



Tips for Parent-Teachers

*Simple sensory strategies for
learning at home.*

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A Note from Barbara:

This booklet is my effort to support parents who are currently trying to keep their lives on track as they have suddenly become their children's teachers. The challenges are multiplied for parents whose children have attention issues, sensory processing difficulties, autism spectrum disorders or other developmental challenges.

This e-book is meant to provide a few quick and simple ways to help your child attend and be more successful doing school lessons at home. You may not be aware of all the things your child's teachers and classroom staff do each day to support your child's learning. So here are a few ideas for you to try as you suddenly become the teacher.

Don't try to do everything at once. Read through each section and decide on one or two things you think your child would respond to AND that you think you can do. Pick things that involve materials you already have. If you are missing something, try to improvise-find something similar and substitute it.

Don't give up too soon on any given strategy. You might need to have your child do it more, or less, or faster, or slower, or even have her sing while she's doing it! Be creative and try to involve your child in the activities and in the assessment of what worked and what didn't.



*Think like a scientist searching
for the right formula*

Different Positions for Learning

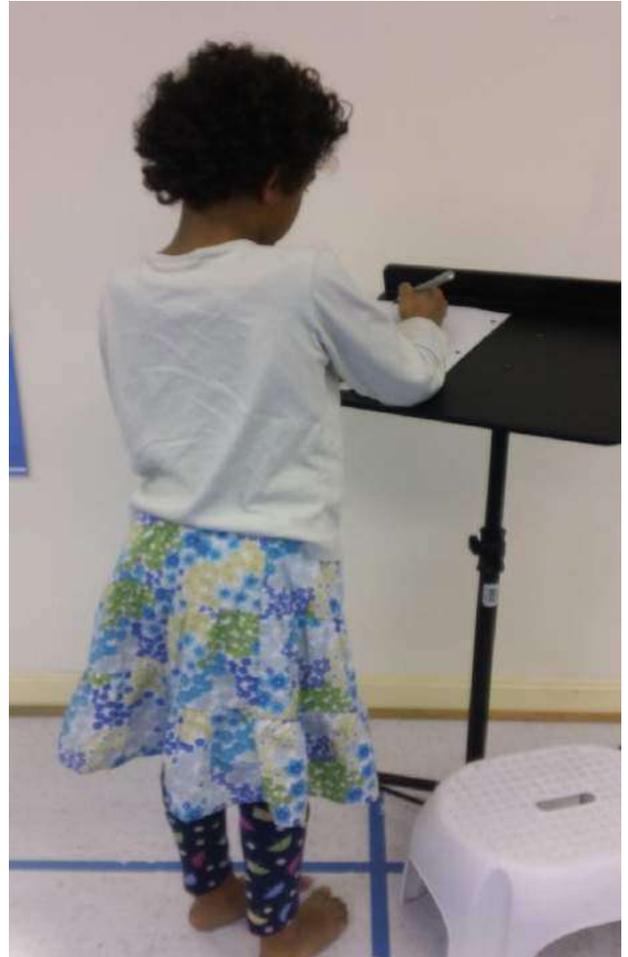


It is a good idea to set up a space where your child will do schoolwork each day. If possible, try to plan for some different work positions. For example, some children will work well standing up. This requires an adjustable table or a surface that is a little higher than a regular table, depending on your child's height. A music stand sometimes works.

Some children will do well working on their stomach on the floor, propping on their elbows. Others may prefer sitting on an exercise ball so they can bounce a little bit.

If you do have a regular chair and table or desk set up for your child, be sure the chair is sized so the child's feet can be flat on the ground and the table is the right height so their arms can rest easily slightly away from their body. (See photo above.)

Use a music stand or table for standing work



Manage the “flow” of your child’s work time by taking breaks designed to promote focus and calm.

Watch your child to see how long he or she can work productively. When the child starts to fidget, it might be time for a break. If it has only been a few minutes, take a break anyway and see if the next work period could be a few minutes longer. It might be as simple as sending your child to the kitchen for a glass of water and then, back to work.

Sometimes, a child will lose focus because of a need for movement, heavy work (moving muscles against resistance), or even to see or touch something novel. Here are some ways to provide that to your child:

Jumping jacks, Wall push-ups, Superman

Roll across the room or do somersaults

Do animal walks

Cat

Kangaroo

Snake

Bear

Elephant

Take 5 deep breaths



Some children really respond well to use of a timer. It doesn’t need to be anything fancy, try the egg timer from kitchen or the timer on your phone. Make sure the alarm sound is not so loud that it startles or upsets your child.



Try placing a visual cue on the wall for wall pushups



Taking a hike is a great break for students of any age and can be a science lesson for younger children

Do a yoga pose or 2 if you know them

Downward Facing Dog



Cat pose

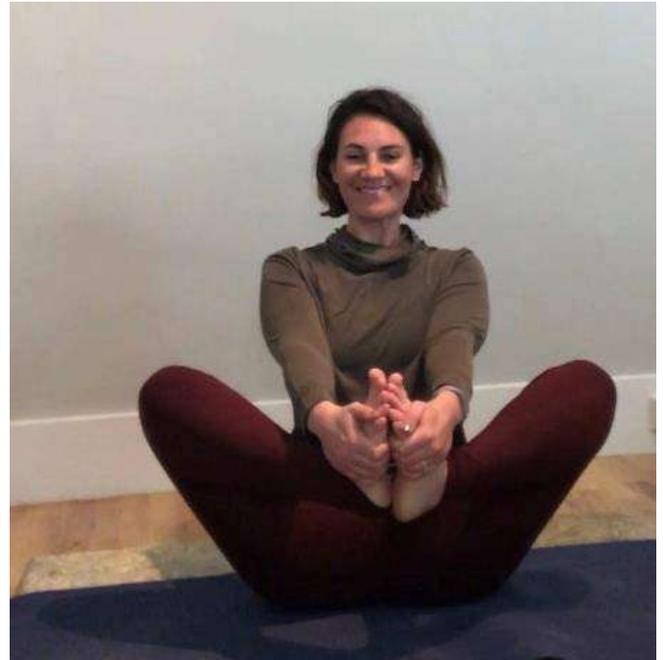


First head and tail up...



...then head and tail down.

Butterfly-move your knees up and down so your legs become butterfly wings!



Tree Pose- 2 variations to try



Mountain Pose- 2 variations to try



Deciding what to suggest to your child will depend on how much room you have, whether it is possible to go outside or not, what materials you have on hand, and your child's age and interests. You can either pick one and tell your child this is the activity or pick two and give your child a choice between the two. How many jumping jacks the child does or how long they hold a yoga pose will depend on their age and how much strength and stamina they have. You want the activity to create a challenge you know they can succeed at so they feel accomplishment. Then, you can honestly tell them they did a good job.



If you try something and your child loves it, write it on an index card or make a simple drawing if your child does not read. Keep it and add to the pile each time you discover something your child does well or likes to do during break time. Be sure to use things you know your child likes and can do. If your child likes to ride a scooter, riding the scooter down the block and back could be a great break activity. Once you build up a stack of 4 or 5 cards, each with an activity your child likes, you can place them face down on the table and have the child pick the one from the top so the activity choice will be random, or you can allow the child to pick. Again, the number of choices you give will depend on the child's age.

Tunnel play and driving cars on the floor will provide weight-bearing on both hands and knees. This is a great movement break for children who no longer use this as a means of getting around.



Shaving cream provides great sensory input



Self-Care and Household Tasks Provide Sensory Input

Maintain expectations for independent self-care

Engage your child in everyday tasks

Make it fun- have age appropriate expectations

Incorporate them into your daily routine

Teach skills and responsibility

Promote ownership and a sense of accomplishment

Being home during this time provides an excellent opportunity to support your child's growing independence and facility with self care-tasks such as dressing, bathing, and grooming. Asking your child to help around the house is also a wonderful way to build skills, increase independence and provide your child with some sensory input. These activities build **executive function**, which is the ability to plan, initiate, manage and complete tasks. Having your child take responsibility for something that the whole family relies on will **build confidence and self-esteem**. Increasing your child's level of independence with self-care tasks improves the child's **sense of self sufficiency**.





Take a few minutes and think about your child's ability to do various tasks and see if you can think of 2 or 3 new household or self-care tasks your child could do by himself.





Here are some examples:

- ❑ Carrying a basket of laundry is heavy work which provides organizing sensory input to the nervous system. You may need to use a smaller basket with only a few items in it, depending on your child's age and ability.
- ❑ Cleaning the kitchen table and counters requires squeezing a rag or sponge, wiping with large arm movements, and uses eye-hand coordination to make sure the entire surface is wiped.
- ❑ Washing dishes provides warm water tactile input, soap smell olfactory input, and execution of a sequenced task. You will need to provide age-appropriate support. For the youngest children, providing a pan of warm soapy water for them to play in while you do dishes is a wonderful way to spend time together, model an important daily activity, and provide your child with sensory input all at the same time!
- ❑ Have your child help with food preparation at an age appropriate level. Whether it's stirring pudding, chopping cucumbers or spreading peanut butter, you will be building skills and providing sensory input. Your child is watching you, smelling foods and spices, tasting things, using her hands to touch, executing functional movements and hearing sounds and more-sensory carnival!



Weight

Weight is a calming input

Providing your child with a heavy toy, lap pad, or ball is a great way to help her calm down.

How can I do this for my child?

- ❑ For a toddler, if your child has a shopping cart toy, a little red wagon or a ride-on car or fire truck, put some weight in the cargo hold area. You can use a rock, a brick, some books or a bag of sand. Be careful not to make it too heavy. A few pounds will make a difference.
- ❑ For a child over age 5, put a 1- or 2-pound bag of rice in a backpack or fanny pack. The amount of rice you choose to use will depend on the weight of your child. Do not exceed 10% of your child's body weight and do not let your child wear this for more than an hour; rest in between for at least 1.5 hours.
- ❑ If you are playing ball with your child, choose a heavier ball rather than a lighter one—for example, a basketball instead of a beach ball.
- ❑ For school-aged children, games such as wheelbarrow walking (where one child holds the ankles of the other) is a great way to cooperate with a sibling and get some heavy work in at the same time.

Oral Input as a Calming Strategy

Have a snack or a meal
Choose the menu carefully



Chewy foods & crunchy foods can improve focus- this makes the muscles of the mouth work and provides input to the jaw.

- crisp raw apples, celery or carrots
- pretzel rods, crackers or sourdough pretzels
- dried apricots, raisins, prunes, raisins
- fresh, un-toasted bagels
- chewing gum
- fruit leather
- drinking water through a straw or from a Camelbak water bottle
- eat a fruit juice popsicle
- use a chewy bracelet or necklace



Play Ball to Build Skills

Things to Keep in Mind When Playing Ball

- ❑ **Always structure for success**-if you begin tossing a ball with your child and she misses more than 75% of your throws, she will soon become frustrated and want to stop. To make both throwing and catching easier, move closer, throw more softly, and aim right at her hands.
- ❑ **Give verbal and visual cues** such as, “Hands up!” (demonstrate) and ask, “Are you ready?”
- ❑ **Consider the type of ball** you use. For catch, use a ball that will be easy for the child to catch. If your child has trouble catching the ball, use a slightly larger ball. However, just because a ball is larger, it may not be easier to use. For example, beach balls are often large, but may be too light for some children, making the task harder. A slightly heavier ball might actually be easier to catch.
- ❑ **Adjust to make it easier or harder as needed**- you can change the size of the target, the placement of the target, or the type of ball you use.
- ❑ **To build skills children need repetition and practice.** They need to be successful but also need enough of a challenge that they are not bored. So you can play catch with a bean bag, a playground ball, a balloon or a tennis ball. Keep introducing new and different ways to play!



Activities to Try



- ❑ Have your child try to bounce and catch a ball with a steady rhythm to support better attention.
- ❑ As a break from seated work, play catch with your child using a playground ball. See how far apart you need to stand to ensure that he can catch it. Then see if he can catch it with 1 bounce, 2 bounces and then 3. Can he throw it back to you with 1, 2, or 3 bounces?
- ❑ Practice dribbling with one hand and then with alternating hands.
- ❑ If you have a wall to use, see if your child can bounce the ball on the wall and catch it without a bounce and then with only one bounce.
- ❑ Bounce and catch a ball to improve memory for sounding out words or learning math facts. Moving in a sustained rhythmic manner while reciting will supercharge your child's memory.

Resources

www.Montessori4Inclusion.org
www.Way2Grow.com

- <https://www.spdstar.org/>
 - Great information about sensory processing disorder, symptom checklists, research
- <https://www.asensorylife.com/index.html>
 - Great ideas for sensory activities and adaptations at home that can be incorporated into everyday life to make things easier
- <https://funandfunction.com/>
 - Sensory toys, games, equipment and resources



I hope you have fun exploring these ideas with your children! Please share with other parents or therapists who might find it useful. I do ask that you respect my copyright and let those with whom you share, know that I am the author.

VERY special thanks to my dear Allie Tice, who shared her beautiful photos of yoga poses with me for this book. You are an amazing Yoga-Goddess!

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