



Using **Enforced Family Time** To Teach Skills At Home



With the current COVID-19 crisis, schools, programs and many supports for children with diverse needs and their families have been suspended. In addition, many parents are now trying to work from home, while feeling the pressure to teach their children. Most parents aren't prepared to take on the demands of full-time homeschooling, especially when their own work situation and the state of the planet is uncertain. Rather than putting more pressure on parents to do even more under difficult circumstances, this article will suggest some ways families can embrace the enforced family time as an opportunity to teach skills embedded within regular family routines.

What kinds of skills can be taught?

So many important skills can be taught within regular family life routines. The majority of these skills would be considered “functional.” Functional skills contribute towards independence and autonomy. Consider teaching your child/youth any skills that are currently being done for them by support workers or family members.

What are functional skills?

There are many types of skills that contribute to independent functioning. Consider, as an adult, the many skills you have developed that allow you to function from day to day without assistance. This ranges from taking care of your personal needs, looking after your home, navigating the community, communicating your needs, and being socially acceptable. Many “academic” skills can be imbedded withing functional activities, e.g., counting, naming, requesting, reading, writing, planning, and organizing, Examples of tasks that fall into various categories are listed below. Think about how you can support your child/youth to become more independent in these skill areas.

Self-care/ hygiene

- Brushing teeth
- Washing hands/face
- Showering
- Shaving
- Trimming nails
- Putting on make up

Meal-time Preparation

- Cooking
- Finding & Reading Recipes (*Literacy*)
- Measuring (*Numeracy*)
- Planning a Menu
- Setting Table
- Using Cutlery

Housekeeping chores

- Laundry
(*Sorting, Washing, Drying, Folding, Putting Away*)
- Dishes
(*Clearing Table, Loading & Unloading Dish Washer*)
- Vacuuming
- Sweeping/ washing Floors
- Making Bed/ changing Sheets

Garden chores

- Grass Cutting
- Weeding
- Planting Flowers

Community use

- Grocery shopping
- Creating a list, looking through the flyer (*literacy, organization skills*)
- Choosing take out or online ordering
- Budgeting the costs (*numeracy*)
- Noticing and reading signs, light signals
- Crossing the street safely

Functional math

- Telling time
- Using a timer for tasks
- Counting and sorting money
- Calculating weight and Measurement in baking
- Sorting and counting cutlery, number of place settings

Functional literacy

- Reading grocery flyers and recipes
- Writing out instructions/steps for tasks
- Creating a daily schedule
- Making grocery list, to do/chore lists
- Listening to / reading stories with family

Social/communication skills

- Playing board games – turn taking, winning and losing
- Joint activity routines- colouring, lego, play mobile, story writing (*choose your own adventure*)
- Calling/face time/skype friend or relative – asking questions, having conversations
- Interviewing family members on a topic, writing the article or sharing the interview verbally

Leisure/fun

- Play doh creations
- Coloring
- Listening to music
- Daily stretching/yoga, dance time
- Bubble baths (*Can include washable wall painting*)
- Walks through nature (*Play i spy while walking*)
- Taking photos, creating collages



How can I get my child/youth to engage in these activities?

Children with diverse needs respond best when they know what to expect. This includes creating a daily **routine** and **following a schedule** as much as possible. To help the child/youth predict, post a daily schedule that is written or visual and broken down by order of activity and time. For each task, create a **task analysis**. Break down the task into steps. Write each step down or create pictures or drawings of the task in order. This is similar to **a check list** that can be checked off as they complete each step. Teach the task step by step, and initially with more scaffolding then fading to having the individual follow the check list independently.

Consider which tasks your child/youth will enjoy and which will be less desirable. Intersperse easy or desired tasks with more difficult/less desired. Begin with heavier loading of desired tasks. Introduce new tasks slowly, with the goal of maximum success for small steps. In addition to the interspersal, providing

External reinforcers (things your child enjoys such as small treats) can help persuade him/her to try something less desirable or new.

Use your child/youth's interests as much as possible. This will create natural motivation for him to engage with the activity. E.g., if doing a cooking activity, involve the child in picking what to cook, ideally something they will enjoy eating upon completion.

Create plenty of opportunities for choice. Learning to make choices is a skill on its own. It also enhances opportunities to communicate when asked which they prefer. Choice can include when to do something, in what order, what colors to use (in drawing), which type of bread for the sandwich, which cups or plates to use on the table, what trail to walk on, which fruit to buy, etc.

Incorporate physical movement and exercise

Being cooped up at home all day is difficult for anyone. Exercise helps relieve stress and can contribute to calmer behavior and better sleep. Exercise can include stretching, yoga, tag or running games in the yard, ball tossing, jumping on a small trampoline, walks. Spending time in nature can also be calming and a source of exercise.

What help can I get to figure this out?

Currently in BC all school staff including Teachers, specialist staff, and support staff are working. If your child's school has not been in contact with you yet, consider contacting the school and asking who can help. Most likely sources of help would be classroom teachers, itinerant teachers, and case managers for students with IEPs. Ask about the amount and type of support they can provide. If your child is on an IEP, it is very possible that many of the same goals and areas of development can continue outside of the school setting, but the activities and tasks can be different. You may want to ask your school contact to help you choose which functional life skills could fit within the IEP for you to implement at home. Ask about entry level skills and any suggested resources that can be sent home. Ask about how to measure progress and what follow up or implementation support is available from school staff.

Take care of yourself

Think of the airplane scenario. When oxygen drops you are asked to put on your own oxygen mask before helping someone else. If you try to put on your child's mask and have forgotten about your own, you are no good to anyone. Find ways to look after yourself every day. Schedule in breaks away from the children if possible. If more than one adult is in the home, switch off with each other. Find something nourishing to you such as taking a bath, having a cup of tea in the garden (without children present), reading a few pages of a favorite book, listening to a meditation before going to bed. Give yourself permission to not do any of this as well as you would like to. This is all new and you are doing the best you can in difficult circumstances.