to plan for the adult’s responses too (dis-engaging or just neutrally waiting whilst they fuss is best, but asking ‘what exactly is the problem’ is also useful in helping to uncover whether the work is the issue or the attitude or escalating feelings in the child).

**Plan for escalating feelings**

Deciding between you what would be good to do if anger or upset arises is great. Use less ‘calm down/ count to ten type strategies’ – use more…

* Throw and catch a ball 10 times
* Pause and create a picture of some time you felt happy
* Imagine something hard at sport that you constantly overcome
* Talk about your best self, the ‘hero’ inside that is waiting to arise
* Find five minutes to look through a photo album
* Go to the bathroom and swear a bit (for older kids)
* Say 10 things you hate about work then resume it having let this go
* Wrestle, swing, bounce on something
* Get a drink, go to the toilet, walk up and down stairs, look out of the window
* Picture your last holiday and tell 5 things you felt good about

Keep a list of ‘things to do when stuck or steaming’ – and choose at random.

Basically moving the mind or the body helps.

**Noticing HOW things get done, not HOW WELL**

**Track ‘coping’ through the session so that you see strengths in use**

Asking the child to check in – on their inner self, allows them to see their own self management and grow these strengths

10 - Usefully getting mad or having a stuck slump- and will return

9- Feeling ready to explode or cry – needing a break

8 - Frustrated or disappointed and doing nothing, just letting it

 grow, but knowing I have to act on it at 9 or 10

7 - Frustrated or disappointed and using patience or hopefulness

 to help

6 - Struggling but telling myself I can allow some error, some

 emotion or some effort and I’ll stay with the task anyway

5 - Finding it a bit tricky but accepting that’s how homework is and

 deciding to get on with it and get it done

4 - Not enjoying this but actively deciding to be patient

3 - Telling myself I can do it, I am bringing some care and courage

2 - Understanding why homework is not always easy and yet I

 value how I learn to become independent

1 –Learning self-managing tools when I am working alone and so I

 know that overall this will allow me to enjoy the learning journey

 and succeed in it

Levels for younger kids might be– managing ….

* Really well (thinking and writing all the time)
* Quite well (thinking, looking around a bit, but returning to write)
* Not so well (looking around and thinking of other things – little writing)

Noticing the lower levels builds commitment for future sessions!

**Once a child is in tears or tantrums – WAIT it out**

**Pre-plan for what to do when the child cries….**

You should not always be their place of comfort – they can build one.

Deciding a safe space (near the homework) & finding a blanket, a book or toy and wait for the feelings to subside and a sense of settling to arise.

In this way they start to believe they can climb out of their despair, and don't need you to be the elevator. But make it clear how much time is being wasted in the ‘sorry for myself’ place!

Try cheerleading wall – where, during good days, your child can add useful thoughts that are encouraging to them to work… to read on a bad day.

Teach what self-soothing is all about – accepting that everyone gets upset and that we have the capacity to talk to ourselves with kindness and patiently wait for calm to come – model this by ‘talking aloud’ thoughts.

**Pre-plan for what to do when rage occurs**

Safe venting can be more useful than trying to suppress it…

Knowing what to do that is physical – pillow fight, kick a ball… can be good…. Or knowing where, and what to shout to get anger out….

Joining your child can alleviate the sense of feeling out of control for both of you, and allows you to reach a point of ‘enough’ and be ready to recover.

**Pre-plan for complete confidence loss**

Where a child doesn’t want to get mad or sad, but withdraws or goes into ‘unfair’/blame/complain…. finding any number of reasons to justify their feeling… wrong, hopeless, useless and sometimes just ‘naughty’.

This requires sympathy for the self that is less-than-best….

And it a sense of ‘everyone slips into this sometimes’ and it does best by connecting through cuddles, communication and care….

Whether from the adult to child, or whether from the child to themselves is ok. If we teach self-compassion, kids will k now how to access it when they feel despair.

**PRE-PLAN for ‘starting again’**

Where instead of returning to the exact piece of work that created the upset, shift sideways into drawing a quick picture, or doing something silly, something they know well, something a little easier, something that engages them for a moment as a ‘bridge’ back to the hard task.

**Guess-timating timing**

If you have pre-planned how long you think the tasks should take, you can have a sense of ‘stopping the clock’ so that they know they are not ‘on task’ but ‘off’ and that the emotional upset is separate to the work time. Of course it extends the timing – but it does not extend the work!!

Then in future sessions you might need to discuss the possibility of adding ‘upset time’ to hard tasks. Then in future, anticipating the wasted time, this usually makes children want to tackle it without the tip into upset.

Alternatively have an and/or – using this time for upset or for a few minutes of break such as quick chase session, or hide and seek.

**Remember….**

**Realize the value of what working is about**

Talking about the gains rather than simply establishing a sense of ‘should’ do.

**Really set the track they should be on** **together**

Being specific about time and place and what should be done, and attitude and planning for feelings

**Recognise when they are coming off track**

By helping them see their own ways of detouring and delaying and being distracted and the big ‘don't want’ that shows up when it gets hard. Using breaks, strengths, soothing, solutions, being there, etc

Get a sense of reminding them how to return to track

**Really know when they are too far from the road**

And the move into the pre-planning for anger, upset or withdrawal

**Recover well and work with ‘readiness’**

Know how to get back to a place of ‘can do’ by allowing the emotional wave to reach its peak and settle and seeing the place where moving back is possible. Remember to ease back on to the track with things that are easier or known, before returning to what is hard.

**Remind each other of the many solutions In use**

*Strengths* such as courage, patience, persevering, being willing to work with mistakes, taking risk, figuring out, starting again,

*Soothing* – being sympathetic to the self that is struggling…but staying

With the difficulty without making it into a drama….and useful *self talk*