

Helping Children Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

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Put your child on the path to a successful school year

Whether your child is just entering elementary school or is farther along, the way she begins the school year can determine how the rest of the year will go. To get her off to a great start:

- **Establish a routine.** Kids thrive on predictability. So establish a regular time for homework. Set—and stick to—a regular bedtime. Plan a morning routine that gets everyone out the door on time.
- **Insist that your child give her best effort in school.** If she knows that school is important to you, it will be important to her.
- **Review school safety.** Talk to your child about the need to follow school rules. Also talk about ways to be safe when riding the school bus or walking to school.
- **Get to know your child's teacher.** When parents and teachers work together, kids do better in school.
- **Set goals.** Students who do well in school have both short- and long-term goals. Whether it's earning an "A" in math or preparing to become a veterinarian, goals help keep your child motivated and focused.
- **Be genuinely interested** in your child's schoolwork. Ask questions about what she is learning in school every day.
- **Don't over schedule your child.** Give her time to unwind after school—especially as she adjusts during the first few weeks.



Inspire a reading habit

Studies show that children enjoy being read to even after they learn to read. When you read aloud to your child every day, you help him get into the reading habit. Try to:

- **Set aside time** for reading. Then do it!
- **Read books** you'll both enjoy.
- **Choose books** that are a little too hard for your child to read alone.

Attitude makes math a plus

Did you know your attitude toward math can affect your child's math performance?

Kids encouraged to enjoy math do better in it. But kids whose parents don't like it often have trouble with math. To help your child feel positive about math:

- **Say often** that you believe everyone can be successful in math.
- **Avoid stereotypes.** Children of all races and genders can do well in math.
- **Talk about careers** that use math—meteorology, aviation, engineering.
- **Point out ways** you use math.



Fit simple activities into busy schedules

All parents these days are busy people. But even on your busiest days, there are lots of things you can do to support your child's learning. You can:

- **Listen and respond** when your child is talking to you.
- **Read** with your child.
- **Fill** your home with books and other reading materials.
- **Quiz** your child on sight words, math and other facts.
- **Look up** new words in the dictionary together.
- **Talk** about the events of the day.
- **Review** your child's homework.
- **Demonstrate** organization by keeping a family calendar.
- **Help** your child locate places mentioned in the news on a map.
- **Offer** your child choices (make sure you can live with the options).
- **Ask** your child "What if ..." questions and discuss the answers.
- **Tell** your child family stories.
- **Engage** your child in word play, riddles and tongue twisters.

Attendance comes first

One of the most critical things you can do to help your child achieve academic success is to get her to school on time each day. Frequent absences in elementary school can set a pattern that leads to poor grades and dropping out later on. To show your child you take attendance seriously:

- **Talk** about the importance of school. Stress that attending is your child's job.
- **Discuss** the consequences of missing school—makeup work, lost knowledge.
- **Allow** absences only when your child is sick or there is a family emergency.





How can I motivate my child to try rather than quit?

Q: Last year was a challenge for my child in school. Whenever his homework got hard, he refused to do it. When a project he was working on got complicated, he became angry and quit. How do I help him develop the ability to stick with tough tasks this school year?

A: Often, children who lack perseverance are afraid of failure. Rather than risk failing, they simply give up. Once you understand that fear is likely behind your child's behavior, it should be easier to help him overcome it. Here's what to do:

- **Help your child see the value of effort.** Say things like, "It's more important to *try your best* than it is to *be the best*."
- **Show your child that mistakes are really chances to learn.** When he thinks he's made a mistake, help him figure out what he can learn from it. Admit your mistakes, too, and talk about what you learn from them. Make it clear that everyone makes mistakes.
- **Encourage your child to keep going when he tries to quit.** Let him know that you believe that with effort he can succeed. Motivate him by reminding him of his past successes.

Whatever you do, don't step in and do the work for your child. As his confidence grows, you'll find that his ability to persevere will grow right along with it.



Do you encourage respectful behavior?

Courtesy and respect for others are essential ingredients in a happy, productive classroom. Are you encouraging your child to show respect for teachers and classmates? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

- ___ **1. Do you remind** your child to say *please* and *thank you*?
- ___ **2. Do you teach** your child not to interrupt others when they are talking? Do you have a signal that means, "Wait your turn"?
- ___ **3. Does everyone** in your family (including adults) say "I'm sorry" if they have made a mistake?
- ___ **4. Have you taught** your child how to shake hands and introduce herself when meeting new people?

- ___ **5. Are you** a good role model? If you show courtesy to others, so will your child.

How well are you doing?

More *yes* answers mean you are raising a courteous and respectful child. For each *no*, try that idea.

"Children are like wet cement. Any word that falls on them makes an impact."
—Dr. Haim Ginott

Join a powerful partnership

Your child benefits when you work with his teacher to support learning. In the first few weeks of school, make an effort to:

- **Meet the teacher.** Make plans to attend back-to-school night. If you can't go, ask the teacher for a short meeting.
- **Share information** to increase understanding. Tell the teacher about things that may affect your child's work, such as a divorce, a move or a new baby.
- **Learn what's expected.** Ask about homework and special assignments.
- **Ask what you can do** to help your child learn, in the classroom and at home.

Checklists and calendars boost responsibility

Elementary students need help developing the skills they need to take responsibility for their learning. To help your child:



- **Write expectations down.** Post lists of chores, morning responsibilities and school preparations and let her check them off as she completes them.
- **Show her how to keep track** of assignments and schedules on a calendar.

How to help with homework

Helping with homework does not mean doing your child's homework *for* him. He needs to build confidence in his ability to do it himself. To give the right kind of help:

- **Make sure** your child understands the assignments. Have him read the directions to you (or read them together).
- **Review** your child's homework every day.
- **Offer a break** if your child is frustrated. Then ask questions to help him figure it out.
- **Take homework time** seriously. Work on a task of your own as your child works.

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