



## **Tip Number Six: Developing independent learning**

Independent learning is about children seizing opportunities to have more freedom and control over their individual learning. It is an essential part of schooling and can play an important role in the current home learning circumstances we find ourselves in.

Teachers help children learn in numerous ways and this varies lesson to lesson and child to child. It can include: stimulating children's appetites to learn, providing investigative opportunities, giving feedback on children's progress and helping children to make sense of what they have learned and relating this to the world around them.

However, children exploring for themselves is at the very core of learning. Making discoveries from a task the teacher sets that a child finds both interesting and challenging and the feeling they gain from self-direction, is highly rewarding, as well as being an incredible life tool.

### **What's so great about Independent Learning anyway?**

As we know, education should not be just about pupils passing exams. It should be about preparation for life beyond the classroom. Independent learners develop abilities that will stand them in good stead, both during and beyond their education.

This can include the ability to develop confidence in:

- communicating effectively using different media
- organisational skills
- problem solving
- social awareness and experience in relating to others

Development in these skills helps academic performance, creativity, motivation and most importantly self-confidence.

### **How to help your child become an independent learner – especially when working at home.**

#### **1. Define a work routine.**

Clear-cut guidelines around when, where and how the work should be done allow a child to be productive and stay on task more easily. A clearly defined work routine is essential to mentally prepare for the tasks at hand. The day does not need to be fully timetabled, but an uninterrupted focus time, along with breaks helps a child to stay focussed.

Research shows that, typically, a child can concentrate hard for three to five minutes for every year of their life. So a five-year-old may be able to focus for around 15 minutes, while a 10-year-old can stay on task for the best part of an hour. With this information you can decide on breaks and work times.

#### **2. Create a work zone at home.**

Once you have the routine planned, it would be useful to create a specific workplace for your child. This should be somewhere free from distraction that contains the materials and resources to be used for the day. At home, this designated work place becomes the classroom environment and will help the child to focus. With the resources already present, a child is more likely to use these to problem solve rather than ask for help immediately.

If you wish and it helps your child, you can always play some soft, background music. With some children this can aid concentration, with others not so much, but you know your own child.

### 3. Give your child the freedom to work in their own way.

There usually isn't just one right way to solve a problem. There are different problem-solving strategies that can be tried. For example, in maths, checking for relevant and irrelevant information can give clarity to a problem.

Some more strategies are included in this diagram.



Allowing children the freedom to find their own way to the answers is better than dictating how a problem should be handled, even if it takes longer.

### 4. Remind children that a challenge and making mistakes can be good.

The end point is an independent learner, who is confident in their own ability. This doesn't mean that children do not make mistakes and do not find work a challenge. Sometimes mistakes can be as important as perfection. Mistakes allow for modification and adaptation, an approach to the problem from a different angle that might yield better results. A positive approach to mistakes is important; in school, we often remind the children that 'everybody should learn from mistakes'. That is how we grow as a learner.

### 5. Encourage collaboration

At school, the children have regular opportunities to work in small groups or in pairs. This encourages them to learn from each other and develop their own ideas, rather than always looking to the teacher for answers. Whilst at home there is no reason why this cannot continue. If you are able to, you could set up a small zoom meeting or skype call to allow the children to discuss work with their friends and peers. It's also a good time for the children to catch up and for you to have that quiet cup of tea!

### 6. Self-evaluation

Self-evaluation is a way to reflect on work. It allows a child to recognise what they did well and what they could have done better. This can be achieved by assessing work against a success criteria or simply observing and reflecting on mistakes they have made. For example, you could set your child the goal of punctuation in their writing. Did they use full stops correctly? Was their spelling as good as it could be? Clearly, the criteria set is dependent upon a child's age and their academic ability.

To help reinforce this, whilst working at home your child could keep a 'learning diary' to enable them to keep track of their learning. Hopefully their confidence will increase as they look back and become aware of how far they've come and the progress they have made. It's similar to their exercise books at school.

## 7. Rewards and positive reinforcement

At present some children may find working from home purposeless and distracting. A positive working environment which praises good work and perseverance, along with a rewards system can help with this. You know your own children and how you could reward them for their hard work and persistence. For example, at school we use the house point system and golden time. You could use this or try something else.

