

## Parenting in Focus: Don't be too hard on yourself

*(This article appeared in the Sequim Gazette on September 23, 2020.)*

Remember how you talk with your children when they get discouraged about things they're trying to learn. Think about ways you try to keep up their spirits and their efforts to accomplish what they are trying to do — or trying to learn how to do.

Think about times when they have said they are going to quit trying and you have stepped in to be the cheerleader when they have been discouraged.

In other words, think of the times you have encouraged them to keep trying and told them it would get better with time.

That is what is happening right now: many of the parents who are trying to help their children learn new material for school are feeling overwhelmed and discouraged. They remember how difficult it was at the end of last year. They remember feeling their children were not learning as much as they usually learned in school.

It can be discouraging, especially when most parents have not learned how to be teachers.

### Take initiative

Now it is time for you to take the lessons you have been trying to teach your child about becoming discouraged and remember them for yourself. You may not be the best teacher your child has ever had, but that doesn't mean you can't help your child learn.

Here are some ways you can help:

- Begin by reading the material your child's teacher sends home. The more you understand what is expected, the better you can help your child.
- Ask your child to make it clear to you what each teacher expects. Even when your child doesn't know how to do some part of an assignment, he probably can tell you what the teacher is asking.
- It is fine to ask your child's teacher for help. First, see if you can do what is being asked. If you can't, ask for the help you need. Teachers want you to succeed.
- Remember that there are lessons to be learned beyond the ones the school is sending home. Those lessons include how to play outside, how to wash his hands thoroughly and about how to wear a mask regularly.
- Lessons about establishing a regular routine are important for him to learn. Let him see how helpful they can be. He will need your help on this one, so let him see ways in which you are organized.
- Help him learn to organize his material in a special learning place.
- This is a time to talk about health. He needs to learn that he can make a difference in his own health by how he treats himself and how he protects himself.
- Help him understand that life changes and he has to change with it.

- Talk with him about the changes he is experiencing. Let him talk about changes such as seeing less of his friends.

Let him have a chance to talk about the difficulties and problems with you. This may be the most important positive change that comes out of this pandemic. Your child might learn to talk more freely with you especially if you are responsive and understanding. Let him know how important he is to you and that you want to help him in whatever way possible.

End your talks with hugs. Be sure he knows how important he is to you.

Cynthia Martin is the founder of the First Teacher program and former executive director of Parenting Matters Foundation.