

Helping Children Learn[®]

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

Harvard Elementary School



September 2014

Get ready, get set, get back to school with ease

School has started again! That means it's time to introduce (or reintroduce) the routines that will make your family's lives run smoothly. These same routines, research shows, can also help your child do better in school. Consider calling a family meeting to brainstorm better ways to accomplish necessary tasks. To get the ball rolling:

- **Ask your child** what daily efforts were the toughest last year. Did he find himself racing for the bus? Arriving at school without something he needed? Could he finish homework and still have time to play?
- **Make a plan together.** Don't start by changing everything—focus on one or two things that will make a real difference.
- **Establish an evening routine.** List the things everyone should do before bedtime. That's the time to find gym shoes. Your child should also make sure his homework is in his folder, the folder is in his backpack, and the backpack (with the gym shoes!) is on a "launchpad" by the door.
- **Set a reasonable bedtime.** It's the best way to have a happier and more stress-free morning. And your child will be relaxed and ready to learn when he gets to school.



Source: Michigan Department of Education, "What Research Says About Parent Involvement in Children's Education," niswc.com/ready.



Begin a parent-teacher conversation

Did you ever watch children on a see-saw? They have to work together. If one child gets off, the other can't ride. That's a good way to think about your relationship with your child's teacher. Neither of you can educate your child without the important contributions of the other person. To start building a strong parent-teacher partnership:

- **Tell the teacher** how to reach you. Provide all your phone numbers and email addresses. If they change during the year, let the teacher know right away.
- **Talk to the teacher** about your child. Plan to attend back-to-school night and parent-teacher conferences. If you can't attend them, or if your child is having

difficulty, ask for an appointment to meet another time.

It's important that you share information about your child with the teacher. Open communication is a critical key to your child's success in school.

Source: J. Allen, "Effective Home-School Communication," Harvard Family Research Project, *FINE Newsletter*, niswc.com/partners.

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Respect is for everyone

Some children act one way at home and another way at school. To promote civility when you're not around:



- **Tell your child** not to check her good manners at the door.
- **Stress the need** to be polite to everyone: cafeteria worker, teacher, principal.
- **Ask the teacher** how respect is taught at school, then practice at home.

School is an important job

Motivate your child by helping him understand that learning is his primary responsibility. Try to:

- **Speak positively about school.** Talk about the ways education will help your child achieve his goals.
- **Help your child stay focused.** Pick a quiet, regular time and place for studying.
- **Encourage time management.** Divide long-term assignments into small parts with reasonable deadlines.

Source: "What You Can Do at Home to Help Your Child Succeed at School," LearningToGive.org, niswc.com/job.

Give praise with purpose

One of the best parts of parenting is admiring your child's accomplishments. Effective praise can even help build on those successes. To make compliments count:

- **Include details.** "You studied every day for your test and got an A!" is better than "Good job!"
- **Be honest.** Say it only if you mean it. Then your child can trust what you say.
- **Emphasize effort.** Focus on things your child works hard to do.



Source: H. Hatfield, "The Right Way to Praise Your Kids," WebMD, niswc.com/purpose.



How can working parents stay involved in school?

Q: I am going back to work. I used to be a regular volunteer in my daughter's class, but I can't do that any more. How can I still provide her and her teacher with help and support?

A: There is no question that when parents support their children's education, the children are more successful. Volunteering in class is just one way to make a difference.

In fact, research shows that things parents do *outside* the classroom can have a bigger impact on learning. First and most importantly, you need to let your daughter know that school is your family's top priority.

You do that in several ways:

- **Set a schedule** that allows her plenty of time to finish schoolwork.
- **Have conversations** with your daughter about what she's learning in school. Offer positive comments. Simply saying, "That sounds really interesting. I hope you'll tell me more" will motivate her.
- **Leave time for reading.** Don't give up the joys of reading aloud. And sometimes, try reading a book she's reading and then discussing it.
- **Support her teacher.** Ask what you can do at home. Could you assemble packets of student activity materials? Cut out a bulletin board display?

You *can* continue to play a role in your daughter's education.



Could you make reading more fun?

Even if your child knows how to read, he won't spend his free time reading unless he enjoys himself. Are you doing everything you can to promote a love of reading? Answer *yes* or *no* to the following questions:

1. **Do you still read aloud** to your child—even if he can also read to himself?
2. **Do you make bedtime** early enough that your child has at least 15 minutes to read in bed before lights out?
3. **Do you let your child** read what he likes for pleasure?
4. **Do you offer your child** nonfiction books? Kids sometimes prefer to read about things that are true.
5. **Do you make sure** your child gets to read more titles

in a series if he enjoyed one?
It's a bridge to chapter books.

How are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are teaching the pleasures of reading. For each no, try that idea.

"Experience is a hard teacher because she gives the test first, the lesson afterwards."
—Vernon Law

Make time for playtime

Did you know that while children are playing at home, they can develop skills that make them better learners? These include:

- **Curiosity.** Don't throw out that old manual typewriter or broken music box. Let your child take it apart. He may start to figure out how things work.
- **Imagination.** Acting out his stories lets your child be an author. Collect hats and clothes for costumes, curtains for capes.
- **Creativity.** Encourage your child to write a story or paint a picture. Display his work with pride.



Source: L. Calkins, *Raising Lifelong Learners: A Parent's Guide*, Addison-Wesley.

Aim for perfect attendance

Research is clear: Attendance has an impact on school success. Commit to having your child be prompt and present. You can:

- **Post the school calendar** and plan appointments and vacations around it.
- **Explain the benefits** of timeliness to your child—better learning, time with friends at the bus stop, relaxed mornings.

No worries: Banish anxiety

Your child loved school last year—but this year, she doesn't want to go. Many students show some anxiety about school. Here are some ways you can help:

- **Reassure your child** that she's up to the challenge of the new work.
- **Encourage her** to spend time doing things she enjoys. It's the surest way to make new friends.
- **Put grades in perspective.** Is she doing her best? Is she learning? That's what's really important.

Source: D. Bloch, *The Power of Positive Talk: Words to Help Every Child Succeed*, Free Spirit Publishing.

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