LEARNING AT HOME DURING COVID-19

8 Tips for Fostering Children’s Self-Regulation and Promoting Creativity

In this time of uncertainty, families and teachers are struggling to help children learn at home. Many kids and adults are struggling with self-regulation, finding it difficult to stay motivated and focused on schoolwork without the structure of the classroom. These tips can help parents and caregivers foster their children’s self-regulation to promote creativity and engagement in schoolwork.

Self-regulation includes attention, organization, self-control, planning, and memory strategies. By enhancing self-regulation through instruction, modeling, coaching, structure, and routine, parents and caregivers can also help expand children’s creativity.

1. **Prepare a place as free of distraction as possible for children, encouraging them to take breaks between periods of work, and praising on-task behavior and task completion.**

2. **Break tasks down into smaller “bite-size” pieces, and clearly describe what successful task completion looks like while keeping in mind specific task requirements.**
   
   **EXAMPLE:** In a creative writing assignment, break down the task into the components of the story, such as the title, setting, list of characters, or ending. If you start with the setting, discuss three or four alternative choices, ask the student to discuss why one alternative might be better than another, and then to choose.

3. **Help students plan by asking them to identify and evaluate the immediate and long-term consequences of their decisions.**
   
   **EXAMPLE:** “Let’s look at a story you are reading for class. If you could change the ending, what ending would you choose? If you chose a happy ending, how would that affect the plot and the characters?”

4. **Give children choices in areas that they can control and include them in decisions about their own behavior. This promotes self-regulation more effectively than just giving commands.**
   
   **EXAMPLE:** “You need to spend two hours a day on your schoolwork. When do you think we should schedule those hours?” or “Would you rather work on your social studies essay or your science quiz after lunch?”
5. Give kids time and opportunity to practice new information so they can remember it over time. They should be able to explain the information in their own words, ask questions about it, rehearse it, and practice it repeatedly.

**EXAMPLE:** Ask the student to make up a quiz on the information that they learned that day. Let them prepare a "lesson" to teach you about the information.

6. Over time, allow students to use a variety of different approaches for completing tasks and solving problems. The strategies they have been taught may not be the only or best ways to answer a specific question or solve a particular problem.

**EXAMPLE:** “You have learned how to solve this problem using a routine that your teacher gave you. Can you use a different method for solving this problem that ends up with the same answer?”

7. Vary activities by changing the wording of directions for assignments. Use words such as “create,” “invent,” “discover,” “imagine if,” and “predict.”

**EXAMPLE:** “Imagine if you return to classes at your school in August. Predict how your daily routine will change. What are some positive changes you can expect?” Follow up by asking them to clarify, and if needed, further develop their responses.

8. Create opportunities for play. Games and creative play can stimulate useful cognitive or self-regulatory skills.

**EXAMPLE:** Play board games that incorporate planning, problem-solving, or hypothesis generation (like Checkers, Othello, or Candyland). Or, if you’re a musical family, try making music together. Sing, play duets, or make up songs or plays about staying home and perform them together as a family.