



Institute of
Child Psychology

Navigating School at Home:

A Guide for Parents in a Time of Global Crisis

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Defining our Roles as Parents and Teachers in the Lives of Students

Questions to ask ourselves:

→ What is my philosophy about the purpose of education?

→ How does my philosophy align with what I see happening in practice?

“Teachers can teach, coaches can coach, guidance counselors can outline graduation requirements, but there’s one thing ONLY parents can do:

Love their kids unconditionally and provide them with a safe base at home.”

(-William Stixrud and Ned Johnson, “The Self-Driven Child”)

What is the Purpose of School?

“In an educational system in which productivity is measured by hours logged per task, number of worksheets completed and scores on standardized tests, it doesn’t make a whole lot of sense to prompt kids to ask more questions unless the questions are about what’s going to be on the test. In many classrooms, stopping to encourage and mull over questions that aren’t procedural or directly related to the material at hand is viewed as wasting time. It’s no big surprise then that most kids come to school bursting with questions, but exit, a dozen or so years later, asking very few. Curiosity declines from one grade to the next, and the reason isn’t that kids’ thirst for knowledge has been satiated and they now know everything they want or need to know.... So instead of learning how to learn, many kids are learning how to be good at going to school. The straight-A student is, in virtually every educational setting, the one who has figured out what the teacher wants and how to deliver it.”

(-Amanda Lang, “The Power of Why”)

What is MY Belief about the Purpose of School?

How Does it Compare to What I See Playing Out in my Child’s Education?

The “Learning Brain” and its Function in a Time of Stress/Crisis

Our brains come wired from infancy to protect us in highly stressful or dangerous situations.

The limbic brain, despite having limited scope of reactionary options (generally known as the “fight, flight or freeze” responses), is highly effective in employing these mechanisms.

Our prefrontal cortex, the “front brain” (or the “higher thinking” brain) is responsible for much of our learning. It is the center of judgement, reasoning, processing and decision-making.

When we are highly stressed or exposed to trauma/triggers, our sympathetic nervous system shuts down access to our “front brain” and we become solely reliant on the limited responses of the limbic brain.

This is what Dr. Dan Siegel has termed the “lid flip” and unfortunately it can be triggered by situations of stress, fear, pressure, overwhelm, etc.

GIVE IT SOME THOUGHT ...

Have you seen these “lid flipping” behaviors in your own kids/students over the last several weeks? What are some potential “lid flipping” triggers for students right now?

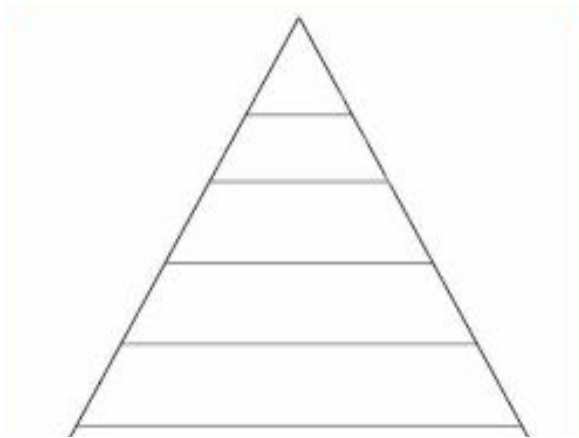
Our children often respond to stress by needing more time with us, and we often respond to stress by needing time away from them.

That makes it really hard right now, when we’re all stressed at the same time.

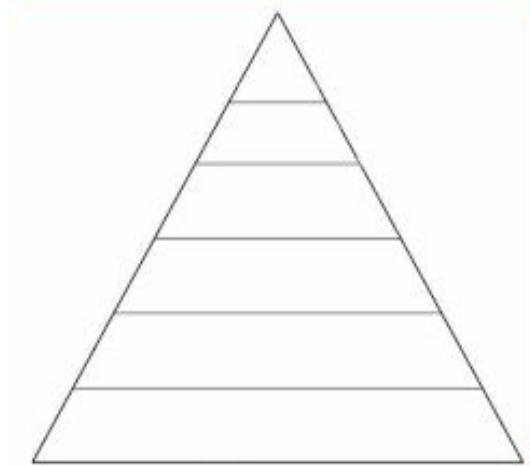
(-Flourishing Homes and Families Facebook page)

Maslow Before Bloom

Maslow's Hierarchy



Bloom's Taxonomy



Some Things to Consider:

What happens if we skip the "basic" needs and try to hotwire our way to the top?

How can we support and help?

Undesirable Behavior (Where does it come from?)

“Challenging behavior occurs when the demands and expectations being placed upon a child outstrip the skills he has to respond adaptively.”

-Dr. Ross Greene

When we see “misbehavior” or undesirable behavior, there is always a deeper root cause. Some causes suggested by Dr. Ross Greene’s work are:

- Unmet needs
- Lagging skills
- Expectations that outweigh skills
- Lack of problem solving skills

How do highly stressful situations affect our bodies, brains and ability to learn?

“Now more than ever, kids don’t need to be doing fake work.

They don’t need to be doing worksheets.

Give them problems to solve. Ask what they’re interested in. There’s so much data coming out right now for them to be working with. There’s so many stories coming out ... Give them tools to think about ‘How am I affecting the world around me?’”

-Alex Venet

Schooling in a Time of Trauma: Emotional Stability and Support

“One of the very best scientific predictors for how any child turns out—in terms of happiness, academic success, leadership skills, and meaningful relationships—is whether at least one adult in their life has consistently shown up for them.”

*-Dr. Dan Siegel and Dr. Tina Payne Bryson,
The Power of Showing Up*

The 4 S’s of Healthy Attachment and Emotional Stability (-Dr. Siegel, Dr. Bryson)

- Safe

- Seen

- Soothed

- Secure

The Power of Rest

When we operate at a pace that is overwhelming or put unbearable levels of pressure on our kids, we increase the number of stress responses and adverse experiences they have.

Putting stability before schoolwork is essential to creating more meaningful learning experiences.

“Children learn who they are and what they really enjoy if they are allowed to sit with themselves. Inundated with activity and subjected to lesson upon lesson, how can they hope to recognize their authentic voice amid the din of all this “doing”?

-Shefali Tsabary, *The Conscious Parent*

Trust and Teachability: The Power of Relationship and Mindset

According to Dr. Gordon Neufeld, a “teachable” spirit consists of:

- Natural curiosity

- An integrative mind

- Ability to benefit from correction

- Relationship with the teacher

Strengthening the Student-Teacher Relationship

Student comfort level with the teacher and their schoolwork is so important, and as a parent, (especially now that they are at home with us) we can do a lot to help with this, even with limited time and energy. Keeping a positive attitude, encouraging and providing emotional comfort and security can help to develop this comfort level.

Positive Factors found to affect student comfort level with the teacher:

- *Self-confidence*
- *Trust*
- *Positive feelings for the teacher*
- *Supportive classroom and school communities*

“Relationships are key to resilience, so anything that teachers can do to help foster relationships should be a priority right now.”

-Kara Newhouse

How to foster strong relationships with the teacher:

- *Facilitate individual and personal correspondence between your child and their teacher*
- *Open clear lines of communication*
- *Don't make assumptions ... When in doubt, ask!*

Dr. Alex Russell's Model for Approaching Communication with Teachers:

★ Entrust

★ Inform

★ Empower

*“The more parents take on these concerns,
the more their children are oblivious to them”
-Alex Russell*

What is the “Worry Ball”?

How do we toss the worry ball back to our kids?

- Provide some freedom/autonomy
- Empower and believe in them
- Allow for “painful, non-catastrophic failures”

The Accountability Factor

"Sometimes we rescue because it's easier than dealing with the awkwardness and discomfort of other people's unsolved problems.

We haven't learned to say, "It's too bad you're having that problem. What do you need from me?" We've learned to say, "Here. Let me do that for you."

-Melody Beattie

Something to Consider: When do kids do well or succeed?

"Kids do well if they can - if your kid could do well, he would do well, because doing well is preferable"

-Dr. Ross Greene,
Raising Human Beings

Common Barriers to Student Motivation and Success:

- Unmet needs (physical, emotional, psychological, social)
- Lagging skills (in problem recognition/solving, transitioning, organization, writing, comprehension, social interactions, etc)
- Coping skills for overwhelming or confusing emotions
- Awareness of or ability to meet expectations

We want kids to get busy without an adult's having to stand next to them, carrots and sticks at the ready; we want them to act responsibly even when no one is watching."

-Alfie Kohn

INVESTIGATING MOTIVATION

The Motivation Formula (-Daniel Pink, *Drive*)

- Purpose

- Mastery

- Autonomy

Requirements for Active Participation in our Lives (-Stixrud and Johson, *The Self-Driven Child*)

- Sense of Competence

- Sense of Relatedness

- Sense of Autonomy

“We humans - parents included - tend to become the most anxious when we feel powerless: powerless to achieve certain desired outcomes, powerless to effect desired changes. Feeling powerless often causes us to apply more power. Yet often the more power we apply, the more powerless we feel.”

-Dr. Ross Greene, *Raising Human Beings*

Something to Consider: Parent Involvement/Investment in Academic Success

- ★ We gain far more influence through relationship, trust and connection than we ever could with power and control measures.

“School is the most common area for parental over-involvement especially among the educated, high-achieving set. And it doesn’t help that schools increasingly send the message that parents are responsible for their children’s academic success.

As parents, our prime objective should be to help our children develop their own, positive relationship with academic achievement. “

-Dr. Alex Russell, *Drop the Worry Ball*

What Happens When Kids Lack Autonomy or Agency over their Learning?

- Disengagement
- Avoidance
- Reluctance
- Defiance
- Appeasement

Granting Our Kids More Autonomy is Easier if we Remember:

- ★ Our kids WANT their lives to work out
- ★ They are usually far more competent than we give them credit for
- ★ There isn’t one narrow path to success
- ★ “Success” for our kids doesn’t always look like we expect

Parent as Consultant

Instead of acting as an enforcer or manager regarding our kids' academic affairs, adopting the role of "consultant" allows us to be present and offer support without robbing our kids of their autonomy and empowerment.

One of the best things parents can do in the midst of this global crisis, is to become for their children an available, non-anxious, non-threatening presence.

When we remove the pressure from our kids, and allow them more freedom and autonomy, it may get "worse before it gets better". We may see a decline initially in productivity or engagement, as students begin to develop their own relationship to the material and the process. Stay the course!

Cultivating Curiosity: The Wonder Effect

The false dichotomy:

If we choose or prioritize an analytical, practical or more scientific/mathematic ideology, we cannot hold space for a more creative, artistic, philosophical worldview.

If we choose "A" we forego "B".

The act of holding the false dichotomy, leaves kids feeling unfulfilled, unrealistic and hopeless. The truth is there is space and opportunity for both.

FLOW: "the creative moment when a person is completely involved in an activity for its own sake" (-Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi)

Moving from a Fixed Mindset to a Growth Mindset

“What on earth would make someone a non-learner?”

Everyone is born with an intense drive to learn. Infants stretch their skills daily. Not just ordinary skills, but the most difficult tasks of a lifetime, like learning to walk and talk. They never decide it’s too hard or not worth the effort

They become afraid of not being smart.

I have studied thousands of people from preschoolers on, and it’s breathtaking how many reject an opportunity to learn.”

(-Carol Dweck, Mindset: The New Psychology of Success)

Acknowledging our Parental Fears

Something to Consider: What am I most afraid of?

- *I’m afraid they will get behind in their studies...*
- *I’m afraid that I will set a bad example by not “enforcing” school work as top priority ...*
 - *I’m afraid that they will not meet teacher expectations ...*
 - *I’m afraid their grades will drop....*

*“Try not to resist the changes that come your way.
Instead let life live through you.*

And do not worry that your life is turning upside down. How do you know that the side you are used to is better than the one to come?”

-Rumi

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