

PARENT INFORMATION

7 Top Tips 4 Helping your Child to Consolidate their Skills

Being your child's at-home-coach is certainly an exciting and often daunting role. The 7 Top Tips that follow will help you and your child to get the language of *Little Highway Heroes* 'into the muscle.' Use the language of BUMPS and TOOLS in your home and then work on skills specifically as their need arises for your child as they travel along their own Emotional Highway, The Playground Highway and The Classroom Highway too. Here are the 7 Top Tips:

1. Role play
2. Discussion
3. Reflective Listening
4. Buzz Words and Sayings
5. Journal
6. Imagery
7. Reward and Celebrate

1. Role Play: to be 'Really Practised'

We guarantee you that the best way to learn something is to watch others doing it, and then to do it yourself – repeatedly. Just as you can't learn to ride a bike by watching a video, the same applies to social and emotional skills: you need to walk the walk and talk the talk. The *Little Highway Heroes* TOOLS that are suitable to role play rehearsal are:

- Calming Down Breathing
- Calming Down Thinking
- Joining In Think-Say-Do
- The Friendliness Think-Say-Do
- Sticking Up 4 Me
- Playground Supa Thinkin
- Resilient Supa Thinkin
- Spotting Sillyness The Speed Wobble
- Tricking Sillyness The Speed Wobble

Using the words and body language in role plays at home – in an 'out of the crisis', stress free moment when you *can* make a mistake – and in fact is all part of the learning - is the key to mastery. Practice makes progress. A positive, however, is that generally kids love role play; adults – different story – so you shouldn't have too much of an argument on your hands convincing your child to have a go – especially if you're willing to take your turn.

Here are some tips to get the role play practice happening smoothly in your household:

- ◆ Do 5 minute sessions regularly, rather than a longer session less frequently.
- ◆ Choose a time when there are limited distractions, and everyone is feeling relaxed and happy.
- ◆ Make the role plays fun - rather than a 'lesson.'
- ◆ Decide on the target skill e.g., Sticking Up 4 Me.
- ◆ Move around to music to 'loosen up.'
- ◆ Each person can choose their role. Agree to swap roles after 5 minutes or 1 role play.
- ◆ Discuss how to give feedback – and how often - **before** the role play.
- ◆ Agree that comments need to be respectful – not ridiculing.

2. Discussion

Talking regularly with your child about their progress in using the TOOLS definitely helps – as does your being on the lookout for seeing them popping out at home. Too much discussion can feel intrusive for some children – and a sense of being nagged and pressured, so try to agree at the beginning how often these discussions will occur. Try to get an agreement that:

- The child will practice the TOOL with their peers if possible a couple of days **after** it is role-played at home.
- During the week you'll check in with how they went – a 1-3 minute conversation.
- Each week, the child can choose another TOOL to role play - or keep working on the current one for a little longer.
- Try to reach an agreement about the time frame for getting through the 9 skills listed above, e.g., one school term; half by mid-year and the rest by the end of the year; the summer holidays.

Some helpful questions when talking about their efforts in using the TOOLS with peers are:

"What score are you going to give yourself for how you did the TOOL? 'OK'; 'Good'; or 'Terrific.'"

"What about for effort and courage at having a go?"

"Anything you'd do differently next time?"

"How confident do you feel about using this TOOL?"

3. Reflective Listening

If, despite your most friendly, reasonable parent approach, your child is still resisting any discussion, don't make demands and turn this into conflict. Instead, use 'reflective listening' – that is hold off making any persuasive suggestions or critical comments about what your child has just said – or done.

Rather, simply reflect back the emotion you think your child is experiencing right at that moment. For example, *"You sound like you're feeling pretty fed up with me wanting to talk about it. It's hard for all of us when you think that you're being nagged about something."* And for the moment, leave it at that.

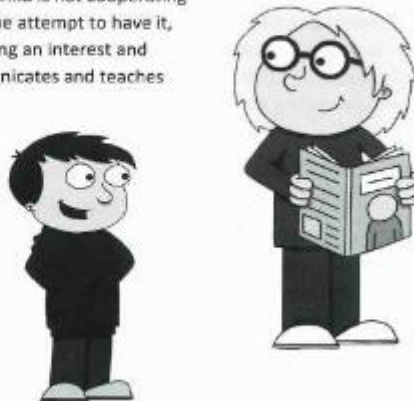
We have 2 ears and 1 tongue, so we should listen more and talk less.
Diogenes

If the reply you receive is to continue complaining about your intrusive questioning, keep the reflective listening going using different words, but with the same emphasis: *"Yes, it can be difficult when you feel pressured to answer."* Don't try to get an answer. If the complaining keeps happening, finish the conversation with a broadly affirming comment such as, *"It's not always easy doing this stuff, and it takes lots of courage to try, and I admire what you've been doing. Perhaps another time, we'll be able to talk about it."*

Expressing empathy, such as: *"It's hard for all of us...."* is a teaching moment in itself – regardless of the outcome. It demonstrates that you are picking up on your child's emotions; that you're willing to express it, and that you know what that feeling is like.

You are a great role model, and talking out your experiences with your own skills development is an excellent way of demonstrating that adults also need this sort of practice, and that social and emotional learning is ongoing.

Don't become disheartened if your child is not cooperating with this type of dialogue. Making the attempt to have it, going through the motions, expressing an interest and coming up with suggestions, communicates and teaches much, much more than keeping it a 'no go' lane where it's not safe for anyone to enter.



4. Buzz words AND sayings

Using the language of *Little Highway Heroes* when you're talking about challenges in the playground, with siblings or any situation will make it easier for everyone to know they are talking about the same thing.

Calling a difficulty a BUMP – determining whether it is Little, Medium-size or Big; talking about whether you're engaging in Stinkin Thinkin - or alternatively, what Supa Thinkin would help, all help to bed-down these concepts in your little person's life and their way of viewing the world.

Model the language yourself – refer to doing Calming Down Breathing when you're caught in a crawling traffic lane; talk out aloud your Supa Thinkin that is helping you be patient when shoes can't be found in the morning. There's no shortage of situations – as you well know – when parents can model their own emotional self-management using the same language. And one thing you can be 100% certain of – is it **will** make a difference – to the social and emotional TOOLS that your children develop and the well-being that they attain. That's a guarantee.

Children have never been very good at listening to their elders but they never fail to imitate them.

James Baldwin

5. Journalling

This is a different take on writing a diary. It concerns beginning a story about the child's journey of developing – and using - these social and emotional TOOLS, and then tracking their progress through the story. At this developmental level, a parent assisting this creation will be necessary – and that may be as the interviewer – or by recording the sound version – or perhaps being the scribe. Your own observations about how the child is progressing with the learning can also be incorporated, giving a richer perspective and a window into your emotional processes as you were engaged in this.

Any of these styles will be effective, but what is fundamentally important is to use it as a 'living story' - meaning that it doesn't gather dust on a shelf or end up with rolled corners under the sofa - but that it is read to the child regularly, giving it a proud public voice. That will also make a huge difference to the child's learning – putting them at the forefront of the story...and that's another guarantee.

6. Imagery

Imagery is the process of visualising a scene unfolding in your 'mind's eye.' It is an effective way to memorise the steps of a skill, and to gain the confidence to perform it. Many children aged 4 or 5 years will be able to do this – using one simple scenario and holding that image for a brief time – perhaps 10 seconds. It is very powerful when practised repeatedly.

"Imagination is everything. It is the preview of life's coming attractions."

Albert Einstein

An example of this would be for the child to practise the imagery of themselves approaching a group of children, asking a question to join in – and receiving an acceptance; doing Calming Down Breathing when Sillyness The Speed Wobble was whirling around or thinking some Playground Supa Thinkin when there was a BUMP. For those who like to draw, a poster of the imagery is an excellent personalised visual reminder.

Situations for which you could use imagery to help your child with various social situations are:

- ◆ Seeing themselves being successfully included in a game.
- ◆ Responding confidently to a Normal Refusal.
- ◆ Responding assertively if it was a Nasty Refusal.

It is important to have the visualisation ending in a successful outcome – e.g., the child responding assertively – even if the scenario itself involves some negativity.

The most effective way to use imagery is to have the child sit comfortably in a relaxed manner while you describe the scenario to be visualised, suggesting what emotions they might be feeling and their possible reactions.



You may also like to compose a visual imagery script in which your child is dealing with a BUMP with a TOOL, and you read this to them while they do the visualisation. An example of a script for using Calming Down Breathing and Calming Down Thinking while Sillyness The Speed Wobble is twirling around is as follows:

An Imagery Script: Your teacher is explaining what the next activity is, but the new girl isn't listening. She's winking at you- trying to make you laugh. You know that she is someone who often gets bossed by Sillyness The Speed Wobble. You remind yourself that you've practised how to spot – and trick – Sillyness The Speed Wobble at home with your Mum. You take a very slow, deep breath counting 1-2-3 and blow it out quietly and softly, 1-2-3. At the same time, you say to yourself, 'Stay calm, look somewhere else and pretend the teacher's voice is very loud. Tell yourself how much fun it's going to be doing the activity.'

7. Reward and Celebrate

When you begin this skill building your child, brainstorm some ways that they would like to celebrate their future success. Here are some ideas – with the important caveat: *No money must change hands. Parental wallets must stay firmly closed - locked in fact.*

- ◆ Break any of the skills into 'Levels' of achievement, and decide what the criteria are for reaching each Level. For example, 'Level 1' of The Friendliness Think-Say-Do TOOL may be doing a role play at home. 'Level 2' is doing the role play with someone else in the family person, and 'Level 3' is trying out either the Think, Say or Do component in a social situation.
- ◆ Award Championship Certificates for reaching each Level. Present them at a family 'Championship Awards' event.
- ◆ Spread the good news about achievements by showing the Certificates to aunts, uncles and grandparents.
- ◆ If you are working on a Journal together - as above - include the skill level attained, photos of Certificates and the presentation.
- ◆ Write a poem, a song, or make up a dance about the skill that has been learned. Video it's launch.
- ◆ Create an object out of any household material – newspaper, jars, lids - to create a symbol of the skill learned, and start a "My Awards Collection."
- ◆ Do anything that signifies: 'Learning this skill is important and we're going to celebrate it.' That means parents too!
- ◆ Have fun – it's great glue!

