



Parenting during pandemic

Day 23: Managing with children of different ages at home during the pandemic

Having children of different ages at home during lockdown due to the pandemic may be one of the difficulties for parents at the moment. Children of different developmental stages each have their own needs and will want to do their own things. In this blog we will look at the different developmental stages and at how children learn best in these stages.

Very early on, until about the age of 2 years old, children learn about the world through sensory and motor contact. This means they move around and explore things in their environment. They begin to have a sense of what is known as object permanence, or the fact that things are not gone when they are out of sight. From around age 2 to around age 6, children start to use words and pictures to represent objects. They can start to pretend at this stage but still lack some logical thinking and are more interested in meeting their own needs than those of others. From around age 7 to around age 12, more logical thinking develops and in teenage years, abstract thinking develops.

This is of course a very general explanation of Piaget's stages of cognitive development but it is just to give a sense that children's brains are actually different at their individual stages so there are developmental reasons why they need different things.

When learning, not just academic learning but learning of other kinds too, it is important for any of us to be within a comfortable zone. This zone needs to include going over some things we know, to give us confidence and consolidate our learning, and pushing us on to support our development, but not too far as to be overwhelmed. This zone has been called the "zone of proximal development" (by Vygotsky).

So, children's brains are different at their individual stages of development and need to be supported to develop without causing boredom, if it's too easy, or potential worry and anxiety if it's too hard. But how does all this help with having children of different ages at home during lockdown?

Well, it gives an understanding of what is happening for children of different ages and stages and it allows us to think about what they need individually for brain development. In practical terms, it can be helpful to set up ways in which children can help each other but still be in their own learning zone. For example, older children can help younger children with some of their learning and this can be set up such that they feel they are showing lots of skills in being flexible and “teaching” in a way that is relevant and helpful to the younger child. For younger children, they can help older children with learning too in that they can be tasked with getting all of the materials ready for the older child to do their tasks. These types of systems are used a lot by clubs and groups where there are children of different ages and stages. It may be that there are rewards for children at different stages but for the same task depending on their role in the team.

Of course children of different ages will need their own space sometimes and we talked about getting closer or needing space in a previous blog. It may be helpful to explain this to children in a way that notes how helpful they are being either by giving each other time to do separate things or by working together depending on what is needed at the time. If we think about ourselves as adults, how many times do we all write on job applications that we can work independently and in a team? How many times do we write about communication skills and supporting others with different skills and abilities? These are important skills for both children and adults.

We hope these tips are helpful. Well done on managing another day off school and we hope you will join us again tomorrow.

Tomorrow’s topic: The importance of play for children.

Please contact us with questions, comments or topics you’d like to see covered. We’d love to hear your feedback.

Wishing you a safe and healthy path through this pandemic.