

Help your child COPE by developing better Study Skills

One of the most common reasons bright students struggle academically is because they lack good Study Skills. The good news is found in the word, “skills.” Developing effective study skills is not a talent reserved for a lucky few, or a personality trait only natural to some. It is a teachable skill, or rather a set of skills, that can make a significant difference in your child’s scholastic success. The key is making a concerted effort to ensure that these skills are taught, demonstrated and emphasized – and now is the time!

In this four-part series, we’ll break down the four major components of Study Skills, using the acronym COPE: Concentration, Organization, Preparation, and Education.

CONCENTRATION: Think of the brain as a muscle. Like any muscle, the more it is used, the stronger it becomes. But muscles must be specifically trained in order to excel at specific skills. No one would expect a person with no gymnastics training to be able to suddenly perform a back flip. And yet, we expect our students to be able to concentrate on school work right away, without the proper training.

So, what can a parent do to help? It definitely starts at home, and not just on “academic” skills. Before a child can sit for an hour poring over a reading assignment, they must gradually learn to stick with any challenging endeavor. The following are all tasks that children of any age can do that will subtly train them to stick with a project through to completion, even if it is not always fun, entertaining or easy.

Build! – Anything from simple block towers to elaborate Lego villages.

Create! -- Learn to knit or create a ceramic pot. Get crafty. Put together model airplanes!

Fix It! – Help change a light-bulb or change a tire.

Take Responsibility – Kids can water plants, feed pets,

Clean!– load the dishwasher, fold laundry, make the bed.

Puzzles! -- Introduce the joy and challenge of puzzles into your child’s life. Crosswords, word-search, Sudoku’s, jigsaw puzzles, logic grids are all amazingly effective – and fun – ways to build the ability to concentrate. Turn off the TV. one night a week and have

puzzle night where you do them together and do them to completion! Reward yourselves when you are successful!

Break it down- - When it is time for homework, try setting specific time expectations. Set a timer for “work time.” This should be about double the child’s age. For instance, a six-year old can work for 12 minutes without stopping. When the timer is ticking, they must work without stopping. When it goes off, the child can stop and stretch, get a drink of water, walk around a little, and then return for the next timed segment. This pattern repeats until the project is completed. Avoid letting a project go unfinished until a later date or time. There is great satisfaction in the finishing, and it becomes a good habit that will take them through their lifetime.

Concentration is a key skill to developing better Study Skills, but it is just the beginning. Check back for news on Organization, Preparation and Education.