



Enhanced Learning
Educational Services
“the study skills specialist”

WHAT CAN I DO DURING A STUDY SKILLS SESSION IF MY CHILD WON'T ENGAGE?

During study skills evenings, parents sometimes message to say:

“My child is sitting next to me right now and they won't engage.”

Or:

“They don't want to discuss anything. They won't answer the questions. What can I do?”

This can feel frustrating, especially when you have made the effort to attend the session because you want to support your child. You may be hearing practical ideas that you know could help, but your child may be sitting silently, rolling their eyes, giving one-word answers, or refusing to participate.

The first thing to know is this: do not try to force engagement in the moment.

If your child is already resistant, embarrassed, tired, anxious, defensive or annoyed, pushing harder during the session is unlikely to help. In fact, it may make them shut down even more.

Your goal during the session is not to win the argument

It is tempting to whisper things like:

- “Are you listening?”
- “You really need this.”
- “This is exactly what I keep telling you.”
- “Why won't you take this seriously?”

These comments are understandable, but they usually increase defensiveness.

During the session, your goal is not to convince your child to suddenly change their attitude.

Your goal is to keep the door open so that the conversation can happen later, when they are less exposed and less reactive.

Sit calmly and model interest

Even if your child is not engaging, you can still get value from the session.

Listen for ideas that may be relevant to your child. Make a few notes. Notice which strategies might reduce stress, conflict or last-minute panic at home.

You might quietly say:

- “I’m just going to jot down a couple of things that might be useful.”
- “You don’t have to answer now.”
- “Let’s just listen and we can talk about it later if anything seems relevant.”

This lowers the pressure. It also shows that you are not trying to trap them into a public discussion.

Avoid embarrassing them

Some students find parent-student sessions uncomfortable. They may not want to talk about their study habits in front of other families. They may feel exposed if they are struggling. They may also worry that any answer they give will be used against them later.

Try not to say things during the session that put them on the spot, such as:

- “You do this all the time.”
- “This is your problem.”
- “Tell me what you’re going to change.”
- “See, this is why your marks aren’t where they should be.”

Even if these comments are true, the timing is unlikely to help.

Give them permission to just listen

A reluctant student may be more willing to absorb information if they do not feel forced to perform.

You could say quietly:

- “You don’t have to talk. Just listen for one thing that might make school easier.”
- “I’m not going to quiz you on this.”
- “Just see if there is one idea that might be useful.”
- “We don’t have to discuss it right now.”

This can reduce the battle over engagement.

Look for one small opening

If your child is willing to respond at all, keep the question small and non-threatening.

Instead of asking:

“What are all the things you need to change?”

Try:

- “Was there anything there that sounded even slightly useful?”
- “Which of those ideas would be least annoying to try?”
- “Is there one thing that would make homework less painful?”
- “Would any of this help reduce stress before tests?”
- “What is one thing you definitely don’t want me to nag you about?”

Sometimes the best question is not about study at all, but about reducing friction.

Do not turn the session into a lecture afterwards

After the session, avoid launching into a long conversation in the car or at home if your child is still shut down.

A better approach might be:

- “Thanks for coming. I know it may not have been your favourite way to spend the evening.”
- “I wrote down a couple of things that I thought could help. We don’t need to talk about them now.”
- “Maybe on the weekend we can choose one small thing to try.”

Then leave it.

This can be hard, but it gives your child time to process without feeling cornered.

Use the session as parent learning too

Even if your child appears disengaged, the session can still help you as a parent. You may gain ideas about:

- how to reduce conflict around homework
- how to help your child start tasks earlier

- how to support organisation without taking over
- how to encourage active study rather than just reading notes
- how to help your child manage distractions
- how to have calmer conversations about school

You do not need your child to adopt every strategy immediately for the session to be worthwhile.

Follow up later with one small choice

A day or two later, when things are calm, you might say:

- “I’ve been thinking about the study skills session. I don’t want to overhaul everything. Could we just choose one thing that might make school easier?”

Then offer a limited choice:

- “Would it help more to work on planning assignments, dealing with distractions, or preparing for tests?”
- “Would you rather try a better homework routine or a better system for remembering what is due?”
- “Would you be willing to test one idea for a week and see if it helps?”

The key is to keep it small.

Final thought

If your child will not engage during the session, try not to panic. It does not mean the night is wasted. It does not mean they heard nothing. It does not mean they will never change.

Stay calm. Avoid public pressure. Let them listen. Take your own notes. Follow up later with one small, practical step.

Sometimes the most useful thing a parent can do in the moment is not to push harder, but to make it safe enough for the conversation to happen later.