

Promoting Social and Emotional Learning at Home

This Week's Focus – Optimistic Thinking

What is Optimistic Thinking?

Helen Keller once noted that, "Optimism is the faith that leads to achievement. Nothing can be done without hope and confidence." The belief that things will turn out well is what motivates effort and encourages us to keep trying. After all, if we truly believed that our efforts are wasted and that things are going to end badly, why would we make the effort? We want our children to have an attitude of confidence, hopefulness and positive thinking about themselves and their future.

As we all struggle with the challenges posed by COVID-19, maintaining a sense of hopefulness and optimism is critical; that is why we are beginning this series with this topic. The sacrifices that we are all making are inspired by the belief that they will make a positive difference for our families, our communities, and our country. Fortunately, optimistic thinking is a skill that can be taught. We would like to share a simple strategy that you can use with your children to promote their sense of optimism.

Strategy– "Even If"

The need for social distancing has filled our children's lives with disappointment. From not being able to go to a friend's house to play to not being able to participate in a high school graduation ceremony, our children are experiencing loss and frustration. **Even if*** can help ease some of that disappointment. The essential idea of **Even if** is to encourage your child to reframe the loss as an opportunity. Instead of focusing on the negative, we want to help them see the positives in the situation. For instance, **Even if they can't** have their friends over for their birthday party, **they can still** have a virtual birthday party. In fact, with a virtual party even friends and relatives who live far away and would not have been able to attend an in-person party can participate! Encourage your children to think, "**Even if I can't....I can still...**" With enough practice, this can become a life-long skill to help your child deal positively with disappointment.

For elementary students – it may help to focus on what fun things they can still do with their friends. In addition to virtual parties and sleepovers, they can also learn a new game to play with their friends or family. For example, **Even if I can't** go to my friend's house, **we can still** play Words with Friends together. Or, **Even if we can't** go see a movie, **I can still** play my favorite board game with my family.

For middle school students – learning a new skill like cooking (**Even if I can't** go to my favorite Mexican restaurant, **I can still** learn to make tacos at home) can be fun and rewarding.

For high school students – being able to contribute to the family and community can help them find meaning in their situation (***Even if I can't*** go to my part-time job, ***I can still*** help by making home-made face masks).

For preschool students – Try to help preschoolers focus on the fun things they can still do at home like learning new games to play, snuggling up and watching a show with a parent or sibling, or going on daily walks in the neighborhood. For example, ***Even if I can't*** go to preschool, ***we can still*** set up a pretend classroom in my bedroom. Or, ***Even if we can't*** go see a movie, ***I can still*** make popcorn, grab a blanket and watch a movie with my family.

For Infants and Toddlers – When children are this young, the ***Even if*** strategy is for parents. Parents can use this strategy as a “self-talk” technique to help develop their own optimistic thinking. For example, ***Even if I can't*** take my baby to visit grandma, I can use the computer to schedule meetings using screen sharing. Or, ***Even if I can't*** take the baby to the park, ***I can still*** tune into some of the free classes that are being offered online.

A Note to Parents

One of the most important ways that you can both teach your children and promote your own well-being is by modelling the Even if strategy. Show your children how you use the strategy and ask them to help you find the positives in the challenges you are facing. Practicing Even if as a family can be a fun way of bringing you together.

Promoting Social and Emotional Learning at Home is brought to you by Aperture Education (www.Apertureed.com) and The Devereux Center for Resilient Children (www.CenterforResilientChildren.org). Feel free to visit our websites for additional ideas.

****Even if*** was developed by Ann McKay Bryson and is part of Aperture Education's DESSA Comprehensive Social and Emotional Learning System