

Home Support in Child Development

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It is the time of the year when, after a lot of hectic activity and high stress levels, parents of young children are done with the admission of their child in formal schools. It is time to take a break, relax and breathe a sigh of relief! Do that and enjoy it because you have your next task lined up – one that is infinitely more challenging and which requires consistent effort and energy!

After the initial settlement phase of the children in Kindergarten, the teachers will be ready to roll up their sleeves and get down to business. The focus will be on development of age-appropriate physical, intellectual, socio-emotional and life skills such as discipline-which is all about making choices, bonding, cooperation, communication, motor skills, decision-making, self-awareness and human values.

Sowing the seeds of these skills and then nurturing them carefully over the years will make your child a successful human being. To bring out the best in the child, therefore, teachers and parents need to work together as a team.

Parents need to keep in mind that **home support** in the following areas will go a long way in the child's development and provide him the most conducive environment to blossom.

- **Reward, Encouragement and Praise.** Reward for a desirable behaviour keeps the child **motivated**. Our children want to please us and inherently seek our approval. A reward need not be in the form of a material thing. A happy smile, a spontaneous hug, a sloppy kiss or a bit of cuddling and talking are much better as rewards. A child who is frequently encouraged learns to be unafraid of failure or obstacles. Encouragement builds **self-esteem**. The child learns to take decisions and have faith in his judgments. He eventually learns to be independent in thought and action. His **confidence** in himself as an individual increases. Praise, the third and equally important part of the trinity, helps **reinforce** positive behaviour. The child who is praised often will learn not to be unduly critical. Reward, which is given after a desirable action has been performed, should not be confused with bribe, which is given before a desirable action has been performed. Bribery is corrupting to the character and should not be promoted.
- **Give 'Do...' Commands.** Commands given to children need to be **simple, single and effectively communicated**. Parents and teachers must spend more of their time showing the children what is acceptable and desirable behaviour rather than telling them what is not. Instead of saying, "Do NOT", try to say, "Do...."
- **Importance of repetition and routine.** Consistency in a child's daily routine gives him a sense of order and organization. Some routines must be followed without compromise, while for others flexibility needs to be maintained. For example, rules regarding brushing, proper dressing, wishing guests, prayer or family time must be respected. Rigidity should be avoided as it breeds intolerance and autocratic behaviour in later life. Good habits and etiquette should be fostered as part and parcel of daily living. Rules are important as the child learns and understands the dynamics of family living and recognizes that he is an important member of the family with certain responsibilities to fulfill.
- **Free play and Structured play.** Free play fosters **creativity and imagination** in children, whereas structured play develops the ability to follow instruction. Free play has no pre-determined outcome and as such is not carefully planned. Romping in the park, shaping play dough, freehand painting and role play require the child to be imaginative and creative. Jigsaw puzzles, shape-sorters, tennis and cricket are structured activities with a pre-determined outcome. A balance between the two needs to be maintained.

The joys of successful parenting last a life-time and its results, much longer. Good parenting is not a tough job – the **basic premise to be a successful parent is that you must love your child enough to try**. With home and school support you can make your child a successful human being in all respects.