

Study finds three ways to help your child succeed in school

Parents want their children to do their best in school. But what works? A study by researchers at Indiana University found that children do better in the classroom when parents:

- 1. Are positive.** You know that your child is sensitive to your emotions. Not surprisingly, the study found that to also be true for parents' attitudes about schoolwork. Parents who thought their child could do an assignment successfully had a child who believed that, too. In addition, the study found that encouragement from a parent led a child to be more motivated. Model positive attitudes, and your child will copy them.
- 2. Break it down.** A long assignment can overwhelm your child. One of the easiest things you can do to help is to break that big task into smaller pieces. The study found that when children worked at a task they thought they could handle, they did better at it.
- 3. Teach the importance of a final check.** One of the best habits to



instill in your child is to look over his work before handing it in. Oops—he added when he should have subtracted. He wrote *their* instead of *there*.

Correcting these minor mistakes can lead to a much better overall grade. In addition, the study found that children who were in the habit of checking over their work were more likely to volunteer to answer questions in class.

Source: Anne Dopkins Stright and others, "Instruction Begins in the Home: Relations Between Parental Instruction and Children's Self-Regulation in the Classroom," *Journal of Educational Psychology* (American Psychological Association, www.apa.org/journals/edu).

Make sure your child attends school daily!



As the school year begins, help your child get into the habit of going to school every day.

Research shows that missing school regularly can hurt both the students who miss class—and their classmates.

When students miss school, they miss out on learning. When they return, they have to work harder to catch up. After a while, it gets more difficult to catch up, and then kids are even more likely to miss school.

As a result, kids who miss school have lower levels of achievement throughout their school careers. By sixth grade, research shows that students who miss an average of just one day a week are more likely to drop out of high school.

The students who do come to class also miss out. When teachers have to repeat material or pay extra attention to kids who have been absent, everyone suffers.

Source: Kim Nauer, Andrew White and Rajeev Yerneni, "Strengthening Schools by Strengthening Families" (Center for New York City Affairs, New School, www.newschool.edu/milano/nyc affairs/documents/StrengtheningSchoolsOct08.pdf).

Show your child that reading for information can actually be fun



Children ask a lot of questions. Helping them find answers to those questions is a great way to encourage their curiosity. So be sure to add some nonfiction books to your child's reading list. Reading these books can help your child learn more about subjects that interest her.

Here are some fun activities to get your child reading more nonfiction:

- **Look for books** about how things work. How does the wheat in a field end up in the pasta on her plate? How does the football game get onto your TV screen? Books can help your child learn the answers to these questions.
- **Turn your reader into a writer.** Have her write her own "how-to" book. She can explain how to kick a soccer ball past a goalie. Or, she

can show a creative way to braid hair. Help her choose something she does well and then write step-by-step instructions. You can "publish" her book by adding photos or drawings she makes herself.

- **Read nonfiction books yourself.** Help your child see that learning takes place everywhere and at any time—not just in school.

Source: West Bloomfield (MI) Township Public Library, "Why Information Books," www.growupreading.org/grade3/index.php?section=010.

"Anything parents have not learned from experience, they can now learn from their children."

—Unknown

Research reveals rewards are just a short-term fix for motivation



You're talking with your child about doing well in school. "Nick's parents pay him for A's," he says. Do you pay up? In families across the country, parents are unsure of what to do. Will rewards lead to better grades and behavior? Or will they simply produce kids who won't do anything unless they get paid?

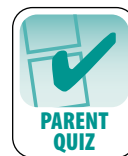
Researchers are finding that rewards can work—for a short time. But over the long run, they tend to be ineffective. A recent Clemson University study found that giving prizes for reading led kids to spend less time reading.

Here are effective ways you can reward your child for a job well done:

- **Offer a reward** you're willing to give. Don't offer candy if you're concerned about nutrition.
- **Tie the reward to the activity.** "If you are reading, you can stay up 15 minutes past your bedtime."
- **Don't waste your rewards.** If your child loves to read, don't offer a reward for finishing a book. Save it for cleaning out the rabbit cage.
- **Remember that your praise** is a huge reward. A high five from you may be all your child needs.

Source: Lisa Guernsey, "Rewards for Students Under a Microscope," *New York Times*, March 3, 2009 (www.nytimes.com).

Are you making the best use of family time?



There are only 24 hours in a day. Many families feel that there isn't enough time to fit in all the things that matter most.

The start of a new school year is the perfect time to think about how your family uses time. Answer *yes* or *no* to each question below:

___ **1. Do you make time** to do things as a family? Try to eat some meals together each week and plan time for family fun.

___ **2. Do you limit** the number of after-school activities? Kids need some quiet and unscheduled time each week.

___ **3. Do you have a regular time** for studying?

___ **4. Do you set limits** on screen time? Kids shouldn't be on the computer or watching TV all the time.

___ **5. Do you make time** to go to important school events like teacher conferences?

How well are you doing?

Each *yes* answer means you are making the most of the time you have.

For each *no*, try that idea in the quiz.

Elementary School
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Practical Ideas for Parents to Help Their Children. ISSN: 1523-1275

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P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474.
Fax: 1-800-216-3667.

Or visit our website: www.parent-institute.com.

Published monthly September through May by The Parent Institute®, a division of NIS, Inc., an independent, private agency. Equal opportunity employer. Copyright © 2009 NIS, Inc.

Publisher: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.

Editor: Rebecca Miyares.

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Help your child to work through challenges for school success



It's hard to get anywhere without perseverance. In fact, many of the world's most admired people (including Albert Einstein

and Abraham Lincoln) could not have succeeded without it. To help your child develop a work ethic that will last through school and life:

- **Talk about perseverance.** List examples of not giving up, such as finishing a tough homework assignment, learning to ride a bike or continuing to play a game when you're losing.
- **Find role models.** Name people who exemplify perseverance. They might be friends, relatives or famous people, such as Benjamin Franklin. Discuss their lives. Describe their traits.
- **Act it out.** What does it look like to persevere? Role play stories, such as *The Little Engine That Could*.

- **Draw a picture.** Have your child think of a time when he persevered even though it was tough. Suggest that he draw a picture of what worked for him.
- **List "success stoppers."** What keeps people from pushing forward? (Negative attitudes are a good example.) How can you and your child avoid these pitfalls?
- **Admit being human.** No one is perfect. Everyone must work through challenges. Help your child see that he has what it takes, no matter what.
- **Make a plan.** Choose sensible goals with your child. Believe that he'll succeed. Be supportive, and turn mistakes into lessons. He may need to start over, and that's okay!

Source: Leah Davies, M.Ed. "Instilling Perseverance in Children," Meet Kelly Bear, www.kellybear.com/TeacherArticles/TeacherTip58.html.

Teach your child to think about the consequences of behavior



Children often don't think about the results of their actions. So they don't see how leaving trash for someone else

to pick up is disrespectful.

Here's an easy game to play with your child to help her understand that all behavior has consequences:

You think of a sentence about a simple event. For example, "The baby cried." Now have your child think of the reason this might have happened. "Because her sister yelled."

Then you (or another player) tell what could happen next. "They had

to quiet the baby down, so everyone was late for school."

This is a good game to play when you're in the car or waiting in a line. It should help your child think about two important questions: What came *before*? What will happen *after*?

Then when you see your child doing something without considering the consequences, you can ask the questions: "What do you think will happen if you just leave your trash sitting there? What will be the consequence?"

Source: Deborah M. Plummer, *Anger Management Games for Children*, ISBN: 9781-8431-0628-9 (Jessica Kingsley Publishers, www.jkp.com).

Q: I am worried about my son. He is in second grade and has a weight problem. His sister is a third grader who goes to the same school. Today, he told me that the kids at school tease him and call him names. I asked if his sister took his side. He told me she actually joined in the name calling. I've talked with her about sticking up for her brother. What should I do?

Questions & Answers

A: Your son is lucky to have such a caring mom. It must be hard for him to be called names. Here are some steps you can take to turn things around:

- **Talk with his teacher.** Is she aware of the name calling? Ask if the school has a program on name calling and bullying.
 - **Talk with your son.** Get him to share his feelings about being called names. Let him know that other kids have experienced teasing and have found ways to cope with it.
 - **Make positive changes.** With your child, shop for healthy foods like fruits and vegetables. Encourage everyone in the family to get a little more exercise.
 - **Talk with your daughter.** She needs your support, too. Is she afraid that the other kids are going to start calling her names? Talk about how important it is to stand up for people who are being bullied. Look for stories in the news about people who have protected others.
- Finally, find ways to make each child feel special. Let your kids know you love them and are proud of them.

—Kristen Amundson,
The Parent Institute

It Matters: Responsibility

Teach your child to be responsible for mistakes



When school begins, many responsibilities are added to your child's life. Eventually, things fall through the cracks. Some kids are tempted to blame others. To help your child admit fault and learn from mistakes:

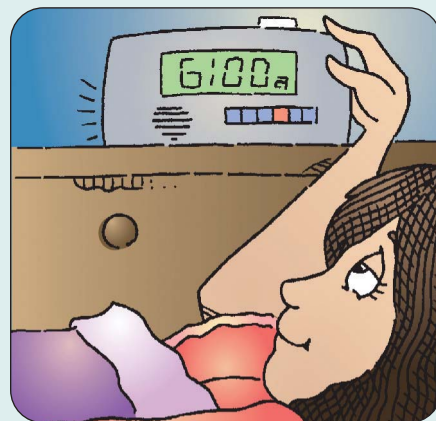
- **Tell—don't ask.** When you know your child has dropped the ball, don't give her the opportunity to shift blame. Instead of asking, "Did you study for this social studies test?" say, "I know you didn't prepare for your social studies test. The consequence is that you earned a D. From now on, please tell me when you have a test."
- **Be understanding.** Boost your child's confidence by complimenting good behavior and limiting criticism. Do not, however, make excuses. ("It's okay. You said that because you're tired.") It's better to say, "I know you're tired, but you still have to speak to me respectfully." This empowers your child to control her own behavior.
- **Provide freedom.** Kids who are overprotected at home may have trouble at school, where they need to be more independent. Build your child's confidence—and ability to handle failure—by giving her age-appropriate responsibilities. She might select her outfits for school or organize her room. Remember that mistakes are opportunities to learn.

Source: Polly Greenberg, "Setting Limits: The Child Who Always Blames Others," Scholastic, www2.scholastic.com/browse/article.jsp?id=3746878.

Refresh critical back-to-school skills for a successful school year

Back to school means more than buying supplies and going to class. It involves establishing routines that help students do their best. To help your child develop good habits and independence:

- **Put an alarm clock** in your child's room. Instead of you waking her up, see if the alarm can.
- **Prepare at night.** Have your child pack her backpack, pick out an outfit and put necessities by the front door. You can plan breakfast and make sure her lunch is ready to go.
- **Create a homework schedule.** Pick a consistent time for studying, such as after school or before dinner. When will your child have the most motivation and energy?



- **Stick to a regular bedtime.** Allow time for duties—bathing, brushing teeth, putting on pajamas, reading and saying goodnight.
- **Post charts** to help your child stay on track—a weekly schedule, a bedtime checklist and a reminder by the front door.

Evaluate your child's ability to take on more responsibility



Do you dream of the day when your child will take on more responsibility? As the new school year begins, notice subtle signs of readiness, such as:

- **Complaints.** Your child might not know how to say, "I'm ready to do my own laundry," so it may come out as, "I can't find my P.E. uniform anywhere. Didn't you wash it yet?"
- **Bossiness.** "Mom! You have to water these plants!" If your child knows enough to criticize, he may know enough to help with the job.

- **Interest.** Kids are often excited about being responsible. Pay attention to his requests. "Can I help feed the dog?"
- **Developmental stage.** Consider your child's maturity. Most six-year-olds can make a sandwich.

When your child seems ready for something new, work together at first. Stay relaxed and give him plenty of practice. Take it one job—and one step—at a time. Be patient (mistakes are bound to happen), and celebrate your child's success!

Source: Emory Luce Baldwin, "Ready for More Responsibility? Nudging Your Child Toward Self-Sufficiency," *Washington Parent*, March 2009 (Knollwood Publications, Inc., www.washingtonparent.com).