

Rounding out the day for a challenging child

by Maxine McLellan

Looking back at over 14 years of home schooling I see that my approach to it has gone through many changes. However, some things have remained constant and, I believe, have given us a goodly measure of success with learning challenged, average, and gifted children.

My personality almost demands that I be accomplishing more than one thing at once and I tend to bring this trait to the home school setting. Hence, whenever possible we double up on activities to maximize our time usage. You might want to divide the activities. Throughout the day we do exercises spread out in several five to ten minute sessions. Some are done on a mini-rebounder. Exercises include breathing techniques, toe-touches, jumping jacks, stretches, running, hopping on the foot we are trying to establish as “the dominant side”, bouncing balls, crawling on the floor army-style, and marching like toy soldiers. Walking along a piece of two-by-four wood stud encourages balance. Recently we were encouraged to purchase and use an electric hand-held massage unit to stimulate the neurological pathways. The two learning-challenged children we currently home school and our dog now look forward to their daily massages as we discuss the events of the day or something we are studying! While exercising, we memorize scriptures or shout out spelling words, saying a word or a letter on each jump or stretch. Our tummy-strengthening exercises are good for great laughs. We choose multi-syllabled words. As we slowly say each syllable, we alternate pulling the muscles in and then letting them go out. Here is an example from our social studies: Iberian Peninsula: I (*in*) beer (*out*) ee (*in*) an (*out*), Pen (*in*) in (*out*) su (*in*) la (*out*). Try it!

Games and Lego are played for at least an hour each day to encourage thinking, dexterity, and co-operation skills. Most of the games we play co-operatively; each person helps out the other player(s). Some of our favourite strategy and thinking games include Scrabble, Pente, chess, Scrabble, dominoes, Tri-Ominoes, Rummikub, Yahtzee, checkers, Chinese checkers, Battleships, and Mastermind. We have several visual memory games (commercial or home-made) where they must remember the placement of a matching piece or must match pieces together, much like dominoes. For instance, we make up sets of words cards for synonyms or antonyms, questions and answers, and use a stop-watch to time how long it takes to arrange the correct matches. The Lego creations are getting to be very

impressive. Jig-saw and word puzzles are main staples. Playing with plasticine is a favourite activity. Depending on the season we play ping-pong or basketball. Jacks and paddle-balls are great, as is hitting a ping-pong ball continuously with the paddle. We have a few computer games as well, but they are not used every day.

When I am sitting with a child to assist them with their work or to supervise a game, I myself often have a book, magazine or letter-writing equipment in hand to keep myself occupied while the child is writing out an answer, making a move, etc.

We generally sit on the couch with one child on each side of me or directly across from me on another chair. All of their books and supplies are kept in a large suitcase that is brought into the living room each day so that everything is at our fingertips. To request my assistance or to ask a question the children place their hand on my knee or shoulder to first get my attention if I am working with someone or something else. They then wait until I can respond. They have been taught to move on to the next question or to something else they do not need assistance with if it is obvious it will be a few minutes before I can respond to their need.

One of the girls we teach used to be in constant motion. She now sits still but to give her body the sensation of "moving" we give her something to manipulate in her hands. We tried plasticine but it gets messy. Sometimes she has a little ball or some little gadget that does not encourage playing. We are looking to purchase one of those little stress balls. She uses a short cosmetic brush with a thin, rounded tip as a place marker while she reads. Snack-time is usually around 10:00 a.m. and again at about 2:00 p.m. to keep the fuel levels up. I recently learned that when the brain and neurological pathways are stimulated in a learning challenged child, they sometimes demonstrate the very symptoms you are trying to eliminate: aggressiveness, depression, hyper-activity, unpredictable behaviour and social responses, tiredness and so on. We were advised that as the synapses of the brain are re-routed or newly established, the brain and body quickly uses up its stores of fuel, causing what amounts to be breaks in the electrical systems of the brain and body. These breaks or disruptions can manifest themselves as some of the symptoms listed above. It is necessary to keep up with the exercises and massage but to not overstimulate the brain and body aggressively in too many areas at once. Take your time and balance out the stimulation, gradually increasing the length of time, frequency, and intensity. Mrs. Suzanne Day of Wise Choice Educational Services in Barrie, Ontario, is very gifted in assisting families determine this balance and to plan out a program.

To strengthen the body systems and to speed the neurological development it is important to add a good quality multi-vitamin and

mineral supplement. There are many excellent ones on the market. We are personally going to add to our snack times a teaspoonful of crude black-strap molasses in a glass of water as it is a terrific source of vitamins and minerals.

Patience is a vital key. With some children it is important to assume that every time you give instructions or an explanation, it is just as if they have never heard this before. Frustrating words like, "I have told you this a million times, when will you ever get this through your thick skull?" are counterproductive. Just patiently give the instructions/explanation again, have the children repeat your exact words or at least demonstrate understanding, and get on with it! After the millionth time they shall surely get it!

The most important part of our day is prayer. We begin our studies with prayer and frequently pray for guidance or extra help throughout the day. As you educate your children, bathe yourself, them and your activities in prayer!

Maxine McLellan, mother of two young adults, is now educating two young girls. She was OCHEC's area 5 Representative, the owner of JOY Center of Learning, and in the 15th year of home schooling web site: <http://www.joycenter.on.ca>

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