



Six Skills that Help Kids Succeed!

There are a number of skill sets that contribute to children's success over the long-term. They are skills that we neglect if we narrow our focus on numeracy, literacy, performing arts and other academic skill sets. They are also skill sets that can be taught, or at the very least drawn out, when we as adults know what to look for.

Following are six skill sets that contribute massively to overall student success and contentedness at school.

1. Friendship skills

The ability to get along with others is hugely important for children. How quickly children settle into a new school year will be determined as much by their ability to make new friends and fit into a peer group, as any other factor. Those children with a strong set of friendship skills have a definite set of skills that makes them easy to like, easy to relate to and easy to play with. These skills include the ability to win and lose well; how to approach others to join in a group and how to lead rather than boss. These are just three of 17 basic friendship skills that have been identified as being essential for making and keeping friends.

2. Organising skills

You can probably recall when you went to school a student who was really bright, but who let themselves down because they couldn't organise themselves or others. The ability to organise your time, your space, your items and others is a massive plus for any student. Being organised extends beyond school, including at home and during leisure time. The best way to help children who are organisationally-challenged is to introduce them to systems and processes to help them organise themselves. These processes include the use of visual reminders; anchoring (i.e linking new behaviours to habitual behaviours) and mapping activities out.

3. Optimism skills

It may seem strange to see optimism as skill set, but as leading psychologist Prof. Martin Seligman discovered through his research, optimism can be taught. Seligman found that while some children are more inclined by nature to see a glass as half empty than half full, all children are capable of developing an optimistic explanatory style through exposure and direct teaching. The skills of optimism include being aware of self-talk, reframing negative events into positive effects and the practice of perspective-taking.

4. Coping skills

Kids will generally face a number of challenges during the course of their school lives including overcoming disappointment of missing being picked in a team; working their way through difficult learning situations and meeting with rejection. How stressful these situations will depend on their own spirit, the support they receive and their coping skills. The good news is that coping skills can be taught, or at the very least, encouraged, if adults know what to focus on. Coping strategies include parking problems for a while; normalising a situation and accepting and moving on. Some kids will use coping strategies quite naturally, while others need parental input to help them cope with seemingly minor challenges.

5. Relaxation skills

The ability to relax and get away from it all is vital for the maintenance of mental health, which in turn, impacts on a student's ability to perform. Many of today's kids live with pressure. That pressure needs to be released through relaxation and play, otherwise it just continues to build and it shows itself through anxiety and other mental illnesses. The ability to relax and unwind is paramount to your child's school success. Ways to unwind include getting lost in a hobby; learning how to meditate and enjoying creative pursuits.

6. Relationship skills

Children at school are involved in hundreds of social interactions every day ranging from working cooperatively with a peer in class through to asking a teacher for help. Most of the interactions go well, but there are times when there will be conflict and tension. This is when children with a solid set of communication and relationship skills honed through a myriad of sibling interactions come to the fore. They don't become flummoxed when a child won't give them what they want, or a child tells tales to the teacher about them. Children that come from very small families (two children or less) often don't have experiences of conflict to draw on so they need to be taught how to give way graciously; to stand up for themselves assertively rather than angrily and to see two sides to a story rather than take things personally. There are many skills we can teach our kids to help them maintain healthy relationships at school, as well as in their families.

These skill sets are part developmental and part environmental. That is, kids will naturally develop many skills as they mature. But also many of the skills need to be nurtured environmentally- that is, they need to be recognised, encouraged, taught and modelled by adults that children and teenagers respect and admire if children are to acquire them. That makes parents Very Important People in the acquisition process of these skill sets in children and young people.

