



10 TOP TIPS FOR HOME EDUCATORS



Introduction

Every child is different, so please forgive me if some or all of the approaches I've outlined below just wouldn't work for your child. You know your child better than anyone, so feel absolutely free to amend or adjust or even ignore my advice completely. I was a teacher for more than 30 years and I've been a parent for almost 25 years. If I had to choose which role was harder, parent or teacher, there would be no contest. Parenting would win every time. However, being a parent and a teacher at the same time is off the difficulty scale!

You will have been home educating for some time now and may have had to adjust your approach already. You may already be doing lots of the things included in this list; if you are and they are working, that's great. If you feel you need to change tack a little, some of the ideas here may be useful.

My main objective here is to suggest some ground rules and give some tips that will, first and foremost, maintain and hopefully enhance the wonderful relationship between parent and child. If this works, the rest will look after itself.

1 Work together to create an appropriate space

It is important to create a dedicated work area where your child can concentrate. If possible, this should be in a room where there are few distractions. Even if space is limited, try to make the area as organised and clutter-free as possible. Try to ensure too that any necessary equipment is close at hand. We all know the very skilful diversionary tactics that our children employ - clutter, electronic devices and lack of equipment supply great reasons to interrupt the work flow.

2 Work together to create a daily timetable

Draw up a timetable for daily activities and keep to the timetable from Monday to Friday. Start at the same time every day (9 am if possible) and include regular breaks. Agree the timetable together with your child. The working day should be much shorter as it isn't realistic (or advisable) to try to replicate a school day.

An example timetable has been included below but this can be adjusted depending on the age of your child and the time available. Younger children may benefit from shorter work sessions whilst older children may be able to concentrate for longer periods.

Home circumstances may dictate that it isn't possible to spend this amount of time on school work. Session time can be reduced, but a balance of work and breaks is important. Once the day's work is done, plan activities for the afternoon. These can be used as rewards and should really depend on your child's preference, interests or hobbies.

2 Work together to create a daily timetable (continued)

Afternoon activities might include other curriculum subjects such as science, history or geography. They could be made into fun activities with a quiz or a video clip. Practical activities, such as cooking, DIY or gardening may be possible, or your child may really enjoy art and craft activities. Some physical activity is a must, even if it's as simple as star jumps or running on the spot.

Suggested example daily timetable

(The timetable below would be suitable for most children. It may be appropriate to lengthen or shorten the sessions according to your child's needs.)

9.00 – 10.00 am	Maths (a balance of arithmetic and problem solving with times tables practice)
10.00 – 10.15 am	Break
10.15 – 11.15 am	English (a balance of reading comprehension and grammar & punctuation with some writing opportunities)
11.15 – 11.30 am	Break
11.30 – 12.00 pm	Reading together/Story

(The morning session will be followed by afternoon activities.)

3 Try to stay positive at all times

Revisit the ground rules before starting work every day and remember the 5:1 praise to criticism rule. Children (and adults) respond much better to praise than criticism and a positive, affirmative approach will produce an atmosphere conducive to learning. If you also have to work too, explain this to your child and give them the responsibility to facilitate this. Thank them sincerely when it happens.

4 Stop if it gets difficult

Inevitably, there will be times when tiredness or frustration will have an effect on either you or your child, or both. The best approach here is to stop. Take a break, play a game or do a different activity. When you are both ready, continue with the learning but try a different approach. If this doesn't work, move on. It is more important to maintain positivity than to labour fruitlessly over one aspect of the learning.



5 Take care with rewards

It is very tempting to try to motivate your child by offering rewards. These may take the form of ticks, stickers or points on a chart which may then be exchangeable for other rewards. These may work for a while but the effectiveness of this kind of reward system is often short-lived. The simplest and best reward is your praise linked with a shared activity that you and your child can both enjoy when the work is complete.

6 Slow your child down

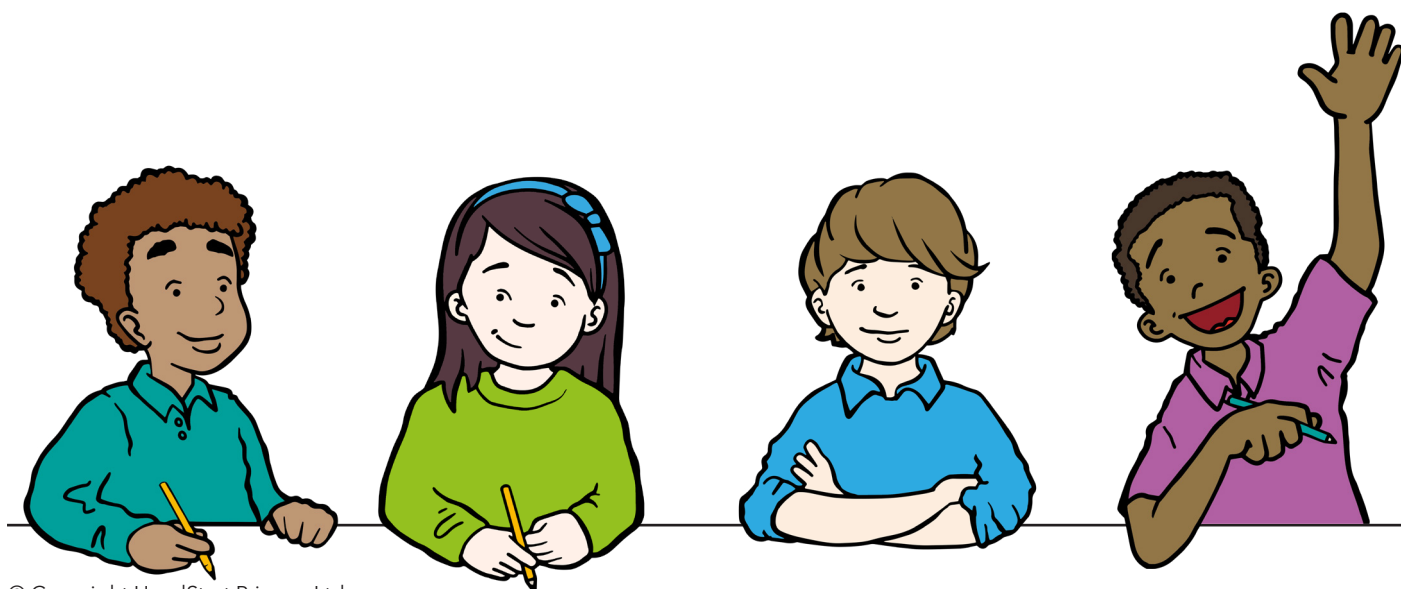
Many children's first instinct when given work to do is to finish as quickly as possible. Explain to them that the effort and care put into the work is much more important than the speed of completion.

7 Don't overteach

It's easy to fall into the trap of trying to explain things to children in detail. This can often hinder rather than help. Let your child be your guide when considering how much direction to give. Keep explanations as brief as possible and break up the learning into small chunks. Reassure your child that making mistakes is an excellent way to learn.

8 Use mistakes as a learning tool

Always praise effort rather than work without errors. Some children find it difficult to accept that they will make mistakes. Explain to your child that, even when trying their best, they will still make mistakes. If they are making no mistakes, it is likely that the work isn't presenting enough of a challenge. Try to identify any common errors that your child is making and discuss the reason for this. Once you understand the way they are thinking, the misconception or misunderstanding will be much easier to address.



9

Set achievable expectations

This applies to both you and your child. Nothing breeds success like success, so make sure any targets that you set are achievable. If targets are constantly missed, it's very demotivating. Go easy on yourself too. Things will go wrong. The best teachers realise that things don't always go to plan. They reflect on what was good and what wasn't good.

Make notes during the day of successes and failures and spend some time reflecting at the end of the day. Use this reflection to learn. Ask your child to do the same and agree to move forward with this learning.

10

Have your end goal in mind

Think about what you want to achieve in the long term. Don't focus too much on the learning as this will happen naturally if everything else works. Time spent with your children is more valuable than anything I can think of. Plan for it to be a valuable experience, to be remembered for all the right reasons.

I sincerely hope you find some of this guide helpful. I realise that teaching of any kind can be a daunting task, regardless of experience. However, above all else, I think it's important to try and enjoy this time with your child/children, without putting too much pressure on them or on yourself!

Take care.

Best wishes,

Peter Sumner
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