

Mrs Dowdell's Parenting Pointer

Dealing with Discouragement

We all feel discouraged from time to time. Struggling with issues at school can be one source of discouragement for our children. What are some ways that we can help? Here are some thoughts ...

Children have different skills and learn at different rates, whether that's learning to swim, ride a bike, read or write. Unfortunately, they quickly learn to compare themselves with others and this isn't always helpful. It is important that we help our children to recognise their strengths and build their self-confidence. They need help to understand that it's OK not to be good at everything, as long as they are trying their best. We can draw on their successes to help them in more challenging areas. For example, when you see your child concentrating and being persistent to reach the next level of a computer game, you can point out that they can use those same qualities to grasp a new concept in maths or learn their spellings. We can also use "positive forecasting statements" to express our faith in their ability to succeed. For example "If we keep practicing your spellings, you'll get better and better" or "if you keep trying, you'll soon be able to ride your bike without help."



We want our children to succeed, but it's important that we don't put expectations on them that are too high. If they are getting very few spellings correct each week, it would be unrealistic for us to expect them to get full marks every time. Instead, we can practice with them and praise their efforts as they improve little by little, week by week. If they are reluctant to read a whole book out loud to us, we can praise them when they manage one page, or even just the odd word. In time we can build their confidence and courage to "have a go". When supporting our children with homework, remember that it is the child being assessed, not the parents. The most important aspect of homework is that children are beginning to work independently and take more responsibility for their learning. Of course, we'd love it if they produce a piece of work with neat handwriting, correct spellings and punctuation etc., but if that means we enter a battle with every assignment because we are seeking perfection, homework becomes a chore that is miserable for everyone involved.

If children are really discouraged, we can try offering extra incentives, small rewards or setting up sticker charts. Reading an extra page of their reading book could mean an extra story at bedtime. Getting their homework completed before tea could earn extra minutes on the Xbox. Alternatively, stickers could be awarded for completing tasks, which can then be exchanged for rewards such as choosing what is for pudding, a trip to the park, having a friend to tea or choosing a movie to watch at the weekend. (More homework tips next week.)

Parents can have a huge impact on children's learning by engaging in school. This may be hard for us, especially as our children start to learn concepts that perhaps we don't understand, or if our own experience of school wasn't good. If you are struggling to support your children with their homework, or you feel that the work being set for them is too hard, please speak to your child's class teacher. If we know there is a problem we can help and when we all work together, we can help our children to reach their potential.

Got any questions? Need any help or advice? E-mail me at parenting@foundrylaneprimary.co.uk