**Encourage a Context for Learning**

Recently, I posted my top 10 tips for home-schooling success, whether it’s just helping with homework or being full-time home school teacher to your kids. Now I am elaborating on each item on the list. Parenting tip #7 is this:

Context for Learning --- What else is going on?

Why now?

Your child’s completion of homework, or even his home schooling, never occurs in a vacuum. There’s a context for this learning. That context can either take away for his time and attention to task or promote it. Understanding the context for his task at hand is like helping him clear his desk to create the space for him to do his work. A cluttered desk is full of distractions and makes it hard to concentrate. A cluttered mind confounds productive focus of attention. Two questions address the clutter and clarify the focus: What else is going on here? And, Why now?

Angie had come to the door of her son’s bedroom to check on his progress with homework. She saw 10-year old Trey feverishly working the controls of his gaming system instead of doing his homework.

“Trey,” she blurted from his doorstep, “really?” Trey startled for a moment before continuing his gaming as Angie entered his bedroom.

“Okay, Mom, just a minute,” Trey conceded while his thumbs continued flying over the controls. Angie found the pause button on the system and pushed it. “Hey, why’d you do that? I was in the middle of it.”

Angie breathed a heavy sigh before continuing, calming herself and her voice.

“Son, you came up to your bedroom and gave yourself a half hour to get your next lesson done. That was twenty minutes ago. Have you even started the lesson?”

“No,” Trey looked down sullenly, “but that’s next on my list,” he added hopefully.

Angie pulled up a chair to sit beside Trey at his desk. “Sweetheart, this isn’t like you,” she stroked his forearm as she spoke, “What else is going on?”

Her persistence and active listening led to Trey finally spilling out that he had had a falling out with his best friend at school. Angie sympathized and helped him talk through his feelings, leading to thoughts about how he could mend the friendship. As Trey’s emotional fever subsided, Angie gently directed him back to task.

In hindsight, Angie answered her internal “why now?” question. She decided that Trey shifted into gaming to delay homework because thinking about homework got him all hung up on being dissed by his best friend. Taking time to help her son clear his head led to Trey tackling his homework without further delay.

My conviction is that everything happens for a reason. As parents, we need to stay on top of the reasons for our children’s actions (as well as for our own) to help them stay the course. Blaming or giving out consequences doesn’t address their stuck-ness. Active listening, problem-solving, and redirecting does.

There is a context for their learning. When they are off task and not abiding by mutually agreed upon guidelines, pause the process to answer the questions, “What else is going on?” And, “why now?” You will find both teachable moments and an unimpeded healthier return to task.