

Simple ideas to encourage children's learning at home.

15 ways to help your children develop learning skills

This is an extract from 'Unhomework' by Mark Creasy:

1. *Reading*: Do this every day, using different types of text. Walter Dean Myers puts this best, 'If you had a sick patient, you wouldn't entice them to medicine, you'd tell them flat out "Take this or you're going to die." We need to tell kids flat out: reading is not optional.
2. *Cooking*. The process of cooking covers English, maths, science, art, history (if you let it) and geography, as well as providing them with practical life skills.
3. *DIY*. This provides numerous opportunities for problem solving, measurement, spatial ability, maths and following instructions.
4. *Gardening*. This teaches care and patience and long-term planning
5. *Board games*. Playing games teaches taking turns and playing to rules. It shows that having rules makes play more enjoyable and creative. It also supports accepting that you don't always win.
6. *Computer games*. If you are not familiar with these, your children can show you how to play! If you are already a gamer then don't show off your superior skills. Always give them a chance to beat you, and take time afterwards to think of how you could have done better. Sharing a computer game helps develop resilience and perseverance, as well as improving your reaction times. It will also allow you to show you aren't the best at everything. Whilst I dread Just Dance on the Wii, my daughter loves it. I have to admit that it's a great exercise – and a mild form of humiliation for me leaves her feeling great!
7. *Jigsaws*. A good way to develop spatial acuity, persistence and problem solving. It also allows time to chat at ease as you collaborate together.
8. *Pets*. The great thing about looking after pets is that it teaches the child to develop their caring and nurturing instincts; it also gives something worthwhile to share information about with friends.
9. *Television*. What does your child watch? Do you watch with them? What was the last news or documentary programme you viewed together? Do you turn off the TV and talk about what you have just seen? There are many programmes that can teach much about life and getting along with others.
10. *Internet*. There is something to be said for the serendipity that arises when you follow a trail on the Internet, but sometimes what you find is not reliable!* How can you teach your children to discriminate the good from the nonsense? You can stick to more reliable sites e.g. bbc.co.uk, nationalgeographic-kids.com, nasa.com, www.sciencenewsforkids.org (children's version of New Scientist).
11. *Culture*. Make museum and art gallery visits, not only to engage with what your child is learning but also to stimulate their enjoyment and your own.
12. *Singing*. Sing songs together on a car journey (this may only last until a certain age). It is fun and provides an excellent opportunity to examine the lyrics e.g. metaphor
13. *Road signs and billboards*. These are great for initiating discussions about advertising and geography.
14. *Number-plate countdown*. Make words which include the letters on the car in front. Pick three cars and use the numbers to create a sum of their choice. Better still, they think of it and you have to solve it.

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15. *Word games.* We're spoilt for choice here but a good example for starters is Alphabet. Give ten words starting with a given letter. This can be varied to go through the alphabet giving animals or countries or foods and so on. Or you could try word association.

These are all easy and, on the whole, free ways for engaging your child. They will also help prepare them for future learning.