

Dear Children, Parents and Carers,

Welcome back!

I hope you managed to have a great Easter break and did some lovely things with your families. The weather has been great! I can remember some Easters when it's been really cold and snowed. I managed to get into my garden and have been using an APP called PlantSnap to try and find out the names of some mysterious plants that have appeared.

We are now at the start of the Summer Term and your class teachers will begin to add more home learning pages to Frog this week. However, the online lessons don't meet the needs of the pupils all day or every day and I know some of you have told me that you are struggling to keep your children engaged.

So, my advice, please stop worrying about trying to accomplish the impossible and do the best that you can. What you can do, is strengthen the skills your children need in order to thrive when they come back to school. Children who are good readers tend to do better than other children. Time spent learning how to find things out, problem solving, and focusing on one task for longer periods of time will give students a leg up when they return.

Children might even have a little fun learning something new during this challenging and confusing time. Here are a few ideas to try at home.

1. Read, read, read If you do nothing else but read to young children—or set aside time for children to read on their own and then talk to them about what they have read, that will be more valuable than attempting to teach almost anything else. Children who have someone read to them are more likely to read for pleasure. And if they read for pleasure, they do much better in school in all subject areas. Students who read novels have much higher emotional intelligence, which helps them cope with stress, make friends more easily, and learn from mistakes. Children who read well can sit still longer and concentrate on a single task for more time than their peers. Parents, you could ask the grandparents, or family friends to read a book aloud over FaceTime or Zoom. There is also a huge list of children's audiobooks that Audible has made available for free during the pandemic. It has also been found that turning on the subtitles on your TV will also encourage children to read them, and, improves reading ages significantly.

2. Teach family history What was the world like for my ancestors? You don't have to teach from a history book at home. Get older relatives to talk to the children about their life experiences (back in the black and white days, as my daughter said after looking at some old photos). We have a lot of visitors come into school to talk about the things they have experienced in their lives. The children are always interested, excited, motivated and moved by the experience. They could create a family tree based on the information they get from family members. Some children have had challenging experiences, particularly if they have been migrants. Helping these children to write the story is always interesting and can be therapeutic. You know, in the past family traditions and histories were passed from one generation to another through stories. I would love to read these stories either by e mailing them or bringing them in when school opens.

3. Make maths and science interesting Teach fractions by increasing a recipe by one-third, or converting a recipe for 6 to a recipe for 2 or 3. Do simple science experiments like changing the ratio of squash to water and test on different family members to find the one they like best. Take seeds from fruit and vegetables, the tops of onions and carrots, and plant them all. Water and care for them equally and see what grows. Keep track of your

experiment on a chart, then the children can predict how big the plants will get based on the data they've collected. Please don't be hard on yourselves.

4. Engage the children in caring for plants and animals. Indoor plants and pets are fine, but it's even better to engage the children outdoors. Consider working with the children to provide habitat for wildlife. You can do this by setting up a bird bath or bird feeder. Make a bug hotel or wormery. You might also plant a butterfly garden. It's also important to show children how to relate to other living things in a gentle and caring way: water the plants; avoid breaking branches or stripping bark from trees; and avoid disturbing the homes of birds and bugs. If you collect an animal from outdoors for closer observation (such as a snail, ant or beetle), return it to its natural habitat within a short period of time and explain to the children why this is important.

5. Get Creative Children are naturally creative and most have the ability to make something from nothing. Children can draw outside using a paintbrush and water or use sticks and stones to make a picture. Creative activities help to spark your child's natural curiosity and create their own journey of exploration, discovery and developments. What's more, it's great fun!

Based on research and practical experience, here are the top 10 benefits on engaging in creative activities

Hand & Eye Co-ordination: Learning to develop fine motor skills takes practice. Whether it's learning to hold a pencil, mark making or scissor skills, creative activities help to develop your child's proprioceptive input, dexterity and tactility. This also helps your child to compare different materials.

Inspire Imagination: "Imagination is more important than knowledge" (Albert Einstein). When you nurture your child's imagination you help to nurture their creativity and they grow as an individual. This helps with all areas of learning, enhances their wellbeing and self-development.

Physical Development: In a world where children are exposed to screens at an increasingly early age, helping your child develop their hand and finger strength is vitally important. When your child creates models, manipulates clay or uses their fingers to make marks, this helps to develop their hand and finger strength. Creative activity also supports the development of your child's movement, balance and spatial awareness.

Sensory Development: Your child makes sense of their world by taking in information from their many senses. Being involved in creative activities helps your child to develop their observation skills, ability to listen to instructions, explore different textures, recognize different smells and gain an understanding of their world.

Logic: Overcoming challenges is part of life's journey. Creative activities help your child to think, make connections and work things out for themselves. To *FAIL* is the 'First Attempt in Learning' and creative activities provide a wonderful way for your child to think and to try out different solutions to achieve what they want. Activities help your child to sort, organise and analyse information, problem solve, and make connections.

Communication skills: Creative activities help your child to develop their listening skills, express their feelings, describe their activities and actions, developing their language and their attention to detail.

Concentration: Being creative builds your child's confidence to try new experiences and activities, builds their persistence and patience and helps them to develop their own ideas.

One of your child's pieces of artwork may look like random scribbles or paint strokes to you, but your child will see something quite different.

Confidence: Developing your child's own ideas and turning them into something they can hold in their hand, promotes deep pride, satisfaction and self-worth. This enables your child to gain confidence in their abilities to develop their thinking as they know their ideas are recognised and valued. Exploring different materials, colours and textures supports your child's confidence around eating healthy foods. This increased confidence can also help with separation and making choices.

Social Skills: Ability to share with others, bond with each other, and make friends. Along with understanding how objects can exist even when out of sight.

Understanding Their World: Creative craft activities help your child's understanding of the concept of large and small, above and below, hard and soft, wet and dry etc. Activities help them understand that they can effect their environment and creates awareness of being safe.

We all want what is best for each child. We want to give them what will make them grow and thrive. We generously give of our time and our attention. We plan each day with care and select materials that we hope will excite their curiosity and creativity. We hold their hands and guide their steps. We wipe their tears and listen to their stories. These are all beautiful gifts that can't be wrapped with paper and ribbon. Let's not forget to give the children in our care the gift of wonder. We can give this gift to ourselves, as well, and in the sharing of wonder their lives and ours will be enriched—not just for today—but for many years into the future.

If you send me back a child who had fun learning, or one who has learnt a new skill, or, who can concentrate a little longer than before — then you will have done something profound and important.

Stay Safe

Sarah Bracken