

Scaffolding children's learning

"This is just too hard. I can't do it!" nine-year old Emmet says as he tears the page from his notebook and scrunches it up in frustration. "Mum, can you help?"

As parents and carers, it is hard to see children struggle with their learning, especially when they are frustrated or upset. Sometimes, and often before you know it, you become caught up in trying to help them and you wind up doing their schoolwork for them. How do you find the right balance between telling them, "You just have to do it!" and giving them all the answers? And what if you don't even have the answers?

Helping children with schoolwork (eg homework assignments or projects) is sometimes a challenge for families as well as for children. However, it can also be an opportunity for parents and carers to get to know what children are learning at school and to support their learning. Children learn better when they have opportunities to share and practise at home what they are learning at school.

It is not necessary for parents or carers to have all the answers when children have difficulties with their schoolwork. If adults simply provide children with the answers, children miss out on the chance to learn and think for themselves. Parents and carers can help children by guiding their learning and thinking and supporting them to try for themselves.

Helping to build children's learning

In just the same way that scaffolding provides temporary support to a building, parents and carers can also 'scaffold' children's learning. For some things, children may need lots of support. This is especially the case when they are learning new things.

As children's abilities develop, they gradually become more independent in their learning and parents and carers can start to reduce their 'scaffolding'.

Helping children think through tasks supports their learning.
Teaching them skills for thinking helps children learn to think for themselves.

How parents and carers can help

Parents and carers scaffold children's learning by leading and coaching them towards coming up with their own answers. This shows children how to learn, and makes it more likely that they will succeed. The next time your child asks for help, you might try some of the following ways to scaffold thinking and learning.

Prompt children to extend their thinking

- Ask them to think about something relevant: "Why do you think...?"
- Ask them to think through alternatives: "That would be one way, what's another way we could try?"
- Provide support for thinking through difficult tasks: "Let's have a think about this together."

Ask them to explain the steps

- Help children to plan their approach: "What is it that we need to do?"
- Ask them to review their steps so far: "Tell me more about what you have already tried?"

Demonstrate

- Show an example and talk it through: "First, I will..., and then I will..., and then I can..."

Break it into steps

- Help children who are stuck by breaking the task into smaller steps.
- It's a good idea to ensure the first step involves something that children can already do. This way they will experience success early which helps their confidence.
- Be sure to provide praise for completing each step as they work through a task.
- Guide children step-by-step to build their skills so they can eventually complete the whole task on their own.

Tips for scaffolding children's learning

- Provide a challenge that is *just* beyond what your child can already do easily by him or herself.
- Give prompts.
- Ask questions.
- Model the steps involved.
- Praise your child for attempting the task, not just for succeeding.
- Watch to see if your child is struggling or becoming frustrated, as these may be signs that the task is too hard.

This resource is part of a range of KidsMatter Primary information sheets for families and school staff. View them all online at www.kidsmatter.edu.au



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