

HOMEWORK GUIDELINES

Traditional homework filling in worksheets has been proven to be meaningless and stressful for children, families and teachers. But a wider ‘concept’ of ‘homework’ as parents working together with their child as home in short, positive sessions (rather than a ‘chore’) is widely recommended in parenting and educational literature, so this is part of our approach to homework at Child Side School (see Essential and Highly recommended Homework examples below).

SCHOOL LEARNING: Learning in a group is significantly different to learning, practicing and consolidating at home. Group learning at school involves social, emotional and group theory building and co-constructive learning and is very complex. It is also very challenging for a teacher/educator to engage and focus children on an adult agenda, when they are in a group! We have to balance being supportive, positive and keeping children engaged and connected with firmness, accountability and expectation. If we put children off and create negative feelings towards literacy and numeracy, we have a long-term, up-hill, exhausting ‘battle’ on our hands! But if we have no expectations or do not hold each child ‘accountable’ then they will never get any depth, satisfaction or challenge from Literacy and Numeracy.

HOME LEARNING: Learning at home is an opportunity to reflect, practice and consolidate in a way that schools cannot do (by the ratio of children to adults and many more distractions at school). “For children, habits of the mind soon become structures of the brain- and they absorb their habits, either directly or indirectly – from the adult culture that surrounds them (pg 138) “ Endangered Minds – Why children don’t think and what we can do about it” – Jane M. Healy 1990. So at ‘home’ with the adults who love and care for them the most, is the most important place for children to absorb that ‘adult culture’ that surrounds them and influences the structure of their brains!

Essential ‘homework’ for every child, regardless of age (basically just healthy parenting practices):

Reading together

- Reading together most nights (even for older children where the focus shifts from learning to read to reading to learn). Reading both story and information books together will expose your child to an enormous vocabulary range, help them to become aware of stereo-types and a range of attitudes, to encounter history, science, mystery, adventure, magic and everything in-between.

- Expect and encourage your child to join in reading and read at their level. Make connections between what is read and daily life, personal experiences, words in other places, your own adult ideas and opinions... Children can be successful, fluent life-long readers if this time is committed at home. There is a major difference between children who have these regular positive literacy experiences at home and those who don't.
- Children need to be active participants in these reading sessions. We explain to children that they don't learn to swim unless they get in the water and have a go, they don't learn music by just listening to someone else play – they have to have a go and practice, when they learn to drive they will need to sit in the driver's seat and follow instructions and practice – it is just the same with reading and writing.
- We recommend that parents still play an active role in choosing literature and information books for children (even when they are independent readers) as it is a consumer/commercial world out there, even in our libraries and often children can only be attracted to the 'treat' or junk food of the literature section. We have set up Interactive Take Home Packs for families to borrow on a regular basis to help busy families (these packs are not always the 'best' but reading together will help your child to become a more creative, critical and constructive reader and thinker and show them how to make more informed choices. Just reading any old thing is like eating white bread for the mind – empty calories – or something even worse, can actually do harm by influencing attitudes, promoting stereotypes and prejudices!)

Listening, talking and wondering about the world together daily

- Problem-solving together (as we are unable to resolve conflict for our children or 'tell' them the answer if we want learning to occur – we have to wonder, suggest, offer, support, encourage them seeing another perspective, offering alternatives and creative solutions, expecting them to be participants and contribute to their own solutions).
- Turning the T.V, radio, telephone off over dinner; turning off the radio or music in the car; turning off the lights at bed-time and talking in the dark.... Are all highly recommended ways to engage children in discussion and reflection, so there are less distractions.
- "What did you do today?" or asking other questions may not be the best way to engage your child in reflection.
- Using story and information books that you read together is a way of entering discussion and making connections to what children may think or experience or understand.

- Reading our school reflective visual diary as often as you can is also a way to comment on what you have seen children do and invite your child to comment.
- Share your own interests, highlights, challenges, possible solutions too. Make connections to the wider community and the adult world (children need to know that adults are human too and having worries, challenges, passions, commitments, making mistakes... is part of being human – it is not personal!)

Exploring the world together

- Such as camping, visiting places such as Scitech or the Planetarium in Perth, watching documentaries and movies together, going to the zoo, walking in the bush, beach-combing, shopping, paying bills, gardening, cooking... From an adult's point of view it is much more fun doing these as a parent/educator than as a teacher/educator with whole group responsibility.
- Involving children in daily life as 'apprentices'. Schools can never do these things as successfully as parents and children together.

Exercising together regularly at what ever level is practical

- Walking, riding bikes or scooters, throwing/catching/kicking balls or balloons, swimming, going to a playground... from experience we know this has to be made a priority or it just doesn't get any time in a busy week. Teachers are parents too, so we understand. Health affects mood and attitude so it is worth it!

Highly recommended homework

- Drawing, painting, writing together – set aside a short shared time in these activities. Making sure your child has easy access to a range of paper, scissors, envelopes, pens, crayons, glue, stimulating books, alphabet and number posters, name cards, calendars and calculators and 2 types of clocks – digital and analogue –traditional clock face- for older children to explore and use informally... Parent interest (even only a couple of minutes makes all the difference) and connections (like to a recipe, board game, story, shopping list) are highly recommended. Literacy learning is more 'organic' and natural to children if they have these sorts of regular experiences at home – it is not a chore or 'homework' but a natural part of daily life (but an adult needs to be part of it, or it can 'fizzle' away).
- Following your child's interests and passions outside of school – such as music, sport, dancing.

- Playing cards and board games with the emphasis on practising (numbers, money, counting, taking turns, chance/luck when rolling dice...) and co-operative time, rather than competition. This is especially important for younger children not to focus on 'winning and losing', adapt rules if need be (but explain that these are home rules and that other children may not accept them). Much conflict can arise at school if the focus at home has been on winning and competing and the learning focus can be completely lost on children. We even raise social-justice issues when we play Monopoly and make connections to the real world with the social consequences and offer our own possibilities as we play. We talk politics, consumerism, economics... as we play, we focus on sound money management and financial stability, we talk about mortgages and the consequences on being bankrupt of living in a society of bankrupt or very poor people.
- Practicing certain focus areas from time to time in short bursts. We don't recommend traditional worksheets with rows of number algorithms or spelling lists for many reasons. However practicing some spelling words from children's writing or reading (children can take pretend 'photos' of certain word shapes and letter combinations when you read and then spell them out orally or write just 3-4 each time and often the same words or the same letter combination), doing a cross-word together, practicing some basic number facts in fun ways, focusing on punctuation as you read (child snaps fingers or claps when sees a full stop, then makes an adult/capital letter with fingers straight afterwards or you ask them what letter/s are missing from the contracted word 'don't or can't). Practicing touch typing on the computer (we have CDRoms available to borrow) – recommended for children around 11 years old only. Some types of learners definitely benefit from practicing spelling, reading and other cognitive (thinking) tasks at home in a quieter environment.
- It is healthy for children to get used to having a short amount of committed time regularly at home to settle and engage in thinking and creative tasks such as a board game, drawing, making a poster, practicing 4-5 tricky spelling or reading words, creating with lego, sewing, knitting... and for older children practicing complex concepts such as converting centimetres to metres, fractions, decimal places, percentages, telling the time, tables... in a supported one-on-one adult situation (some children take a great deal longer to understand and be able to do accurately than others, they need plenty of practice in different situations – at school we have to be careful of boredom and switching off, if children practice too much).
- Support and expect older children to work out the total cost and the change when out shopping, most shop assistants don't mind waiting at all. Get them to work out how long until dinner or how far when travelling... It is these small, everyday 'drips' that make the difference.

Please regularly talk to your child about school being their ‘workplace’, a workplace for both children and adults to go to get their work done and where everyone is important and contributes. Therefore everyone has the right to a clean, safe, pleasant working environment and **everyone** contributes (**children, staff and parents** – as we do not have enough staff to garden, maintain, build, purchase stock) Children need to be aware of all that is done for them and how important their help is. They need to be made aware how they help themselves and others to get their work done.

Recommended reading for staff and parents

“The End of Homework” by Etta Kralovec and John Buell, 2000.

“The Exhausted School: by John Taylor Gatto (Ed).

“Endangered Minds – Why children don’t think and what we can do about it” by Jane M. Healy 1990.

Website: www.allianceforchildhood.com