



The role of the parent during this time of change



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With many Australian children currently learning from home, I'm often asked, 'what should I (the parent) be focusing on?' and 'what is the key to successful parenting for the present moment?' Advice varies from, 'Don't worry, kids go on family travel trips and miss extensive periods with no impact', to the other, 'my child is in Year 12! How is he going to cope? How hard should I push?'

My answer to both these questions is simply that there is not any one formula or recipe that will work for all. What we can do, is look at guiding principles and apply those in the home.

At school, your child receives all his learning cues from the school environment. He is with his friends, in classrooms; bells signal the changes in classes and dynamics and so on. These 'marker points' are all different. Schools, through trial and error, have become very good at using these cultural marker points to influence how and when people learn. Good schools have values, understand the importance of peer influences on learning and have enforceable behaviour policies that help create certainty and wellbeing.

It is in the school context that your child can set goals, have rewards and develop a sense of purpose.

So at home, it is then important to look at how these structures and marker points can also be established, developed and maintained. There are two key principles:

1. Create and maintain family wellbeing

Wellbeing starts with you. Like the airline in-flight safety demonstration, we, as parents, need to take the oxygen first. The same must apply at home. You are also working: your child, even in lower primary, needs to understand your boundaries (firmly and fairly applied). You need to be able to take time out to make your own adjustments.

Adjust your expectations

British psychologist, Donald Winnicott, describes the power of parenting and letting kids be kids. It is from his work that the term ‘the good enough parent’ is derived. Don’t worry too much about all the extras – focus on building safety, a sense of calm and emotional availability. There is some truth to the reality that students who have missed blocks of school can come back and do very well. There is a lot your child can learn at home.

Build some wellbeing routines into your daily life

Using prompts such as, ‘what went well’ or a ‘gratitude bucket’ or a ‘check-in’ around the dinner table, is a great way to build an emotional connection in the family.

Reframe what is going on

Stories can be a powerful way to reframe a challenge. No one has chosen COVID-19 as a challenge, but what we do in response as a family is what we will all remember. How do you approach this challenge with a spirit of adventure? What are some stories you can draw on – from your own life or others?

Set a goal of a new ‘normal’

It can be hard to ‘land’ during this time of change. Currently, there are daily updates on the evolving social restrictions, possible school return dates, and infection rates. Within this, there is also the new normal – when mealtimes are, routines for setting up the day, what we do together as a family and how we do them. Invite your children into the discussion about the structure of the day and make them responsible (and accountable) for making it work.

2. Create a learning culture

The key to a learning culture is developing rules and guidelines around academic work. The reality is that online learning is tiring. Some schools will change the timetable to build in work that is in real time (synchronous) and also work that is to be done in a more flexible way (asynchronous).



There are two essentials to consider:

The basics

Your child needs a place to work, free from distractions, with clear timelines. Mealtimes, breaks, exercise blocks, and free technology time should be timetabled and agreed upon. Access to a device and Wi-Fi is essential; if not, the school will assist.

The 'even better if'

If you can ask questions, see work, and be involved in the learning then you and your child are on the right track. It is important to support your school, its values and pedagogy, by presenting a united front to your child about the value of what the school is doing, and how it is doing it. Where there are issues and failings, address them with the school as a problem solving exercise – being part of the process (as feedback). This will demonstrate to your child how to problem solve effectively.

As we step deeper into this great time of change, we know that we are being called to do more, to be more. Ultimately, we will remember this time as one of growth and learning, and for parents it may be a time that can, and will define you.

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