



# HEARTS & MINDS

From TDSB Psychological Services to Your Family



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## AT THE TDSB, IT'S ALL ABOUT TEAMWORK!



Professional Support Services (PSS) team members work closely together to support students, families, and school staff! Schools meet on a regular basis with members of their School Support Team (SST).

The SST includes Psychology Staff, Speech Language Pathologists, Social Workers, and may include Occupational or Physical Therapists and CYC/CYWs (Child and Youth Counsellors & Workers).

These professionals work together to provide the best support and resources to students and families. Learn more about Professional Support Services [here](#).

## DYSLEXIA AWARENESS MONTH: A READING MYTH DEBUNKED



*Dr. Sara Zimmerman, C.Psych.*

After reading to their children for years, parents are often surprised when their youngsters have trouble learning to read. But most children need more than just daily reading to ensure they will grow into successful, independent readers.

**Reading to children in any language is beneficial because it introduces new vocabulary, and teaches them facts about the world.** Early oral language experiences, including being read to and having all kinds of conversations with parents, also helps children to think logically, and teaches them how to understand more complicated sentences. This prepares children for school success.

**Even when their oral language experience is rich, children will not usually become good readers until they are also able to sound out (decode) words accurately, and recognize them quickly. Most children need formal instruction to master these skills.**

In order to become good readers, children must have the decoding and word recognition skills necessary to read the words on a page, as well as the oral language skills needed to understand the meaning of the words they read!



When children struggle significantly in their efforts to read words despite having formal instruction, they might be suffering from a type of Learning Disability that is also known as Dyslexia. This particular Learning Disability, which also impacts spelling, often runs in families. **Researchers have developed successful interventions for teaching reading and spelling, and students of all ages can benefit from these approaches.**

For more information please see the RESOURCES section of this newsletter.

OUR ARTICLES, TIPS, AND SUGGESTIONS DO NOT CONSTITUTE TREATMENT ADVICE.

IF YOU OR A FAMILY MEMBER IS IN CRISIS, PLEASE CONTACT KIDS HELP PHONE: 1-800-668-6868 OR THE DISTRESS CENTRE: 416-408-4357

# PRACTICAL TIPS TO SUPPORT LEARNING AT HOME

by Drs. Alison Blakely and Maureen Jean, C. Psych.

Learning at home brings opportunities and challenges for all students. Those with learning differences may especially benefit from the following practical strategies...  
**(Click on the underlined words for links to free resources for each strategy!)**

**Establish the WHERE, WHEN, and HOW of your home learning space:**

- Carve out the best work space(s) to fit your home. Divide work spaces to reduce distractions (e.g., cardboard tri-board, furniture barrier).
- Create a learn-from-home schedule and establish a routine - Make it visible.
- If learning spaces are multi-use (e.g., the kitchen table) or if they change during the week (e.g., different homes), consider creating a portable learning station!



**Use the CHUNKING strategy to make big tasks feel less overwhelming:**

Students with self-regulation, organizational, and/or emotional difficulties can especially benefit from this step-wise approach. At each step, (a) review, (b) recognize accomplishments, (c) and then plan for the next step:



- To chunk writing tasks: brainstorm, organize ideas, draft each paragraph, edit.
- Chunk projects using a calendar, or write each step on a sticky note. Set small, manageable goals, working backward from due dates.

**Take regular BREAKS to stay calm, focused, and ready to learn:**



- It's helpful to step away from the screen to re-charge. Try: Drawing, mindful breathing, caring for plants/pets, socializing with family, and *physical activity*.
- Keep eyes alert with the 20-20-20 rule: Every 20 minutes, take a 20-second break and focus your eyes on something at least 20 feet away.

**ROADBLOCKS:** Identify & problem-solve recurring issues while learning-at-home:

- *What activities are most engaging for your child?* Use high-interest activities to get started or as a reward.
- *How is the information being presented?* Consider audio vs. visual input and what helps your child engage (e.g., volume, brightness, using headphones, using audio-only for virtual lessons, grid view vs. only the teacher, etc.)
- *Discuss & ask questions* to pinpoint the issue (see "Ask The Psychologist", below).



## COMMUNICATION:

If parents have information about the way their child learns best, it's important to communicate this as soon as possible. Work with your child's teacher to provide insight into their learning goals and the best way for your child to meet them. Make adjustments together as needs and demands change.....and celebrate effort!



# DID YOU KNOW?

## REDUCING ANXIETY THROUGH CONNECTION

By The Hearts & Minds Committee

**Going to school for the first time can be anxiety-provoking for many kindergarteners.**

Young children need to feel connected to their caregivers, through contact and closeness.

Connectedness creates a sense of safety, allowing children to comfortably explore, play, and rest.

Caregivers can help children reduce their anxiety by creating experiences that help them feel connected throughout the day...

**Here are some tips to help:**

When saying "Goodbye," give your child something tangible to hold onto - like a family picture, a note, or an object - to remind them of their home .

**Say, "A part of our family will be with you today."**

Keep in mind that you are building a bridge to the next connection with your child.

**Say, "After I pick you up, we will \_\_\_\_ together."**

**Caregivers and teachers should strive to work as a team and convey the message that our community is like one big family.**

Nurture your child's meaningful connection to their teacher by helping them notice similarities between themselves & their teacher. Point out times they worked together to reach a goal or have fun!

**Say, "You and your teacher seem to enjoy \_\_\_\_\_ together!"**

Tears help children adapt to things they cannot change. Caregivers' and teachers' teamwork creates **a safe place for children to express their emotions freely**. Children who may need extra support should have a safe place to cry and a safe person to cry with.

Adapted from Dr. Gordon Neufeld's *Making Sense of Preschoolers*.

## RESOURCES

[International Dyslexia Association of Ontario](#)

[Understanding Dyslexia](#)

[Collaborative and Proactive Solutions for Problem Solving at Home](#)

[Reducing Anxiety through Connection - Dr. Neufeld](#)



# ASK THE PSYCHOLOGIST

by Jill Shuster, Ph.D., C.Psych.

**Help! My 15-year-old seems very distracted during online learning. How can I help her?**

First, it is important to acknowledge that your child and family are not alone in this struggle. We are all continuing to adjust to new ways of learning while managing other challenges related to the pandemic.

**Here's an approach that can help:**

**Collaborative and Proactive Solutions (CPS)** may be helpful with your teen to find a solution together. CPS assumes that teens do well when they can, and if they are struggling in a situation, it is because they lack the skills to do better.



**Here are the basics to get you started:**

**Empathy step:**

Start with a neutral observation such as, "I've noticed that it's hard to focus in your classes. What's up?" Give your teen some time to share.

**Describe why you're concerned:**

"The thing is, if you're not paying attention, you'll miss important information."

**Invite your teen to join you to come up with solutions:**

"I wonder if there is a way to make it easier to pay attention?" Brainstorm ideas and find one that is doable and that you both agree to.

**Try the solution!**

If you need to come up with a different solution, return to step 3 and try again.

**SAVE THE DATE!**

**Coming Oct. 24 and 25th, 2020**

[Parents As Partners - Virtual Conference](#)

with special presentations by TDSB Professional Support Services including Psychology Staff!