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SPRING 2023

Homeschooling *and beyond*

EXAM TIME

The do's and don'ts of parenting during exam time

Crucial skills for success

Turn down the heat

How to stop being an angry parent

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fun spring activities

OVERCOMING OBSTACLES

Dyscalculia: More than a maths struggle

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Ask Dalena



Dalena van der Westhuizen will answer any questions or concerns you may have about learning, concentration, memory and cognitive development – and, of course, the frustrations arising from these

Should parents play a role in helping their children choose subjects? – *Gail Brennan*

Hi Gail,

While children are on many different levels of independency, most children are, in my opinion and experience, not yet independent and experienced enough to make subject choices completely on their own.

Lack of knowledge about themselves and their future career preferences, the demands of industry-specific tertiary study requirements and the tendency to sometimes choose with their heart (only subjects I like or find easy) instead of their head

(do these subjects also support what I want to study/do one day and allow me options?), are all strong indicators that in most instances, parents should definitely play a guiding/facilitating role in this process.

My 12-year-old daughter struggles with anxiety when it comes to schoolwork. What are some of the risk factors/triggers for anxiety and how can I help her? – Sandy Thomas

Hi Sandy,

Schoolwork-specific anxiety is usually caused by one or a combination of the following:

- Unrealistic expectations (self and/or parents)
- Comparison with high-performing siblings (self and/or parents)
- Weak cognitive skills (underlying brain skills for learning; effort doesn't show in the output)



- Peer pressure
- Low self-esteem
- Previous bad academic experiences

The best way to help your daughter would be to work through this list to eliminate or pinpoint the cause(s) of her schoolwork anxiety. Explain this to her in an age-appropriate way and get her involved in the process as much as possible. In my experience, for the majority



of children with schoolwork-specific anxiety, a weak cognitive skill(s) is the major cause of the anxiety. A cognitive assessment would thus be a strong recommendation as a first step towards helping your daughter.

How much schoolwork should young kids be doing every day? – Annemie Grobler

Hi Annemie,

There’s an ongoing debate and conflicting information about this in educational circles. In my opinion, reframing the focus of schoolwork instead of the time spent on it daily, might yield an appropriate guideline for your child/children.

An approach growing in popularity is that perhaps the amount of time a child spends on doing schoolwork every day is actually not that important. Instead, the focus should be on “what do I need to do?” or “what do I want to achieve today?”

For students to achieve what they should be doing, they need to have a plan and know what they need to get done each day – this could be a to-do-list, task list or a set of outcomes they would like to complete. In other words, a student (and parents) need to focus on the quality of the schoolwork done (quality output) and not the quantity (time spent doing it).


My child insists on doing schoolwork in the living room or kitchen where we all are. Is this a bad idea? – Sarah Schlieben

Hi Sarah,

According to most studies on learning and learning spaces, silence really is golden when tackling the most difficult tasks. When learning or analysing highly complicated material, our brains process information significantly more quickly without ambient noise.

Some studies have shown that students who studied on their own tended to get better grades than those who studied in a busy environment (with multiple people). However, for some students, without other people around to hold them accountable, they may procrastinate, lack motivation and easily get sidetracked by other things.

Most children aren't good at ignoring distractions, paying attention and keeping their focus



About Dalena

Dalena van der Westhuizen is the co-founder and MD of BrainAbility, a cognitive development specialist, a master brain coach and an internationally certified cognitive coach. She translates the latest international cognitive research and best practice into strategies that can be applied by parents and educators alike.

A mom and a self-confessed chocoholic, Dalena enjoys working with both kids and adults to improve the way their brains process information for better learning, reading and focusing.

Send your questions for Dalena to: adri@isikhova.co.za.

in a busy environment. My advice would therefore be to find the golden middle-ground here.

