

# Helping Children Learn

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

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## REINFORCING LEARNING

### You can encourage school success

Educational research makes it clear: *Every* parent can help her child succeed in school! To do this:

- **Believe in your child.** Have high, but realistic, expectations.
- **Establish a daily routine** for homework, chores and meals.
- **Offer to help** in the classroom.
- **Model traits** you want your child to have, such as self-discipline and a love of learning.
- **Emphasize the value of hard work.** Don't let your child blame teachers or bad luck for poor grades.
- **Monitor** your child's after-school activities.
- **Make time** for reading, writing and family talks.
- **Be respectful** when talking with or about teachers.
- **Help your child** imagine how education will help her "get ahead" in life.
- **Foster individuality.** Respect your child's ideas, even when they're different from yours.



Source: "What Research Says about How Parents Make a Difference," Parent Portal, University of California Lawrence Hall of Science, <http://lhsparent.org/parentmessages.html>.

## ENCOURAGING READING

### Reading aloud boosts thinking skills

Even if your child knows how to read, keep reading to him. Remember that his understanding level is probably higher than his reading level, so you can read him books with new ideas and vocabulary. To develop thinking skills, ask questions about:

- **Words.** "What do you think this word means?" "Can you use it in another sentence?" "What other words mean the same thing?"
- **The story.** "Why did the character do that?" "Where did that event occur?" "What did she say to him?"
- **What's next.** "Where did we leave off yesterday?" "What do you think he should do?" "How do you think the story will end?"
- **The conclusion.** "Is that what you expected?" "If you were the author, how would you have ended the story?"

Sources: Elaine McEwan-Adkins, "Ask the Experts," ParentCenter.com, <http://parentcenter.babycenter.com/expert/bigkid/glearning/1382383.html>; and Tracy Grant, "The Reading Railroad to Happily Ever After," *The Washington Post*, Nov. 3, 2003 (The Washington Post Company, 1-800-627-1150, [www.washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com)).

## BUILDING CHARACTER

### Practice 'school manners' at home with your child

Kids who are impolite in class waste valuable learning time. Students do best when they treat each other and the teacher with respect. To ensure your child has good school manners, have him:

- **Practice good manners** at home. Say *please, thank you*, etc.
- **Wait patiently** for his turn to speak (instead of interrupting).
- **Use table manners** and clean up after himself.
- **Disagree politely**—without shouting.
- **Resist teasing.** It's just too easy to hurt others' feelings.

Source: "Parents Can Teach Children 'School Manners' at Home," The Ohio State University Extension, <http://delaware.osu.edu/fcs/pg3.html>.

## WORKING WITH YOUR SCHOOL

### Communicate with teachers

Make an effort to stay in touch with your child's teacher. If necessary, write frequent notes with simple questions. "Has Katie been turning in her homework?" "How can I help at home?" When parents and teachers work together, it makes a huge difference.



## YOUR CHILD AND YOU

### Celebrate back-to-school

Show your child how important school is by declaring a back-to-school holiday! Do things he enjoys, such as baking cookies, inviting friends over or visiting the zoo. Talk about all the fun school will bring.

Source: Jennifer Halpern, "Ready, Set, Go Back to School," *Parents*, September 1999 (Gruner + Jahr Publishing, 1-800-727-3682, [www.parents.com](http://www.parents.com)).



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## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

### How can I 'make time' to spend with my child?

**Q: I know it's important to be involved in my child's life, but between my work schedule and his school and other activities, we barely have time to talk. What can I do?**

**A:** Today's families spend many hours in the car. This provides good opportunities for one-on-one conversation. Here are some tips for car talk:

- **Start slow.** Don't bring up serious issues every time the engine starts. Begin with relaxed questions, such as, "What are you learning in math?"
- **Time it.** Don't bring up emotional topics unless you're sure you can finish the talk. You don't want to drop off your child with the most important things left unsaid.
- **Be safe.** Driving carefully is more important than keeping up with the conversation. If you become distracted, tell your child that you'll listen in as soon as you can.
- **Look ahead.** For some kids, less eye contact makes it easier to talk in the car. There are plenty of chances for face-to-face talks at home.

Source: Katherine Shaver, "Car Time Can Go Miles Toward Bonding," *The Washington Post*, September 3, 2001 (The Washington Post Company, 1-800-627-1150, [www.washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com)).



## PARENT QUIZ

### Is your child starting school off right?

"Well begun," said Aristotle, "is half done." Answer the following questions *yes* or *no* to see if you're helping your child start the school year off right.

- \_\_\_ **1. I read** with my child daily.
- \_\_\_ **2. I encourage** a homework routine—same time, same place every day.
- \_\_\_ **3. I meet** and stay in touch with my child's teachers.
- \_\_\_ **4. I enforce** a regular bedtime so my child gets enough sleep.
- \_\_\_ **5. I help** my child develop organized habits, such as choosing outfits at night and setting her backpack by the front door.

**How did you do?** Each *yes* answer indicates that you're starting the school year in an important way. For each *no* answer, consider using that idea from the quiz to change your answer to *yes*.

"By giving children lots of affection, you can help fill them with love and acceptance of themselves. Then that's what they will have to give away."  
— Dr. Wayne Dyer

## DISCIPLINE

### Family discipline doesn't have to be complicated

Discipline is one of parents' greatest challenges. Thankfully, simple guidelines can help. For example:

- **Evaluate family rules.** Choose a few key limits.
- **Explain the rules.** Help them make sense to your child.
- **Enforce rules every time.** Then your child will know you mean business.

## MOTIVATING YOUR CHILD

### Goal-setting equals success

What does your child want to do this year? Make the honor roll? Try out for a play? The first step is to set a goal. To start:

- **Be specific.** The clearer the goal, the better.
- **Think big.** Help your child pick exciting but reachable objectives.
- **Take notes.** Putting goals on paper makes them tangible.
- **Review regularly.** This reminds your child what she's striving for.

Source: Gerald H. Seijts, "Setting Goals When Performance Doesn't Matter," *Ivey Business Journal*, January/February 2001 (Richard Ivey School of Business, 1-800-646-8531, [www.ivey.uwo.ca](http://www.ivey.uwo.ca)).

## BUILDING RESPONSIBILITY

### 'Hand-me-downs' should include chores

In most families, "hand-me-down" clothes are a fact of life. Responsibilities should be, too. When your child is ready for "grown-up" jobs, pass them on.

Maybe your sixth grader could pack his lunch. Or your second grader could make his bed. Show pride in your child's new abilities!



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