

PARENT INFORMATION 5

Off-track Thinking and The Learning Highway

At some point, most children will experience anxiety about what's happening at school. It may be due to environmental factors, such as not liking their teacher, or social issues to do with the playground.

This week your child has learned about Off-track Thinking – the Thinking and Behaviours that **they** contribute to their Learning Journey that could lead to going 'Off-track.' This might be for a short period of time, or it might characterise their approach to The Learning Journey.

Much of the thinking and the behaviours that contribute to Off-track Thinking have a common base: anxiety - which might come as a surprise. Childhood anxiety can be generalised or very specific, and when it comes to learning behaviours, it is most often characterised by:

1. Worrying about making mistakes.
2. Worrying about how other children are progressing – looking very much like being competitive.
3. Worrying about being perfect – or perfectionism.

Does any of this sound familiar? It can be frustrating working alongside a child who sabotages their efforts by distress about mistakes, or believes that their work is not equal to, or better, than that of their peers.

The child who experiences learning anxiety may not achieve to their capabilities because of catastrophic thoughts about making mistakes, leading to limited work confidence and risk-taking – both important factors in learning and achievement. If a child worries about their performance relative to others they may avoid tasks in which they won't be the best and if perfectionistic, repeatedly begin tasks believing they won't meet their own or others' standards.

Each of these is an example of learning anxiety and requires careful attention and specific strategies to overcome. The crucial factor is to focus on your child's self-talk – what they say to themselves as they begin and progress through a task, as research tells us that when a child undertakes repeated positive and helpful Supa Thinking, it helps reduce patterns of learning anxiety.

Worrying about making mistakes can be offset by regularly communicating the importance and normality of making mistakes. Point out your own mistakes and talk about how they helped you to learn something new, or do something differently. Reframe mistakes as being essential stepping stones on The Learning journey – theirs and

yours. This is part of self-acceptance, and also having the ability to take risks in their learning without worrying about the negative outcome of a mistake.

The need to be perfect - perfectionism - is another negative behaviour: worrying about not meeting expectations – perhaps their own – rather than yours. The usual outcome is avoidance of anything where there's the potential for a less-than perfect outcome – which severely limits a child's learning opportunities. Talk to your child about having a go, setting reasonable self-expectations and being happy with outcomes that are less than 'perfect.' However, if perfectionism causes regular distress, seek the assistance of a suitably qualified health professional.

Being highly competitive can also be a source of anxiety, so talk to your child about being, "The best me that I can be." Point out when you are personally being the best that you can be – even if it's not THE best. Perhaps even display those words somewhere at home, "I'm being the best me that I can be when..."

Finally, in the primary school years, as your child travels on The Learning Highway there can be many moments of being a Highway HERO. Equally, there can be many BUMPS and HAZARDS that require the use of good HIGHWAY TOOLS – like CPR Supa Thinking, The Triple A's 4 Getting Things Done or setting goals with the WWW.

The more TOOLS your child has in their HIGHWAY TOOLBOX the greater their chance of being a happy, successful and resilient...

HIGHWAY HERO with skills for resilience

REFLECTION POINT:

*Success, happiness and resilience are common desires of most parents for their children. How do you actively work towards **your own** success, happiness and resilience? Is it ad hoc, or are you organised - with a plan, with a goal?*