

What Parents Can Do To Help Their Child Succeed In School

Although school is very important, it doesn't really take up very much of a child's time. In the U.S., the school year averages 180 days; in other nations, the school year can last up to 240 days, and students are often in school more hours per day than are American students. Clearly, the hours and days that a child is not in school are also very important for learning. Parents help children succeed by working with teachers and schools to make sure they provide curricula and use teaching methods that are based on strong scientific evidence about what works best in helping children learn. Many teachers say that they don't often receive information from parents about problems at home. Many parents say that they don't know what the school expects from their children, or from them. Sharing information is essential, and both teachers and parents are responsible for making it happen.

What can I do at home to help my child succeed in school?

- Create a home environment that encourages learning and schoolwork. Establish a daily family routine of mealtimes with time for homework, chores and bedtime as well as time for family activities.
- Show your child that the skills he is learning in school are an important part of the things he will do as an adult. Let him see you reading books, newspapers and computer screens; writing reports, letters, e-mails and lists; using math to figure change or to measure for new carpeting; and doing things that require thought and effort.
- Make sure that your home has lots of reading materials that are appropriate for your child. Keep books, magazines and newspapers in the house. You can find many good books and magazines for your child at yard or library sales. Books make good gifts.
- Encourage your child to use the library. Ask the librarian to tell your child about special programs that she might participate in, such as summer reading programs and book clubs and about services such as homework help.
- Limit TV viewing to no more than one hour on a school night. Be aware of the shows your child likes to watch and discuss his choices with him. The same goes for video games.
- Help your child learn to use the Internet properly and effectively.
- Encourage your child to be responsible and to work independently. Taking responsibility and working independently are important qualities for school success.
- Show an interest in what your child does in school. Support her special interests by attending school plays, musical events, science fairs or sporting events.
- Offer praise and encouragement for achievement and improvement.

How can I tell how well my child is doing in school?

- Ask your child to show you his school work, and note the grades and any comments made by the teacher.
- Check report cards carefully for subject grades, attendance and conduct. Ask the teacher or school counselor for other kinds of information about your child's performance, such as test scores and teacher observations.
- In the course of the school year, your child may take a variety of standardized tests, including tests for state standards. Your child's scores and other information may be sent home with her or mailed directly to you. Check with your child's teacher about when these tests are given and when to expect results.
- Find out if your child's teacher uses e-mail to communicate with parents. Using e-mail will allow you to send and receive messages at times that are most convenient for you.
- Ask teachers to show you examples of successful work and compare it to your child's work. Listen to the teacher's comments about your child's work and what she needs to do to improve. Plan with the teacher how you can work together to help your child do better work.
- Use homework hotlines, school Web sites, and other dial-in services to get information about school activities or to ask teachers and school personnel questions.
- Attend parent-teacher conferences that are scheduled during the year.

How can I get the most out of parent-teacher conferences?

- Set up a conference early in the school year. Let the teacher know that you are interested in your child's education and that you want to be kept informed of his progress. If English is your second language, you may need to make special arrangements, such as including in the conference someone who is bilingual.
- If possible, also arrange to observe the teaching in your child's classroom. Afterward, talk with the teacher about what you saw and how it fits with your hopes for your child and your child's needs.
- Before a conference, write out questions you want to ask and jot down what you want to tell the teacher. Be prepared to take notes during the conference and ask for an explanation if you don't understand something.
- Talk with the teacher about your child's talents, hobbies, study habits and any special sensitivities he might have, such as concerns about weight or speech difficulties.
- Tell the teacher if you think your child needs special help and about any special family situation or event that might affect your child's ability to learn. Mention such things as a new baby, an illness or a recent or an upcoming move.
- Tell the teacher what kind of person you want your child to become and what values are important to you.
- Ask the teacher for specific details about your child's work and progress. If your child has already received some grades, ask how your child is being evaluated.
- Ask about specific things that you can do to help your child. At home, think about what the teacher has said and then follow up. If the teacher has told you that your child needs to improve in certain areas, check back in a few weeks to see how things are going.

- Approach the teacher with a cooperative spirit. If you disagree with the teacher about an issue, don't argue in front of your child. Set up a meeting to talk only about that issue. Before that meeting, plan what you are going to say. Try to be positive and remain calm. Listen carefully. If the teacher's explanation doesn't satisfy you, and you do not think you can make progress by further discussion with the teacher, arrange to talk with the principal or even the school superintendent.

How can I encourage my child to read at home?

Helping children become and remain readers is the single most important thing that parents and families can do to help their children succeed in school and in life.

- Read aloud to your child often. Start reading to your child when he is a baby and keep reading as he grows up. As you read, talk with your child. Encourage him to ask questions and to talk about the story. Ask him to predict what will come next.
- Encourage your child to read on her own. Children who spend at least 30 minutes a day reading for fun develop the skills to be better readers at school.
- Set aside quiet time for family reading. Some families even enjoy reading aloud to each other, with each family member choosing a book, story, poem or article to read to the others.
- Visit the library often. Begin making weekly trips to the library when your child is very young. See that your child gets his own library card as soon as possible.
- Buy a children's dictionary and start the "let's look it up" habit.
- Make writing materials, such as crayons, pencils and paper, available.
- Ask family members and friends to consider giving your child books and magazine subscriptions as gifts for birthdays or other special occasions. Set aside a special place for your child to keep her own library of books.
- Get help for your child if he has a reading problem. If you think that your child needs extra help, ask his teachers about special services, such as after-school or summer reading programs. Also ask teachers or your local librarian for names of community organizations and local literacy volunteer groups that offer tutoring services.
- If you are uncomfortable with your reading ability, look for family or adult reading programs in your community. Your librarian can help you locate such programs. Friends and relatives also can read to your child, and volunteers are available in many communities to do the same.