

Helping Children Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School



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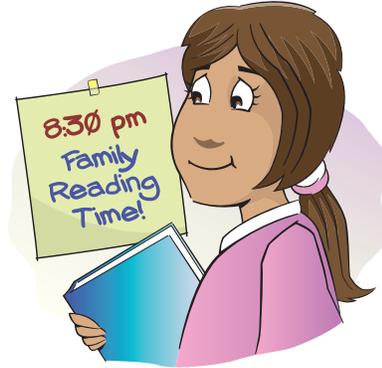
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Educational Service Unit 10

Take easy steps now to get the school year off to a great start

It's a new school year! That usually means new routines, schedules and priorities for elementary schoolers and their families. Try these practical ideas to set your child and yourself up for a great year:

- **Keep a family calendar.** Mark each family member's activities in a different color.
- **Plan for after-school activities.** Schedule adequate time for homework, play, sports, clubs and family time.
- **Establish a family reading time.**
- **Stock a study area** for your child. Provide paper, pencils, a dictionary and other needed supplies.
- **Set up a file for school notices** so they won't get misplaced.
- **Keep an eye on recreational screen time.** Monitor the time your child spends watching TV, playing electronic games, texting and surfing the Internet. Set a firm rule that homework and chores come before screen time. Be sure that she has plenty of time to read, exercise and just relax.
- **Collect important phone numbers,** such as numbers for the school office, after-school program and a neighbor. Post them along with current work, doctor and other emergency contact numbers.
- **Make a backup plan.** Find another parent who will exchange school carpool favors—in case you get sick or delayed by work or traffic.



Attendance affects success

Missing school can hurt both the absent students and their classmates.

When students miss school, they miss out on learning. They have to work harder to catch up. And when teachers have to use class time to repeat material for those who were absent, the whole class is delayed.

Source: K. Nauer and others, "Strengthening Schools by Strengthening Families," Center for New York City Affairs.

Respect leads to learning

Respectful behavior is a key to a happy and productive school for all. Encourage your child to:



- **Be courteous.** Remind him to say *please* and *thank you*.
- **Do his job.** If students don't do their jobs—paying attention in class, homework—it's harder for everyone to learn.
- **Raise his hand** and wait to be called on.
- **Listen to the teacher's comments.** To help children learn, teachers have to point out mistakes. Your child will do better if he can accept constructive feedback.

Source: R.K. Payne, *Understanding Learning: The How, the Why, the What, aha! Process*, Inc.

Have fun with nonfiction

In addition to reading stories, children need to learn how to read for information. To interest your child in nonfiction reading:

- **Look for books** about how things work. How does wheat get from a field into her bowl of pasta? How does the dance contest get onto the TV screen?
- **Have her write** a how-to manual for a task she enjoys. She could explain how to shoot a basketball or make a great sandwich.
- **Read nonfiction yourself.** Help her see that learning takes place anywhere and at any time—not just in school.



Create a responsibility checklist

Your child's sense of responsibility plays a big part in his school success. And the best way to strengthen that sense is to give your child responsibilities.

Sit down together and make a checklist of a few age-appropriate tasks you expect him to handle. Agree on rewards for a job well done and consequences for shirking his duties. Here's a starter checklist you can adapt:

- **Get up** on time.
- **Fix** breakfast for himself.
- **Select** an outfit.
- **Pack** a lunch.
- **Complete** homework.
- **Bring** you forms to sign.
- **Return** signed forms to school.
- **Maintain** grades.
- **Get along** with siblings.
- **Keep** his bedroom tidy.
- **Complete** assigned chores.
- **Get to bed** on time.
- **Take care** of personal hygiene.
- **Feed and care** for pets.



How can I put an end to homework battles?

Q: School has just begun and my fourth grader and I are already at odds over homework. First we argue about when he should start. Next he says he did his reading at school. Then he “doesn’t understand” the math. How can I improve my son’s cooperation, reduce his frustration and make homework time easier?



A: Homework hassles can affect the whole family. But you can go a long way toward eliminating them with four simple steps:

- 1. Set a regular homework time.** Kids benefit from routines. Some work best right after school. Others do better if they work right before or after dinner. Let your child choose, but once he picks a time, that’s it.
- 2. Make homework time a mandatory event.** This will solve the problem of “I did that at school.” If he truly has no assignments, he can spend the time reading ahead or solving practice math problems.
- 3. Ask questions** when your child says he doesn’t understand. For example, instead of explaining the math, ask, “How did you solve that last problem? Could you do that here, too?”
- 4. Never do your child’s work for him.** When the teacher checks his homework, she will see what he understands—or doesn’t. If you do the work, she won’t know if she needs to reteach something.



Are you promoting healthy habits?

A new school year is a great time to establish (or reinforce) some healthy habits for your child. Are you supporting success at school by promoting wellness at home? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

- 1. Do you enforce** a regular bedtime? Elementary school kids need at least 10 hours of sleep to function at their best.
- 2. Do you make sure** your child eats breakfast each day?
- 3. Do you provide** nutritious snacks for your child to eat after school?
- 4. Do you encourage** your child to exercise every day? Studies show exercise can improve memory and focus.
- 5. Do you remind** your child to wash her hands often?

Hand washing reduces illness-related school absences.

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are helping your child learn habits for good health. For each no, try that idea.

“The best thing you can give children, next to good habits, are good memories.”

—Sydney J. Harris

Communication builds a strong parent-teacher team

You and the teacher both want your child to succeed in school. And when you work together, the results can be powerful. To ensure a great parent-teacher relationship:

- **Set a pleasant tone.** Ask questions respectfully, and let the teacher know that you appreciate her work.
- **Listen with a positive attitude.** Addressing struggles is the only way to find solutions.
- **Think of the team.** Make requests, not demands. Speak of *we* instead of *you*. “How can *we* stay in touch to help Ben?”

Let your child learn by doing

When children are babies, parents must protect them in every way they can. But by the time kids reach elementary school, they are able to do lots of things by themselves. Doing so teaches them valuable skills such as communication, negotiation, perseverance and decision making.

Foster your child’s budding independence. Let her do some age-appropriate things for herself. Will she make mistakes? Probably. But she’ll learn from them.

Encourage better listening

Listening is one of the most important skills kids need for school success. To develop your child’s listening skills:



- **Be a role model.** When your child tells you something, stop what you’re doing. Give him your full attention.
- **Practice reflective listening.** When you say something, ask your child to repeat it in his own words.
- **Stop and ask questions** when you read aloud. At an exciting part, you might ask, “Why do you think she said that?”

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