

Thinking and learning: Suggestions for families

Parents, carers and school staff can promote children’s cognitive development by ‘scaffolding’ children’s thinking. Scaffolding involves supporting children as they attempt tasks that stretch their abilities just beyond what they can already do by themselves. Children can generally do more difficult things *with* an adult than they can do on their own.

It is important that the tasks you give children are challenging enough to engage them but not so difficult that they can’t succeed without your help. Scaffolding can involve explaining the goal of the task to the child, demonstrating how the task should be done and helping the child to complete the most difficult parts. This type of support from a more capable person helps children to think things through so that they learn more effectively.

In the following example, the father of a six-year old boy uses scaffolding to help him complete more of a jigsaw puzzle than he would be able to complete on his own.

What the parent or carer says	How it helps	What the child learns
“What we need to do here Jacques, is put all of these pieces together to make the picture on this box.”	Explains the goal of the task	Purposeful thinking
“Let’s start with the pieces for the corners and the edges. Can you see any pieces with the yellow sun on them?”	Demonstrates how the task should be done	Attention and planning
“Well done. Now, can you see any of these pieces that might fit together?”	Helps the child to complete the most difficult parts	Recognising patterns and organising
“That’s right. Now you have a go yourself.”	Supports child to try it independently	Problem-solving incorporating the steps above

How parents and carers can help

Break difficult tasks into smaller steps

If it seems that your child is struggling and becoming frustrated, the task may be set too far above his or her ability. Some signs that might mean a task really is too hard are when a child strongly reacts when he can't complete the task (eg cries or becomes angry), or when he or she takes an unusually long time to finish one part of a task. If this happens, try breaking the task down into smaller steps that are more manageable. Showing children how to do the first part of the task, then guiding them to think through and attempt the next part, helps them learn and supports their confidence.

Encourage persistence

When a child says he or she can't do something that you know he or she can do, try not to get caught up in the attempts to avoid doing the task. Instead, try and motivate the child by making the task fun and interesting. You might set a challenge to help make learning fun, for example: "I wonder how many spelling words you can get through in one minute?" Reminding children of positive goals can also help them to keep trying, for instance: "Keep practising a few more times. Just think how proud you will feel when you play really well at your performance in a couple of weeks."

Watch for signs of frustration

If you notice your child becoming frustrated by a task, try and step in before he or she gives up. It can be a good idea to encourage your child to take short break, or to try something else for a while. Taking a break and coming back refreshed can often make tasks seem easier.

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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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