

Helping Children Learn[®]

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

Harvard Elementary School



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For a less frantic schedule, put school and family first

Are you eating dinner in the car *again*? Is your child so tired from karate class and soccer practice he can't focus on his homework? Your family may be over-scheduled. It's a common problem. But there are things you can do to ensure you and your child have the time you need for activities *and* time together. Try these tips:



		1 library	2	3 study group	4
6 movie	7	8 soccer practice	9 study group	10 soccer practice	11
13	14 study group	15 soccer practice	16	17 soccer practice	18
20	21 library	22 study group	23	24 library	25
27	28 soccer practice	29	30 soccer practice	31	

- **Get a big calendar.** Block out time for critical things. Your child has to go to school every day. He needs time for homework. These aren't negotiable.
- **Talk about the activities that matter** most to your family. Is eating dinner together a high priority? What about a family visit to grandparents? Put these on the schedule next.
- **Add your child's activities.** Include the real time each one takes. Add in the time to drive to and from practice or the game.
- **Think about things you don't have time for** that you'd like to do. Choose one or two of these and put them on the schedule.
- **Don't feel that you need to fill** in every minute. Your child needs some downtime where he can do nothing at all. So do you. And you need time together.

If you have to say *no* to an activity, you may be saying *yes* to school success and a closer family. That's not a bad trade.



When it comes to discipline, be positive

Preparing your child for academic success involves using appropriate discipline. But discipline is not the same as punishment—it's almost the opposite! One of the most critical parts is encouraging *good* behavior. Research shows it works to:

- **Focus on changing two** or three behaviors at a time.
- **Provide details** of the way you want your child to behave. Saying "When Sarah asks for a turn, please give her one," is better than simply saying "Be nice."
- **Model good behavior.** Kids learn from watching parents.
- **Take one step at a time.** If you want your child to read for

20 minutes each night, start with a shorter time and build up.

- **Give frequent and specific** compliments. "Awesome! You shared the first time Sarah asked!"
- **Show enthusiasm.** There's a big difference between saying "Good job" and "SUPER!" with a smile and a high five.

Source: "How to Use Attention and Praise Effectively," Yale Parenting Center.

Avoid homework headaches

Your child may not love homework, but a homework routine will make it easier for her to settle down to study time. To create one:



- **Choose the same time** each day. It reduces the need for nagging.
- **Include the whole family.** Turn off the TV. Read or do quiet chores.
- **Keep rescheduling** to a minimum. If there is a conflict, be sure your child knows when homework time will be.
- **Keep track** with an assignment calendar. Ask questions such as "How's the report coming? It's due Friday."

Make reading a happy habit

Before crossing homework off the to-do list each day, remember the importance of daily reading. Kids who read often—and enjoy it—develop positive attitudes about this important skill. Try to:



- **Show enthusiasm.** "Hooray! We get to relax and read now!"
- **Keep appealing books** on hand.

Get psyched for science

Your child is participating in a science fair. You say "Great!" but worry about the workload. To keep it manageable and fun:

- **Consider your child's interests.** Look for intriguing, educational experiments together at the library or online.
- **Be creative.** Ask "What if ...?" and brainstorm about different twists your child might give a popular experiment.
- **Supervise.** Help your child make a step-by-step plan for completing his project on time. Encourage him while he does the work.

Source: "Science Fair Secrets for Parents," Steve Spangler Science, nswc.com/fair.



How do I help my defiant child get more organized?

Q: My daughter and I are locked in a power struggle over just about everything. She refuses to pick up after herself, and her room is a disaster. She can't find her homework. She can't get ready on time in the morning. She says, "It's my room. I can do what I want." How do I get her to take responsibility?



A: This battle is about more than just a tidy room. It's time to help your daughter remember that there are boundaries and rules she needs to follow. While it may be her room, it's *your* house and *you* get to set the rules for the family. Motivate your child to take responsibility by using a combination of help and consequences.

To get her started:

- **Set a timer and a small goal.** By now, tidying the room may seem like an overwhelming task. Set the timer for 15 minutes and offer to help her put away her clothes. The key is to *help*—not to do the job yourself.
- **Establish a positive consequence.** Is there something she wants you to do? Perhaps give her a ride to a friend's house? Say you're happy to do it—after the clothes are picked up.
- **Refuse to engage in power struggles.** She knows the rules, and she knows the consequences. When she meets her part of the bargain, you will meet yours.



Does your child read aloud to you?

Reading aloud doesn't have to be a one-way street. Parents who encourage children to read aloud to them help their children become stronger readers. Are you helping your child develop reading fluency? Answer *yes* or *no*:

1. **Do you set aside** at least a little time each day for your child to read aloud?
2. **Do you try** to make reading time low-stress by having it when you can give your child your undivided attention?
3. **Do you avoid** jumping in right away if your child mispronounces a word?
4. **Do you switch** books if there are too many words your child doesn't know?
5. **Do you talk** about the book with your child when

he finishes it? Which parts did you each like?

How well are you doing?

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

"What a child doesn't receive he can seldom later give."

—P.D. James

Prepare for test success

You know your child should prepare for tests, but what should you do to help? It's a good idea to:

- **Have your child ask** the teacher what will be covered.
- **Supervise several study sessions.** Studying works best when it's done over time—not at the last minute.
- **Use resources.** Make flash cards, print out blank maps, or have your child take a practice test.
- **Be positive.** "You've got this material memorized! You'll do well!" There's no need to pressure your child. Support and preparation are all she needs.

Team up against stress

He used to love school, but now he often says he's too sick to go. His grades are falling. He doesn't spend time with his friends. Your child may be under stress.

Remind him that you are on his side. And if you suspect stress is causing school-related issues for your child, contact his teacher. See if there are things you can do together to work on the problem.

Keep screens in their place

By age nine, many children are media savvy. They are fans of actors, music groups and online games. But too much screen time interferes with study time—and some online activity can be dangerous. To get control:



- **Set and enforce limits.** Kids this age should spend no more than two hours per day—total—in front of a screen.
- **Be aware** of what your child sees.
- **Record TV shows.** Let your child watch them on your schedule, without the ads.

Source: J.P. Steyer, *Talking Back to Facebook*, Simon and Schuster.

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