Studies prove that even one more hour of sleep can help your child do better in school. His brain will work better. He’ll be more alert and able to pay attention. He’ll remember material with greater accuracy.

To help your child get the recommended 10 hours of sleep each night:

• Follow a schedule. Try to have the same times for meals and snacks; home-work; games, TV and other recreation; and bedtime.

• Get your child active and outdoors. Exercise and fresh air help kids sleep better.

• Create a bedtime routine. Brush teeth, take a bath, put on pajamas and read a brief story. Review something positive from the day. Then, lights out.

• Make your child feel safe. Put a night light in his room, if necessary. Leave his door slightly open. Tell him you’ll check on him periodically.

Four ingredients that can help make any child more successful

Kids can be successful without a lot of outside help. Here are four things that will make any child more successful:

1. **Support.** Kids need to know that someone is in their corner. They can be successful if they feel that someone cares deeply about whether they succeed or fail, and if someone is proud of their successes and their efforts.

2. **Boundaries and expectations.** Kids need adults who act like adults. Parents who are firm and loving have children who do better at school, feel more self-confident and get into less trouble than kids whose parents are too strict—or too lenient.

3. **Empowerment.** All people need to know they make a difference. Encourage children to provide service to others. Make sure they take part in school, community or religious organizations that give them the chance to do community service.

4. **Constructive use of time.** After school, kids still need to be involved in constructive activities. Research shows that children who watch more than 10 hours of TV per week are at greater risk of drug use and school failure.

**Source:** P. Scales, “How to Equip Our Children for Success,” Our Children, Specialty Publications, Inc.

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**“That energy which makes a child hard to manage is the energy which afterwards makes him a manager of life.”**

—Henry Ward Beecher

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Teach your child how to become a more confident test-taker

Test anxiety often comes from self-doubt. If your child doesn’t think he will succeed on a test, he probably won’t.

You can help him become more confident before a test if you:

- **Take off the pressure.** Tell your child that tests just show the teacher what he’s learned so far, and what he needs help with.
- **Avoid last-minute panic.** Your child should begin to review and study days before the test. Cramming the night before a test rarely works.
- **Teach efficient studying.** Help your child focus on the material he hasn’t yet mastered.
- **Help your child connect new material to what he already knows.** These connections can help him recall the material during the test.
- **Encourage positive self-talk.** When your child gets stuck during a test, he can quietly say to himself, “I know this. The answer will come to me.”
- **Build your child’s confidence by reminding him of his strengths.**
- **Help your child visualize success.** Have him close his eyes and picture himself knowing the answers.

**Source:** S. DeBroff, The Mom Book Goes to School: Insider Tips to Ensure Your Child Thrives in Elementary and Middle School, Free Press.

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Ask questions to help your child develop high-level thinking skills

Thinking skills are the basis for learning every subject, from reading comprehension to math. To develop your child’s thinking skills, encourage her to:

- **Evaluate how she did** on a test or homework assignment. Ask your child, “What did you do well?” “What would you change next time?”
- **See patterns and reasons.** Ask your child what she sees in a spider web, for example. Or ask her to explain her or another’s behavior in a certain situation.

What happened first, second, etc.? Why?

- **Practice making decisions.** Ask your child how she would spend $5 and why. What if she had $100?
- **Explore different ways** to solve a problem. Help your child look at the pros and cons of each likely solution. Ask for specific reasons for her choice of a final solution.
- **Connect topics** that seem very different. If she’s learning about bees in school, ask, “How is a beehive like a town? How is it different?”

If your elementary schooler hates writing, start brainstorming!

Some kids don’t like to write because they think it’s boring. Many others find it too challenging. They get frustrated trying to think of ideas.

You can’t force a child to **love** writing. But you can turn a reluctant writer around. How? Try a little brainstorming.

Brainstorming is fun and reduces stress and anxiety, which sparks creativity. It can help your child break through writer’s block. Brainstorming also teaches other skills that help with writing. By creating lists, for example, your child will learn to break down complex ideas into smaller components.

Your child can use brainstorming to figure out a topic for a paper or to think of ideas for a story.

The next time your child gets writer’s block, have her:

- **Make lists.** Here are a few topics to help her get started:
  - Things I love. My favorite animals, places, toys or food. Things I know a lot about. Scary characters. Things adults say.
  - **Exaggerate.** Ask your child some questions that will spark new ways to think about people, events and scenes. “What would it feel like to be a car, a house or a dog? What would life be like if you had four hands?”
  - **Use visual images.** Have your child look at a picture and write down ideas it brings to mind. Or she can take a walk and make notes about what she sees.
  - **Add action to ideas**, people or things. She can think: What will happen next? How quickly?


Q: My third grader has suddenly decided he doesn’t want to go to school. At first, I couldn’t figure out why. Then he told me that he has no friends at school. Should I be worried? What can I do?

A: All children spend some time feeling left out. Like your son, these children often don’t want to go to school.

However, you are right to be concerned. The skills children need to get along with others in school are the same skills they’ll need to get along in life. Kids who have no friends may turn to negative or dangerous behaviors as a way of fitting in. Their grades may begin to drop, too.

What should you do?

- **Take your son’s comments seriously.** Many kids don’t want to tell their parents what’s going on in school. They are embarrassed to let Mom and Dad know that they don’t have anyone to play with.
- **Assure your son** that you want to work together with him to solve the problem. Be as gentle as you can. Kids who are being rejected at school often feel it’s their fault.
- **Talk with the teacher.** There may be recent changes in the class. Perhaps a new student has become best friends with your son’s former pal. Perhaps there is an outbreak of verbal taunting in school. Enlist the teacher’s help to resolve the problem.
- **Find ways for your son** to meet other children. Sign him up for an after-school activity such as scouts. As he feels better about himself, he will find it easier to relate to other children.
Setting weekly goals allows your child to take more responsibility for her learning. To help your child set goals and achieve them:

1. **Ask your child** to identify one goal at the beginning of the week. It might be finishing a book she has been reading for school.
2. **Have your child write** the goal on a piece of paper and post it on the refrigerator or bulletin board.
3. **Talk about how to accomplish** the goal. Help your child break the goal down into smaller steps. For example, “You could read two chapters every day.”
4. **Check your child’s progress** in a few days. If problems arise, talk about possible solutions. If your child falls behind in reading, a 10-minute extension of bedtime might help her catch up.
5. **Help your child evaluate** how she did at the end of the week. Did she achieve her goal? Why or why not? Regardless of the outcome, praise your child for trying. Then set a new goal for next week.

Help a disorganized child take responsibility for belongings

You bought him a special notebook to write down his homework assignments. He forgot to bring it home. He needs to turn in his math worksheet—but he left it sitting on his desk at home.

Some kids never seem to learn how to take responsibility for their things. Here’s how you can help:

1. **Ask your child** to help develop a plan. Talk with him about what he needs to get more organized. You might say, “You’re having trouble getting to school with all your homework. Can you come up with a plan that would help you remember? Why don’t you think about it, and we’ll discuss it at dinner?”
2. **Let your child** try to make his plan work. That means you won’t rescue him. If he leaves his homework at home, don’t rush to school to take it to him. Let him face the consequences.
3. **Offer suggestions** of how to make changes, but let him be responsible. “How about if we try placing a box here by the door? Then you can put everything that needs to go to school in the box. What do you think of that?”

Source: E. Ellis, *Raising a Responsible Child*, Birch Lane Press, Carol Publishing Group.

It Matters: Building Responsibility

Responsibility leads to success in the classroom

Kids who learn to be responsible do better in school. They get along better with teachers and peers. They make better decisions. They’re more apt to try, follow through and succeed.

Here’s how to boost your child’s sense of responsibility:

- **Revamp his chore list.** Are you still packing your child’s lunch? How about making his bed? If so, pass the torch. Most elementary schoolers are capable of handling such tasks. Don’t overload him with too many chores, but work toward giving him meaningful responsibilities.

- **Expose him to money.** If he does not have an allowance, consider giving him one. By letting your child manage his own money, he may develop more respect for it. Include him when you’re working on your budget. Don’t share specific financial details, but let him see what budgeting looks like. Say things like, “I’d love to order pizza tonight, too, but it’ll have to wait. Payday isn’t until Friday.”

- **Use consequences to teach.** When your child makes a mistake, don’t swoop in to save him (unless he’s in true danger). By allowing him to experience the consequences of his actions, he’s more likely to learn not to make the same mistake again. If you’re always running to his rescue, he’ll only learn that he doesn’t have to take responsibility for anything.