

# Helping Children Learn<sup>®</sup>

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

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## Get organized to help your child have a great school year

A new school year is a fresh start. It's an ideal time to create routines and establish habits that will support your child's efforts in school. Use these simple strategies to keep your family organized for learning success:

- **Set priorities.** Schoolwork, family time and healthy habits come first. Schedule time for these on your family calendar. If there are open blocks of time, your child can add activities.
- **Create an evening routine.** Getting organized each evening for the next day makes mornings a snap. Make lunches, pack items needed for school in your child's backpack and agree on outfits. Set and stick to a bedtime that lets your child get nine to 11 hours of sleep.
- **Create a morning routine.** If your child does the same things in the same order each day, she's less likely to forget a step. List her tasks to get ready for school: Eat breakfast, brush teeth, put lunch into backpack, etc.
- **Designate a homework time.** Pick a time when your child will have the most energy and motivation to work. This could be right after school, or after she has had a chance to relax a bit. A set time makes it easier for your child to get down to business. Create a quiet study spot and equip it with paper, pencils and other necessary supplies.



## Let your child practice responsibility

Learning to fulfill responsibilities can be challenging for some children. Your child may forget things. But keeping track of everything for him won't help him learn. To teach him to take responsibility for himself and his belongings:

- **Write down tasks** you expect your child to do. Post checklists—of his chores, items to pack for school, etc.—and have him check off tasks as he completes them.
- **Help your child decide** where to store his things when he's not using them.
- **Give him a calendar.** Show him how to use it to keep track of his assignments and activities.
- **Let your child experience** the consequences of forgetting or losing something. Don't drive his homework to school. If he can't find his library book when it's due, have him pay the fine.
- **Praise him** when he meets his responsibilities.
- **Set an example.** Put your keys in their assigned spot. Check your calendar to prepare for the day.

## Tune in to homework

Teachers give homework to reinforce their students' understanding of the concepts taught in class. Homework is also a crucial communication link between the school, you and your child.

Review your child's homework every day. Talk with her about what she's learning. Your interest sends the message that her education is important. And if your child is struggling, let the teacher know.

## Set the table for success

Studies show that sharing at least one meal a day as a family can improve your child's language skills and help him do better in school. Family meals help children:



- **Build vocabulary.**
- **Improve conversation skills.**
- **Learn social skills,** such as manners and sharing.
- **Feel a connection to family** and a sense of belonging.
- **Establish healthy eating habits.**

Source: "Family Meals spell S-U-C-C-E-S-S," Promoting Family Meals Project, Purdue University Center for Families, [nswc.com/eatandtalk](http://nswc.com/eatandtalk).

## Take attendance seriously

Everyone at school is working to help your child achieve. But only *you* can make sure she gets to school every day. Discuss the importance of attendance. Explain to your child that:



- **Missing school** means missing learning and time with friends. Your child will also have to work harder to catch up.
- **The only time** she can miss school is when she's sick or there's an emergency.



## How can I convince my child that math isn't so bad?

**Q:** My son had a hard time with math last year. Now he says he can't do it and he hates it. I'm sympathetic—I don't like math either. How can I make this better for him?

**A:** Research shows that parents' attitudes about math affect how well their children do in math. Kids whose parents say they didn't like math when they were in school often have trouble in math.

So, instead of agreeing with your son's feelings, be positive! Tell him that you believe math is important and everyone can learn it. If you say it often enough, he may start to believe it.

To motivate your child:

- **Connect math to his life.** When you and your child go to a store, bank or restaurant, point out all the ways people use math. At dinner, challenge family members to talk about one way they used math that day.
- **Discuss careers that use math.** Airline pilots, architects and astronauts all use math to do exciting things.
- **Make math practice a game.** Together, add up the numbers on license plates you see. Estimate the number of cereal pieces he can fit in a cup (then count). Calculate how many days are left until his birthday.



## Are you making the most of read alouds?

Reading aloud to your child is one of the best ways to help her become a better reader. The way you read aloud can make a difference, too. Do you know the strategies that promote reading? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you have** a regular time to read aloud each day? Set aside at least 20 minutes.
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you get** your whole family involved? Take turns choosing books to read.
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you pause** while reading to discuss the story with your child? What does she think will happen next?
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you give** your child a turn to read aloud to you?
- \_\_\_ **5. Do you choose** an exciting place in the story to finish

reading, so you will both want to read again the next day?

### How well are you doing?

*More yes answers mean you are building your child's reading skills. For each no, try that idea from the quiz.*

*"We have an obligation to read aloud to our children ... and not to stop reading to them just because they learn to read to themselves."*

—Neil Gaiman

## Help your child turn dreams into goals

Kids often mention vague goals without actually setting them (I want to finish my report on time). But it takes more than a wish to reach a goal. It takes planning and hard work. Encourage your child to:

- **Think about past successes.** Has he mastered something challenging before? How did he do it?
- **Set short-term goals.** Help him decide on realistic steps to take toward his ultimate goal. Achievement is a great motivator to keep going.

Then cheer him on! Say things like, "You are really sticking with this. I'm very impressed."

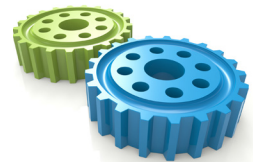
## Bedrooms are for sleeping

While screen media—TV, videos, computer games and apps—may have a place in your child's life, it shouldn't be in her bedroom. Research shows that kids with screens in their rooms spend less time reading, do less well in school and are more likely to be obese than other kids. Confine screen use to locations where you can supervise.

Source: "School, health and behavior suffer when children have TV, video games in bedroom," Iowa State University News Service, [nswc.com/bedroom](http://nswc.com/bedroom).

## Set the tone for teamwork

When parents and teachers work together, students thrive! To begin a productive relationship with your child's teacher:



- **Introduce yourself** and exchange contact information.
- **Ask questions respectfully** and make requests rather than demands.
- **Be positive.** Be prepared to hear about your child's weaknesses as well as his strengths. Work with the teacher to find ways to help your child do his best.

### Helping Children Learn®

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