

Helping Children Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School



January 2011

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Educational Service Unit 10

Share strategies to help your child get organized for schoolwork

Getting better grades often starts with getting more organized. Start the new year by expecting your child to be responsible about bringing home books, homework assignments and letters from his teacher.

Ask your child's teacher about the end-of-the-day routine in the classroom. Then talk with your child about taking time to think about what he is bringing home. Help him make a list to keep in his backpack that he can check each day. Include items he usually needs such as:

- **Spelling book.**
- **Math book.**
- **Reading assignments.**
- **Work sheets.**
- **Planner.**
- **Letters from the teacher or school.**



When your child gets home from school, go over the list with him. When he has finished his homework, have him check the list again to make sure he puts items he needs to take back to school in his backpack. Before bedtime, have him put his loaded backpack by the door, so he can grab it in the morning.

After a few weeks, expect your son to take sole responsibility for checking items to take to and from school. And remember, give him specific praise when he remembers to bring his books home and completes his homework on time.



A lack of focus can prevent learning

Children who can pay attention have the most success in school. They know how to listen carefully when someone is speaking or reading a story. If your child has difficulty paying attention at home, she may also be having trouble at school. To help your child learn to focus:

- **Turn off the TV.** Eliminate all distractions that keep your child from paying attention to the task at hand.
- **Tell your child what you expect.** "We are going to read together now. I would like you to sit next to me and look at the book while I read."
- **Keep work areas free of clutter.** Most children find it easier to concentrate without too many objects around them.
- **Ask!** For many children all it takes is this: "Anna, I need to talk to you. Will you please put the ball down and look at me?"

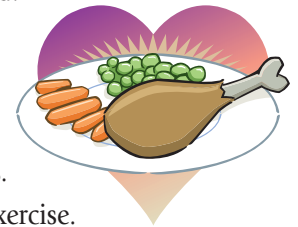
Quirky questions spark conversations with kids

Parents love getting to know their children better. Sometimes asking offbeat questions can start a conversation. For example, "If you could visit any place in the world, where would you go?" Or "If you could change one thing in life, what would it be?"

Focus on health this year

Healthy habits help your child maintain good attendance, strengthen her thinking skills and impact grades. So start 2011 right by setting the following goals. Resolve to make sure your child:

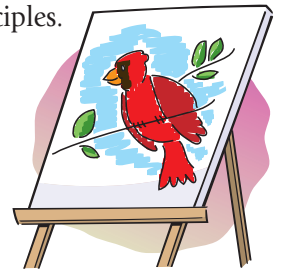
- **Has** a regular bedtime and gets adequate sleep.
- **Eats** nutritious meals and snacks.
- **Gets** plenty of exercise.



Banish the winter blues

Cold, gray days can make January seem like a boring month. It takes a little imagination, but you can turn those days stuck inside into opportunities for fun and learning! With your child, you can:

- **Cook up something fun.** Following recipes boosts reading and math skills. Plus, cooking teaches basic science principles.
- **Embrace art.** Whatever you try—painting, photography or dancing—your child will love discovering his artistic side.
- **Have a tea party.** Tie in history and literature by pretending to be a historical figure. Or be a character from a book.





How can parents build their children's patience?

Q: My daughter has no patience. When she wants something, she wants it immediately. Her teacher says she is impatient at school, too. She whines and complains when she isn't first. It's embarrassing and annoying. What can I do?

A: In this era of drive-through fast food restaurants and text messaging, it's hard for kids to wait. Yet patience is an important trait—one that your daughter needs in order to get along in the classroom and with friends.

Research also says that learning to be patient may benefit your daughter. One study tracked students identified as patient and impatient. Researchers allowed kids to take one marshmallow right away. But if the children waited a few minutes, they got two marshmallows. When the children in the study graduated from high school, those who had been identified as patient were the more successful students.

Encourage your daughter to make being patient her goal for the new year. To help her:

- **Don't accommodate her impatience.** When she asks for something right away, say, "In a minute."
- **Give her an idea** of how long she will need to wait. Knowing there's a limit will help.
- **Use a kitchen timer.** Try shorter lengths of time at first. Let her set it. She'll feel more in control. Gradually extend the time she must wait.



Does your child learn from failure?

Some parents want to wrap their child in a bubble so they never experience failure. But children learn from overcoming disappointments. Answer the following questions *yes* or *no* to see if you help your child learn from failure:

- ___ **1. Do you give** your child time to solve his problems instead of jumping in right away?
- ___ **2. Do you try** to be a good role model by pointing out how you plan to fix your mistakes?
- ___ **3. Do you help** your child keep things in perspective? "You didn't win the game. But you got a hit."
- ___ **4. Do you know** that your child will learn from failure?
- ___ **5. Do you encourage** good sportsmanship by helping your child be a gracious winner and a good loser?

How did you do? Each yes answer means you're helping your child learn to bounce back from defeat and disappointment. For each no answer, try that idea from the quiz.

"The men who try to do something and fail are infinitely better than those who try to do nothing and succeed."

—Lloyd Jones

Think outside the book

Studies show that when children read outside of school they're more likely to achieve success. So how can you encourage your child to read? Try magazines.

Books can be intimidating to some kids. Magazines seem more appealing. The articles are shorter and about interesting topics. And they often have photos or illustrations.

Your school or public library is a great place to help your child find a magazine. Ask the librarian to help him review the choices available.

If your child finds a favorite, consider giving him a subscription. Magazines make great gifts.

Source: "Children, Reading and Libraries," American Library Association, www.ala.org/ala/newspresscenter/mediapresscenter/presskits/kidsyourlibrarycampaign/ffkids06.cfm.

Confidence conquers all

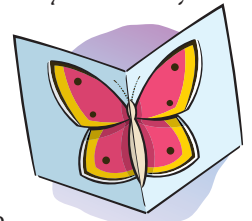
When homework is challenging, some kids just give up. The next time your child gets stuck, encourage her to say, "I know I can do this. I'll try again." Just like the little engine that could, she'll motivate herself if she says, "I think I can, I think I can."

Explain symmetry simply

Recognizing patterns is important for math success. Looking for *symmetry* is one way to build this skill.

Examine a picture of a butterfly with your child. Fold it in half. Notice how the two sides match up. That means the butterfly, like many other things in nature, is symmetrical. Symmetrical items have halves that are mirror images of each other.

Have your child look for symmetry in other places. How many examples can he find?



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