

Tips for Working with Your Child

There are many opportunities all around you for reinforcing academics as you go through your day. Make the most of those teachable moments that occur naturally. However, if you are working on homework or trying to teach a new skill or expand knowledge in a more formal way, then there are some strategies that may lead to greater success.

1. You must be ready to teach by having **materials ready to go** and yourself **relaxed**. If you are anxious about everything else you need to be doing, or getting done in a hurry to pick up a sibling, your child will pick up on your anxiety and the session may not go as well. Both of you may just become frustrated and then your child will not look forward to this time together.
2. **Believe that your child is capable of learning.** It may take *a lot of practice and repetition*. Be patient. Try different approaches to teach the same concept. Your child may be more engaged with one activity than with another. Your child will learn at his pace. This may take longer than you believe it should. That is OK.
3. **Be positive.** Celebrate every step of progress by giving verbal feedback, high fives, stickers, check marks, happy faces or anything else that encourages your child. Be sure you are giving him feedback in a way he appreciates. In other words, if you give him stickers and he doesn't want stickers, then that will not have the same effect as if you give him a high five which is what he really wants.
4. **Set a routine time and place for teaching.** Many children need the structure that this provides in their day. It is predictable and you have selected a time that will work within your schedule. It must fit your child's readiness to work also. If he has just returned from school he may need a few minutes of playtime. Or if he is playing, he may not want to stop so you will need a *transitional activity*. A transitional activity is anything that will draw him away from what he is presently doing. That may be singing a favorite song while picking up toys, helping fold laundry, coloring, reading a book, playing with legos, etc. Do not make this a highly preferred activity or he won't want to stop that either. Set a timer and let him know that when the timer goes off, then you will begin to work. (You may not want to refer to the activity as work, but rather math, money, reading, whatever you are going to do). Or you can say, "First let's sing and pick up your toys and then we will read. What would you like to sing?"
5. **Be flexible and creative.** You may have to get creative to draw him into the activity. So instead of sitting at the usual table, you engage him on the floor with blocks and sorting them into colors. That might be what you wanted to practice but today he is willing to participate on the floor, not at a table. You could also have him teach you or a sibling, have a favorite stuffed animal at the table learning also, or video him teaching. You can set a timer to try to be done when it goes off, or finish this by the time I count to 30, or let's see if we can be done before Dad gets home to engage him by making it a game.

6. Most children with Down syndrome are **visual learners**. Seeing what you want him to do or *modeling* for them makes more sense to him than listening to oral directions. Be sure the *visuals are uncluttered*. In other words, you don't want distractions from the task at hand. If you are teaching the word dog, and you show a picture of a dog in the park chasing a ball, then he may not even see the dog. He may be drawn to the ball. *Point or gesture to clarify directions. Use sign language to emphasis certain points or directions.*
7. **Attention span** is usually equal to their age. So a 5 year old will attend for 5 minutes and then you should change what you are asking them to do. Stop reading and ask questions about the book or look at the pictures to talk about the book. That is a different set of skills.
8. **Keep instructions brief and clear.** Tell or show him exactly what you want him to do.
9. **Allow extra processing time.** You may have to *wait 30 seconds* for an answer. Do not interrupt his processing. If you keep repeating every 10 seconds, "which one is it?" he will lose his train of thought and be back to square one. Wait 30 seconds before you give any prompts.
10. **Chunk instruction into shorter pieces.** If you want to do 6 problems today, only show him the first 2 or 3. This may make the work less threatening to the child. He will not be overwhelmed by the size of the expectation.
11. **Offer the child choices.** Which would you like to do first? Allowing him to pick gives him some control over the situation.
12. **Start with fewer items** if you are introducing something new to your child. Don't give him 6 new vocabulary words. Start with only two if he is struggling. You want him to be successful so limit choices so he is more likely to be correct. Depending on the child, you could give just one choice so he will be successful.
13. **Change the order of presentation and the actual materials and styles.** If you always teach with words or numbers in the same order he will discover that if he always picks from this spot first and then that spot he will be correct. By changing the order you know he actually knows the word or number. Changing the look of it by changing the font or size allows you to know he can generalize the knowledge. Do not do this until he has mastered the word or number as presented in just one font.
14. **Model** correct responses. Avoid saying, "that is wrong." Instead show him the correct answer. You can say, "That was a great try. I think it might be ...and show him the answer" and explain why.
15. **Responses can be verbal, point to, hand me, show me, or select the correct sticker with the answer on it to show knowledge.** Since expressive language sometimes is more difficult than receptive language this will give him a way to show knowledge without having to say the answer.
16. **Show** your child it is **OK to fail**. Purposely make a mistake. Then talk aloud the process of recognizing a mistake, saying that is OK, and now how can I correct my mistake.

- 17. Know when to stop.** If he is tired, hungry, or sick and refuses to work then you need to postpone the session until you have taken care of those needs. If he just needs a snack, then you might be able to work as he eats. If you have started a session and he becomes uncooperative then you might say, one more and then we are done. Keep it short so you are ending the session on your terms. If you haven't started a session then you can postpone until later in the day, or offer the choice, "Would you like to do this now or after Sesame Street?"
- 18. Reinforcing learning in everyday settings** shows why something is important. I need to recognize a 1 so I know how much money to give the clerk. I need to read so I can find a hamburger.
- 19. Frequent practice is necessary to retain information.**
- 20. Use the language the school is using.** If you say take away and the school is saying subtract, the child will not know this is the same operation and will not be able to show the knowledge that he has.
- 21. Help your child feel successful.** He will enjoy this time more and work harder if he feels successful.
- 22. Don't quit** just because you miss a time or two. Life happens. Try to make a realistic schedule so you will be able to work consistently. However, don't stop if you miss more than you would like. Adjust your schedule and keep working. It doesn't have to be long. Even 10 minutes can make a huge difference.
- 23. Have fun! Make this an enjoyable time for you and your child.**