Acorn Psychology Services
Improving Relationships and Building Skills Over the Summer

Many parents have had more time with their children over the last few months and have got to see first-hand their children's learning behaviours, strengths and weaknesses. With the summer holidays now approaching we wanted to think about ways parents can continue to help their children to develop over the summer and help prepare them for returning to school in September.

Speech and Language Development Ideas:

- Read, read, read. This exposes children to new language, lets them hear language in context and gives them story ideas which they can use later when writing in school. With younger children talk to them while you are reading, ask them to guess what might happen next, work out why characters may be feeling a certain way e.g. 'Why is bear feeling sad?' or guess how the story might end. Talk about sounds that make up words e.g. 'Look 3 words in that sentence started with a 'p' sound, do you know what they were? With older children, talk to them about what they are reading, encourage them to share books with you and make suggestions for other books they might enjoy.
- Plan a treasure hunt game, where your child has to listen to your instructions to find a clue or an object. For example, 'Try looking behind the sofa'. Help your child look for a specific number of objects and count them together – such as 3 cups, 2 pink socks, 5 pens.
- Help your child to make a puppet show about their favourite story using toys and objects from around the house. Older children could use apps like story creator, scribble or movie maker to make their own stories or recount a family trip etc.
- Play sorting games together, collect a range of objects and help your child to sort them into groups e.g. by colour/size/use etc.
- Take a make-believe journey with your child. Make a car out of a cardboard box, some cushions or chairs, add some toy passengers and let your child drive you off on an adventure. Encourage your child to talk about where you are going, what you can see on the way etc.
- Talk together as a family about your day, things that you enjoy, what you are looking forward to etc. Support your child to listen, take turns and ask questions about what other family members have talked about.
- Sing, make up songs together, or sing along to ones you already know!
- Tongue Twisters and word games are an important part of learning to speak well. You can have fun teaching your child different tongue twisters, try saying them together. Who can do it best? Who can say it the most times without going wrong?
  - **I scream, I scream, you scream, let's all scream for ice cream.**
  - **Peter Piper, where's the peck of pickled peppers that Peter Piper picked?**
  - **Red lorry, yellow lorry, red lorry, yellow lorry.**
  - **She sells seashells on the sea shore.**

- **Bubble bobble, bubble bobble, bubble bobble.**

  See which ones are the most fun. Try saying them as fast as you can. You can even make up some of your own.

- Play a memory game together. This will help your child communicate, solve problems build concentration and memory. First, gather some of your child's favourite toys, books and objects. They can help you with this. Put them together and talk about what's there. Next, ask your child to close their eyes and turn around. Remove some of the items. Then get them to open their eyes and see if they can list what's missing. You can play this game the other way around, with your child removing the items and testing your memory.

Developing Fine Motor Skills

These involve the use of the small muscles in our hands, wrists, fingers, feet and toes. Fine motor skills require a child's brain to co-ordinate an action and what they are seeing e.g. to draw, to write, to tie shoelaces, use scissor, use a knife and fork etc. To develop these muscles, children need practice grasping, holding, pressing and using a pincer grip. Here are some activities which are particularly effective in the development of fine motor skills:

- Playing with playdough
- Doing jigsaws
- Drawing, colouring and painting
- Using tongs or tweezers
- Cutting with scissors
- Filling and emptying containers
- Building with blocks and Lego
- Threading and lacing
- Brushing teeth

Developing Social and Emotional Skills

To develop and improve their social skills, children need first-hand experience with turn-taking, emotional regulation, teamwork, and perspective-taking. Here are some ideas you can try at home:

- **Emotions and Puppets.** Puppets are a great way to introduce children to feeling words like *happy, sad, angry,* and children will sometimes talk to puppets about their feelings. Puppets can also help in discussions about challenging topics, like going to bed on time.
- **Perspective Taking:** This is an easy activity all about identifying the feelings and thoughts of others and you can do it when you are watching TV or a movie with your child. Press pause and ask, "How do you think that he or she feels right now? What are they thinking?" Let your child respond and then you can also share your own thoughts, "I think they feel scared because they are being

chased" or "I think they feel happy because I see the rain is stopping and they can go outside." "It's important to let your child practice identifying the thoughts and feelings of others," You can also do this while doing role play activities or acting games. The Good Dinosaur, The Incredibles and Inside Out are great film options for talking through emotions and feelings.

- **Read bedtime stories.** This end-of-the-day routine is an ideal time for talking about feelings. Discuss the characters and events in the story. Invite your child to share her thoughts and feelings by asking questions: "What do you think he should do? How do you think she feels? What would you do if you were this character?" Stories are a lovely way to begin to teach empathy. You can also talk through different scenarios and ask your child how other people might feel when certain things happen.
- **Think out loud.** When your child hears your thinking process, it helps them understand how to cope with frustration and solve problems: "Oh no! My favourite shopping bag has a hole in it. I'd better take another one with me to the shop." "Oh dear, I've spilled my drink. Will you help me clean it up and then I can pour another one?'
- **Pre-empt and Prevent potential problems.** Before a friend comes to play, help your child put away toys he does not want to share. Before taking a bus to the zoo, provide a step-by-step explanation of what you will do: "We will wait at the bus stop for 5 minutes, then get on the bus and sit together and watch the sights go by for about 30 minutes [explain this as the length of one episode of a favourite TV show]. Then we will walk for 5 minutes to the zoo and look round the lion house before anything else!" During the trip, remind your child of what will happen next.

Games and Activities to Support Social and Emotional Development:

- **Card, board games and outdoor games** such as tag or hop-scotch offer lots of opportunities for helping children learn to take turns, cooperate, handle frustration, and more. While playing games together, focus on fun instead of winning or losing.
- **Would You Rather' Game:** This is a silly game that lets kids laugh and let loose while using their imagination and creativity. Each person needs to come up with two silly or outlandish statements, making the other choose an answer no matter how ridiculous the options. This game is fun but also encourages children to think outside the box and ask follow up questions. (Some favourites to start could be: "Would you rather be able to fly or be invisible?" or "Would you rather live in the past or in the future?
- **Problem Solving with Props:** This one may take some planning, but you need props like paper clips, plastic cups, cotton balls, tape, lolly sticks, sticky notes, and straws (you can substitute for anything you don't have or things you do have around the house.) Then direct your child to solve problems with the items they have in front of them. Some problem-solving prompts could be: devise a slide for mini figures, create a jump ramp for cars, and build the highest tower you can. See where their imagination takes them!
- **Maintaining a two-way conversation:** This game (Stack) was developed to support children to take turns and stay on topic. To play this two-player game, you need only a set of stackable 'tokens' -- like draughts or blocks -- and an adult or peer group to help judge the relevance of each player's contributions. The game begins when Player One sets down a token and says something to initiate a conversation. Next, Player Two

responds with an appropriate utterance, and places another token on top of the first one. The players keep taking turns to advance the conversation. How long can they sustain it? How tall can their stack become? When a player says something irrelevant or off-topic, the conversational flow is broken, and the game is over.

- **'I spy' and 'Simon Says'** games help children learn to follow instructions, maintain their focus and attention and develop language skills.
- **Scavenger hunts** in the house and garden. Make a list of things for your child to find e.g. leaf, twig, snail, pebble, or teaspoon, lollystick, scissors, tin, moneybox, pen. This game helps your child improve their reading skills, thinking skills and spatial awareness.
- **Obstacle courses** inside or outside will improve a child's gross motor skills and co-ordination. Inside you could use cushions, a chair, a throw or boxes. Ask your child to crawl under, through, and over, jump, throw and hop. This will support language development in younger children.
- **Pretend/role play.** Pretend play has a critical role in cognition, social and emotional development and language skills for younger children. Get out old sheets and charity bag clothes and make costumes, upcycle boxes into boats, shops or animals.
- **Improvisation games** increase children's confidence, thinking skills and focus and attention. For example, tell a story by narrating one word or one sentence each.

For more information visit: https://www.parentingscience.com/social-skills-activities.html

Educational Apps Your Child may Enjoy:

Teach my Monster to Read
Duolingo (Learn a different language)
Minecraft Educational
Roblox Educational
Epic (Ebook library)
Scratch (coding app)
Youtube kids
Puppet Pals (create animations)
Hit the button (maths games)
TT Rockstars (Times tables)
Artie's magic pencil (drawing app)
Toca Lab (virtual chemistry)
DragonBox Algebra

iMovie (movie making app)
GarageBand (music app for older children and teenagers)
AutoDesk Sketchbook (art app for older children and teenagers)

Improving Your Parent-Child Relationship:
The following leaflets have been produced by Unicef and provide some great tips to help improve relationships in your home.

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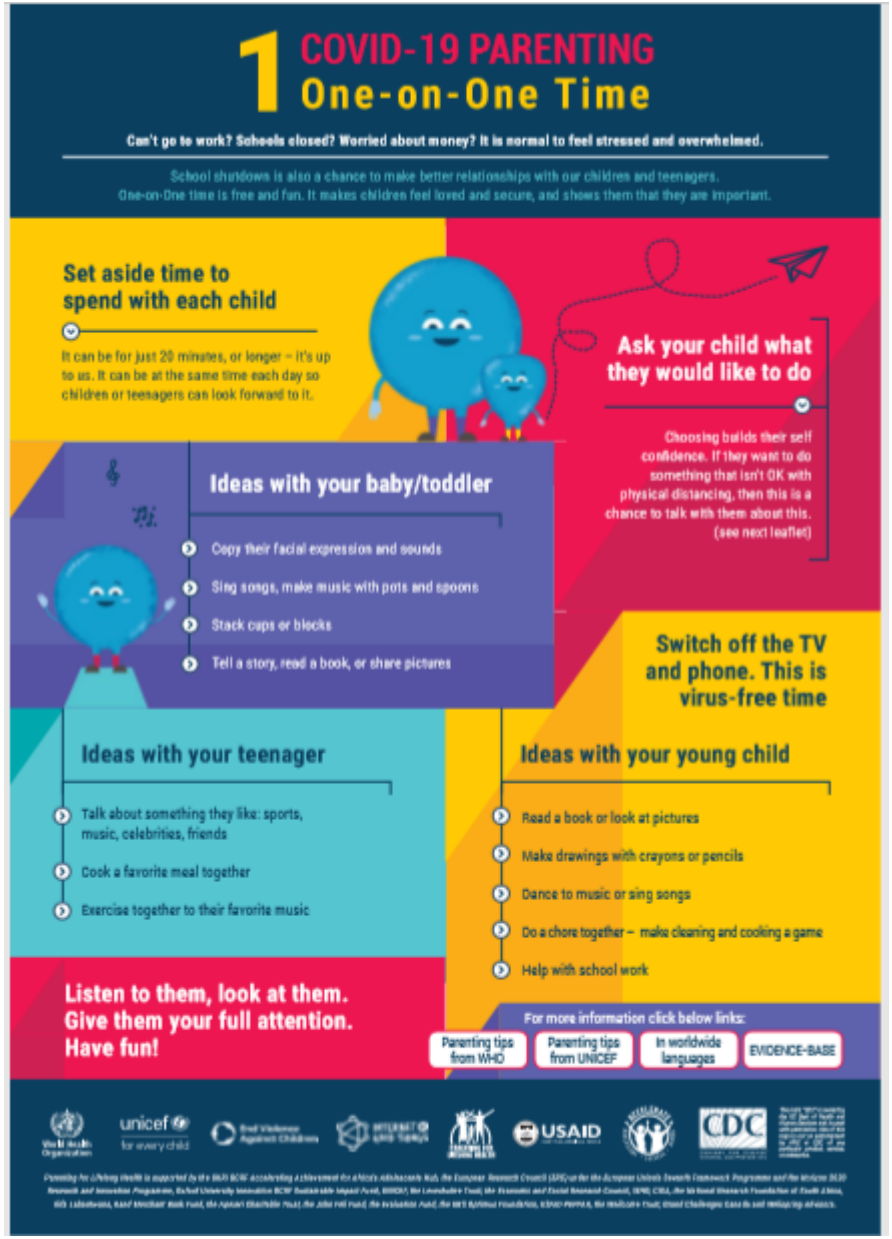

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