

Helping Children Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School



December 2010

Title I Cooperative
Educational Service Unit 10

Evaluate your child's activities

Piano lessons on Mondays, soccer practice on Tuesdays and Thursdays, karate on Wednesdays—no wonder some kids feel stressed out. As a result, they do less well in school. They are also more likely to get sick.

Ask yourself these questions about your child's schedule:

- **Does she have time for unstructured play with friends?** (Do not count practices that are planned and run by adults.) Kids need time for relaxation and just "hanging out."
- **When and where does she do homework?** Does she work on math in the car as you drive from one activity to another? Schoolwork takes concentration, and that takes time.
- **Why does she participate?** Sometimes, it's the parent, not the child, who chooses a class or a sport.
- **Does she get enough sleep?** Kids need between nine and 10 hours of sleep each day. Without that sleep, they don't learn as well. They can't remember what they have learned.

Remember—school is your child's most important job. If too many activities are getting in the way, it's time to cut back. Ask your child to choose one or two activities. Eliminate the others. She'll be happier and healthier—and she'll do better in school.

Source: Raleigh Philp, *Engaging Tweens and Teens*, ISBN: 1-89046-049-4, Corwin Press.



Directions make a difference

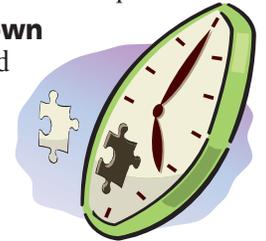
How can you help your child do better on tests? Remind him to read directions carefully. If he doesn't understand them, tell him to ask the teacher for help. When kids skip the directions on a test, they often make needless errors.

Source: "Helping Your Child with Test-Taking—Helping Your Child Succeed in School," U.S. Department of Education, www.ed.gov/parents/academic/help/succeed/part9.html.

Strengthen your child's attention span at home

Paying attention helps children learn. To improve your child's attention span:

- **Identify a sit-down activity** your child enjoys. Reading? Puzzles? Whatever it is, do that with her every day for 15 minutes.
- **Avoid interruptions** to help her stay focused on the activity.
- **Begin to decrease** the amount of time you interact with your child during the activity. Gradually you will notice that she focuses on her own for longer periods of time.



Communicate with your child's teacher

Your child will do better in school if you and his teacher stay in touch. After all, your child spends most of his time at home. You are the expert on your child's likes, dislikes, needs and issues.

Your contact doesn't have to be formal—you can send a quick note or an email. Ask the teacher about the best ways to correspond.

For example, if your child has trouble with a homework assignment, attach a note to the paper the child will turn in. It might say, "This

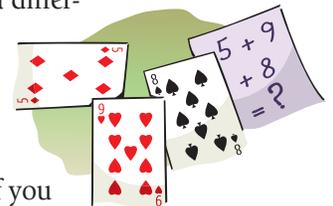
homework was tough for Kevin. It took an hour. Is that okay?" Or you could email the teacher, "Some of the boys are teasing Kevin. How can we work together to resolve this?"

Include your phone number and/or email address so the teacher can contact you easily. Remember, teachers are in class during the day, so you may not get an immediate response.

Source: "Talk with Your Child's Teacher," *Colorín Colorado*, www.colorincolorado.org/families/school/whynottalk.

A deck of cards can become a portable math game

December is the month to "deck the halls," but you can use a different "deck" to have some math fun with your child. Place a deck of cards on the table. Each of you draws one card. Then have your child add, subtract or multiply the cards. Keep a deck of cards handy so you can play wherever you and your child are.





How thoroughly should parents review homework?

Q: My son just showed me a composition he's planning to hand in tomorrow. It's filled with misspelled words and unclear writing. Should I let him turn it in as it is and get a low grade, or should I fix it for him?

A: It's great that you review your son's homework. Below are some dos and don'ts for helping with compositions.

Dos:

- **Do let your child find errors.** You might say, "I see a place in the second paragraph where a word is misspelled. Can you find it and fix it?"
- **Do ask your child to read** it aloud to you. He may notice his own mistakes.
- **Do ask your child questions** if something isn't clear. Then have him revise his composition.



Don'ts:

- **Don't do all your child's proofreading** for him.
- **Don't worry** if you don't know how to spell a word. Together, look the word up in the dictionary—you'll both learn a new word.
- **Don't write or type** your child's paper for him.
- **Don't be afraid** to tell your child there are some things you can't help with. Say, "Josh, I don't think Ms. Jones wants to see what *I* think about this subject. She wants to know what *you* think."



Are you helping your child read aloud?

Studies show that kids who can read aloud smoothly are most likely to have a good understanding of what they've read. Answer the following questions *yes* or *no* to see how you can help your child gain fluency:

- ___ **1. Do you read** aloud to your child—and set aside time for her to read aloud to you?
- ___ **2. Do you let** your child pick the book she wants to read?
- ___ **3. Do you try** not to interrupt or correct your child as she reads?
- ___ **4. Do you help** your child pronounce a word if she asks, then let her keep reading?
- ___ **5. Do you talk** about the books after your child is finished reading?

How did you do? *Each yes means you're helping your child learn to read aloud fluently. For each no answer, try that idea from the quiz.*

"No entertainment is so cheap as reading, nor any pleasure so lasting."
—Mary Wortley Montagu

Cooperate to end rudeness

Does your child talk back? Does she question your authority and make rude comments? If you're seeing this behavior at home, that's how she may treat educators and classmates, too. Talk with her teacher. When you work as a team, you can modify your child's inappropriate behavior. Setting limits and expecting respect—both at home and at school—will make a difference.

Routines shape behavior

Some children have "melt downs" or cope with stress by yelling or crying. Routines can help prevent this behavior. Make sure your child has a regular bedtime and stick to it. Have a morning routine. Do homework at a set time. You'll find you nag less and your child is calmer.

Miss school, miss learning

December is a busy month. Parents are often tempted to take their children out of school for an extra day or two. They think, "It won't really matter, right?"

Actually, missing a few days can matter a lot. Consider these in-class activities that can't be made up by doing extra homework:



- **A discussion** about the book the class is reading.
- **A science demonstration.**
- **Group work** on a project.
- **An introduction** to a math skill.

Research shows that being in school on time—every day—promotes academic success. So make your child's perfect attendance a goal for this month.

Source: J. Railsback, "Increasing Attendance," NWREL, http://educationnorthwest.org/webfm_send/302.

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P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474

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