

EXPERT SPEAK

How to turn the pandemic into a learning opportunity for your child

BY SONALI KHAN

THE POWER OF PLAY

The online class has only been on for 10 minutes but Sameera's 6-year-old daughter is already yawning. Her face tilts away from the teacher on her computer screen to the carefree clouds skimming a blue sky beyond the window. Look, ma, it's shaped like a cat! Sameera tries to pull her daughter's attention back, her frown reflecting the worries of a million mums and dads. Parents,

take heart. It is true that the pandemic has upended traditional academic routines. But this doesn't mean that learning will stop or that your child can't develop the skills necessary to succeed at school. Take some time out to evaluate your goals. Are you trying to replicate school at home or to cultivate an environment in which your child is naturally learning through the day? With a shift in per-



spective, you might find yourself being grateful for the unexpected opportunities that the pandemic has brought you.



Play isn't just for the little ones. It helps older children too. For example, building and acting out a story with every day props and then writing a play or adding grocery bills are engaging, low-stress ways to build creative writing and numerical skills. Similarly, looking at pictures and talking about what's happening in the world and what other children may be experiencing in different countries can build empathy and a sense of connectedness even when you are isolated at home. Play is also a good way to inculcate life skills and as children learn to pitch in at home.

SKILLS FOR SCHOOL

In the early years, all schools look at preparing your child for formal learning by developing fine and gross motor skills, language, numeracy and critical thinking. With a bit of planning and a lot of fun and laughter, these skills are easily accelerated at home by the person best-attuned to the mental and emotional needs of your child: you.

Did you know, for example, that the best way to advance your child's language skills is to talk to her? Ask her about what she is

playing and guide her to think deeper. For example, what are all the things she would need to put on a doll's dinner plate? Can these be grouped into types of food? Or what is the sequence in which she is cooking her pretend meal. Can she teach you what goes first and what to add second? What if more people arrive to share the meal? In just a few moments of play, you've enriched language, math and problem-solving skills, all while strengthening the bond with your child.



CLASSROOM IN THE KITCHEN

Put on your thinking hat and look around. Literally everything you see is a portal for play-based learning. Separating dal from rice helps little fingers prepare to hold a pencil firmly soon. Tumbling and rolling while making the bed releases pent-up energy, gives larger muscles a workout and builds co-ordination. Counting spoons and bowls or folding laundry kickstarts mathematical thinking. And an empty cardboard box is the perfect tool for a burst of unbridled creativity while you get your emails and other tasks out of the way.

THE BEST FOUNDATION IS A HAPPY CHILD

It is easy to forget that children experience stress too. Children are quick at absorbing stress around them and playing it back in ways that appears like they are acting up. To be able to help your child in naming big feelings and make sense of them is to equip him with the ability to hold himself in the face of uncertainty. In fact, edu-

cators acknowledge that emotional intelligence is the biggest indicator of success in life. In the hurly-burly of a regular school day, these softer skills are sometimes forgotten. The pandemic has offered parents a rare window to give time and honour the feelings of their children. Even in the

face of the adversity that so many of us are currently experiencing, a moment taken to remind a child that her feelings are seen and heard and that her view of the world is just as important as any one else's, can help her learn the socio-emotional skills needed to navigate both school and life. (The writer is MD, Sesame Workshop, India)



Signs to know if your child has dyslexia

Dyslexia is a learning disability that affects a child's oral and written language. It makes it difficult for kids to grasp some words and numbers and it can happen to anyone; the disability becomes challenging when kids get it during their learning and growing age. However, dyslexia is not a disease and is nothing to be ashamed of. It's just a disability and does not impact a child's intelligence, learning abilities and emotional intelligence. In fact, you will be surprised to know that kids with dyslexia have proven to be academically strong and intelligent as compared to others. But to recognise it in time gives you the power to improvise on certain difficulties and make learning easier for the child.



Difficulty in reading

Most kids suffering from dyslexia have reading difficulties. They find it hard to comprehend language, letters, alphabets and

words. They often read slowly and mispronounce letters as compared to other kids. They might also feel shy to read in front of others.

Difficulty with numbers

Dyslexic kids find mathematics challenging. It's very difficult for them to do addition, subtraction and other big calculations. Remembering days, colours and months can also be difficult.

Bad handwriting

Dyslexic kids often have difficulty in their writing style. Pay attention to the way they hold the pen or pencil to write on the paper. They even might find it diffi-

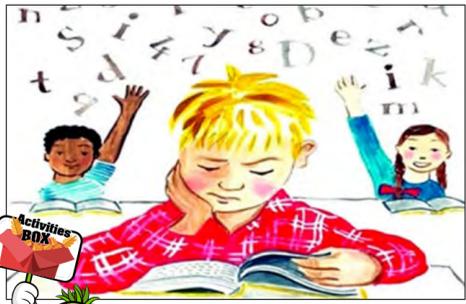
cult to understand grammar.

Don't follow instructions

These kids don't have the ability to multitask or follow a series of instructions at once. This is because their comprehension skills are slow, it takes them time to understand and implement instructions.

Development of speech problem

A dyslexic child might take time to learn how to talk. Their learning and speech process is slow as it's very difficult to grasp a new vocabulary, language and grammar.



Have you read this winner?



The following books won big at the Costa Awards

Voyage of the Sparrowhawk
by Natasha Farrant
CHILDREN'S BOOK AWARD
Set right after World War I, this adventure book follows two orphans as they sail the Channel in an attempt to find some missing loved ones and maybe even a home.

'Love After Love'
by Ingrid Persaud
WON THE FIRST NOVEL AWARD
The book is about an unconventional family, consisting of a woman, her son Solo and their lodger. One night a revelation proves too much...

'The Mermaid of Black Conch'
by Monique Roffey
WINNER OF THE NOVEL AWARD
This is set in a Caribbean village on the island of Black Conch in 1976 and based on a romance between a native and a mermaid.

'The Louder I Will Sing'
by Lee Lawrence
WINNER OF THE BIOGRAPHY AWARD
This is based on the author's experience of being Black in Britain. The author's mother was wrongly shot by the police while their house was being raided. Read to know more.

Costa Book Awards
The UK-based award celebrates British and Irish authors across five categories: First Novel, Novel, Biography, Poetry and Children's Book. For each category, there are 3 judges who select a shortlist of 4 books and choose the winning work. Each category winner receives £5,000 and the overall winner receives a further £30,000.

'The Historians'
Eavan Boland
POETRY AWARD
This is the last collection of poems before the author passed away in April 2020. The judges said the book contains, "some of the finest lines of poetry written this century". Don't miss this one.

QUIZ TIME (MIXED BAG)

- Q.1) Sri Lanka has launched its first satellite. What is the name of the satellite?
A. Raavana 1 B. Colombo X
C. Kataragama D. Vibhishana
- Q.2) When is World Heritage Day observed every year?
A. April 17 B. April 18

- C. April 19 D. April 20
- Q.3) A raging fire tore through Notre-Dame Cathedral, a 850-year-old Gothic building. The cathedral is located in which country?
A. France B. Italy
C. Belgium D. Hungary
- Q.4) What did Google chief Sundar Pichai study at IIT

- Kharagpur?
A. Mechanical Engineering
B. Software Engineering
C. Chemical Engineering
D. Metallurgical Engineering
- ANSWERS**
1. (A) Raavana 1 2. (B) April 18 3. (A) France 4. (D) Metallurgical Engineering

KNOWLEDGE BANK

COMBINATORICS ACADEMICS

This is a branch of mathematics dealing with combinations of objects belonging to a finite set in accordance with certain constraints such as those of graph theory. It deals with the study of countable discrete structures. Combinatorial structures arise in many areas of pure mathematics in algebra, probability, theory, topology and geometry.

