



Help your children to learn

MAKING THE MOST OF TIME WITH YOUR CHILD

For both primary and secondary parents

department for
education and skills

Resources for
parents by parents

Research shows that your interest and involvement in your child's learning and education is more important than anything else in helping your child fulfil their potential. As parents, you are the people who go with your child on their learning journey, from the day they are born to the time they become an adult.

You, as the parent, carer or guardian know your child best. These leaflets give ideas and suggestions for you to choose from – you will know which ones suit you, your child and the school. All of the ideas in the leaflet have been developed by parents and can be used with, or adapted for, both primary and secondary age children and young people.

There are many sorts of schools in England – the ideas and suggestions made in these leaflets do not necessarily reflect DfES policy or school policy and should be viewed simply as support for parents in helping their children to learn. Your school may not have seen this leaflet before and it may be helpful to tell them that you are going to use it. All schools have a home school agreement and by signing this agreement you will be acknowledging your partnership with the school to help educate your child. Working in partnership with the school will help your child become a successful learner and a rounded person.

Making the most of the time with your child

The time you spend with your child away from school is probably very important to you both. This is when you can be relaxed and enjoy 'time off' together. By making the most of this time, you can also support your child's learning.

This booklet looks at some ideas for doing this:

- spending 'family time' together
- reading together
- doing a project together
- pride rating
- looking at your world together.

You will of course have your own ways of being with your child – the ideas in this booklet are only for you to take up if you want to. Any time you spend with your child enjoying yourselves will help him or her to:

- build self confidence and self esteem
- build a strong relationship with you and others
- develop his or her strengths.

And by spending time helping your child's learning you will provide him or her with a role model, showing that you appreciate learning and that learning is important for both children and adults alike.

Spending 'family time' together

'Family time' is time with your children when you can enjoy each other's company uninterrupted. It's a good time for talking, listening and just having fun together. These times are much more important to children than we sometimes realise. They can really help you get closer to your child, increasing his or her self confidence and self esteem. It gives your child the chance to talk to you and ask questions or raise things that are worrying them.

There are lots of ways of enjoying family time. You probably have your own ideas of what you as a family like to do, but here are some ideas from other families.

- Playing a sport together eg swimming, cycling, football.
- Enjoying a meal together at home sitting round the table, discussing things and exchanging news.





- Going out for the day eg to a free museum, to the cinema, to a zoo.
- Watching a favourite television programme together and talking about it.
- Turning the television off for the evening and reading, talking, looking at photographs, listening to music, or watching family videos.

Reading together

Any reading you can do together with your child will help him or her in several different ways:

- it really helps you to get close, physically and emotionally, as you will be sitting together, perhaps having a cuddle
- your child has your whole attention while you are reading together – very important for his or her self confidence and self esteem
- you can help your child appreciate the pleasure of reading
- you can help him or her with any difficulties
- you are providing a good role model – an adult who likes to read!

Try to develop a regular reading routine with your child, even if it's only even if it's only 10-20 minutes a day. It doesn't always have to be a book – try reading your child's favourite comic or magazine with him or her and talking and laughing about it.

Active reading – or **co-reading** – really just means reading together but in a more involved way. It means talking about what you are reading, helping your child to explore the meaning, language, style, characters, and anything else you both find interesting.

If your child is at primary school, you might want to read a short chapter of a book together each day and then talk about it by asking each other questions. You could both write the answers down if you wanted to, giving you a chance to see how your child constructs sentences, uses vocabulary, and understands what he or she has read.

You could even give each other a spelling test, using words from the story. Your child can mark your work and comment on





how well you have done! Try using a dictionary together if there are any difficult words. This is another skill you can help your child develop.

For a more creative child, you could develop the story together, perhaps by writing a short play or poem, or by designing a poster or menu.

If your child is at secondary school and taking GCSEs or A levels, you could co-read a play or poem they are working on and discuss it together. It doesn't matter if you know less about the author or text than they do – the important thing is to develop shared interests and keep the lines of communication open. You might find that your conversations broaden to other issues in your child's life eg bullying, relationships with friends. In this way, reading together can help bring you closer emotionally.

If you are interested in finding out more about what to read with your child, try one of these websites:

www.literacytrust.co.uk

www.bookstart.org.uk (for pre-school children)

Doing a project together

One way of getting involved with your child's learning is to work on a specific project or topic. Primary school children often learn through project work, and at secondary school, children usually do coursework which involves projects.



Here are some ideas from other parents that you might want to try with your child, depending on their age:

- growing plants such as runner beans or sunflowers and making simple notes and measurements
- preparing for a family holiday by finding out more about the area
- finding out more about your local area, perhaps on the history of the area

- researching your family tree
- looking at family expenditure and working out how much you spend and what on (eg food, bills, clothes, going out)
- talking to an older relative such as a grandparent about their life when they were younger and comparing it with nowadays
- finding out more about a sport your child is interested in.

You and your child probably have other ideas of your own – the Internet is also a good place to get ideas for projects.

School holidays are a good time to do this kind of thing with children as there is more time.

If you decide to do a project with your child, you might want to plan it so that he or she can see how it will work out. You could start by asking yourselves these questions:



- What are we going to do and why?
- How are we going to do it?
- What can we do to make it as interesting as possible?

Here's a simple plan prepared by one family.

Task No	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4
1	Choose the project together Decide on start and end date Break down into steps			
2	Start research eg library, museum, Internet. Make notes	Continue research Make notes Take photos		
3			Write up project with drawings, photos etc	
4				Discuss the completed project together Praise and encourage
5				Review project together

The second task, research, may involve using the Internet. If you don't have access to the Internet at home, you can use a library or Internet café, or perhaps a friend's computer. If you are not familiar with the Internet, your child may be able to teach you! Two DFES websites www.parentcentre.gov.uk and www.parentsonline.gov.uk are very helpful. The Parents Online website also looks at the educational benefits of using the Internet.

The last task, review, is very important. This is something you could do together at the end of a project. Encourage your child to answer these questions:

- What did I do best?
- What did I enjoy most about doing the project?
- What have I learned?
- What can I do better next time?
- What didn't I enjoy about the project?

Answers to these simple questions will help you both identify your child's:

- interests and enthusiasms
- learning style (how he or she likes to learn)
- strengths and weaknesses.

School projects and coursework

It's important to take an interest in the projects your child is doing at school. If your child has to finish something or take something into school by a certain date, you might want to know about it so that you can give some gentle reminders if necessary.

If you have older children doing GCSEs or A levels they will have coursework to complete by certain deadlines and you can help



them by making sure they are managing their time and planning their work well. They might find it helpful to use something like the project plan on page 7.

Doing projects at home with children can really help them develop the skills they need to manage their homework and coursework. Working together on projects can show them how to:

- organise their work by breaking it down into small manageable steps, encouraging personal target setting
- plan work to meet deadlines and draw up personal timetables
- find information from several sources eg library, Internet, textbooks, people
- present their work neatly and creatively.

Pride rating

Whatever your child does, at school or at home, it's important for them to take pride in it. You can take pride in it too, and make this clear to your child by giving him or her plenty of praise and encouragement, no matter how small the achievement.

A more organised way of doing this – and probably more suitable for secondary school age – is **pride rating**. This simply means asking your child to decide how well they think they did

when they have completed a piece of work. The pride rating can be a mark out of 10 or a grade from A to C, and would normally involve asking the child one or two of these questions:

- Are you proud of this piece of work?
- Is it neatly presented?
- Is it creatively presented?
- Have you double-checked for mistakes?
- If you were marking it, what mark would you give it?

Pride rating can really help older children to set themselves high standards and so aim for consistently good grades. It also encourages self-discipline as they are not relying on someone else to make them improve, but taking responsibility for this themselves.

Using pride rating for homework

Pride rating can be particularly helpful when children are doing homework. As a parent you are expected to make sure your child completes his or her homework and to sign the homework book. Before you sign the homework book, you could ask your child what pride rating they would give the work. If they give it a low score, you could talk about how they could improve it and they could re-do it so that they can give it a higher rating.



Make sure you check what mark or comments your child gets from the teacher so that you can monitor progress. Give him or her plenty of praise and encouragement for a good mark or comment, and point out that it was worth making those improvements.



Looking at your world together

All children need to know who they are and how they and their family fit in to the world around them. There are lots of fun ways in which you can help them learn more about their own and other cultures. Here are some ideas.

- Produce a cultural calendar together, marking family birthdays, religious holidays, cultural festivals, days of remembrance, and national holidays. This is a good way of highlighting the riches that diversity in our society brings us.
- Celebrate special days together by playing music, writing poems, reading stories, making cards or painting a picture. Special days could be religious or cultural celebrations, or simply an anniversary of something special to your family, such as the day you moved to your home.
- Enjoy a special meal together on a certain date, either to mark an event, or perhaps to try food on a festival day from a culture that is different from your own.





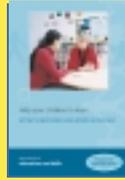
- If your child is invited to a religious or cultural celebration that you don't observe in your family, such as Easter Sunday, Eid or a Bar Mitzvah, help them find out more about the celebration and why it is important.
- If you are going to a local carnival or traditional fair, find out about its history – how and why it started.
- If a charity has a special event, such as wearing pink ribbons or poppies, talk together about what the charity does and why people contribute to charities.
- A very simple but effective idea is to ask your child to wander through your home and observe what they see and feel. Then ask them to write a short story or poem describing their experience, perhaps sharing it with the rest of the family if they want to.

We hope you have found the ideas in this booklet helpful and that you will use the ideas you like to help your child develop and learn.



Help your children to learn
Resources for parents

Reference HYCL



Help your children to learn
Getting the most from school reports

Reference HYCL/3



Help your children to learn
Parents meetings with teachers

Reference HYCL/1



Help your children to learn
How is your child doing at school?

Reference HYCL/5



Help your children to learn
Formal meetings with teachers

Reference HYCL/2

Other leaflets in the series are also available.

If you would like to share your experiences, or you have any queries or require further information, please visit our website www.dfes.gov.uk/parents

The information in this leaflet was written by 'Strikers' a parent support group. Further copies of this leaflet, and others in the 'Help your children to learn' series, can be obtained from Prolog: 0845 60 222 60 quoting reference HYCL/4 for this leaflet and the references shown above for others in this series.