

TIPS TO KEEP KIDS LEARNING- BRAINS ONLINE

This week in Victoria is the first official week of school at home due to Covid19. Most schools have gone online and are offering zoom sessions, activity outlines and recommendation on apps for learning. Parents are scrambling for ways to engage kids in learning while balancing their own commitments as well. We are all wanting this to be a success. We are all wanting kids to be ready to sit down and learn.

Here are our top tips for looking after the needs of your child's brain so it stays switched on for learning.

1 BE PREDICTABLE

- Have a basic plan your kids know about and can see.

Having a plan or routine can create a sense of safety for the brain. If kids know what to expect, their brains are more likely to be ready to learn. This might mean setting a plan such as task A, B and C must be done today; or there will be 2 hours of schoolwork done. Write it down and stick it on the fridge or somewhere where the kids can see it. Keep the plan simple and loose so that necessary alterations don't actually change the plan.

2 STAY GROUNDED

- Apply pressure to legs and arms to stay connected in the body and in the present moment.

Applying pressure to the body can help kids to stay grounded and regulated by activating the proprioceptive system. This is one of the bodies systems that provides information to our brains about our bodies. It also helps with regulating emotional responses and sensory input. If sitting in a chair, place something weighted on the lap. Weighted blankets and animals are great but if you don't have one something like a hot water bottle – cold water is fine- can work too. Using your hands to gently squeeze along your arms and legs can also activate this system.

3 FACILITATE SUCCESS

- Make sure all learning activities start with something kids already know or can do.

Success breeds success. Kids are more likely to tackle new work when their brain experiences that pleasure spike of success. Focusing them on work they can already achieve will set their brains up to feel capable of the next challenge.

4 PROVIDE CHOICES

- Add control back into your child's day through giving choices.

The changes and challenges kids are currently experiencing can make them feel like they are spinning out of control. This does not feel safe to our brains and if our brains do not feel safe they cannot focus on learning. Offer simple choices such as what order they complete activities in or what time an activity will be started.

5 GET MOVING

- Have short bursts of learning broken up by longer sessions of movement.

This is not just something to do to stretch out children's physical bodies but for their brain as well. Movement helps nervous system energy to flow helping our brains with regulation. Add movement as part of the schoolwork where you can. Where you cannot add it to the school activity make sure to have regular movement breaks. Skip, dance, run on the spot, whatever you can manage to get the body moving.

6 DRINK COLD WATER

- Suck cold water out of a drink bottle.

Sucking cold water out of a drink bottle or straw can stimulate the vagus nerve that controls the autonomic systems in the body (autonomic systems are the ones that work without us thinking about them, like our heart beating). Stimulating the vagus nerve has a positive affect on our stress response and helps with emotional regulation. When we feel regulated our brains are ready to focus on learning.

7 PLAY PLAY PLAY

- Turn learning into games and fun and take lots of play breaks.

Play involves movement and connection and often evokes laughter. It is a natural way that kids engage in brain integration and emotional regulation. Turn learning activities into games where you can and make sure your kids have plenty of free choice play opportunities to break up the day.