

Helping Children Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School



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Help your child succeed with homework without battles

Helping with homework is a common topic of questions from parents. Many parents wonder *if* they should help their children with homework, and *how* to do it effectively. A recent study points to ways parents can promote success—without butting heads with their kids. It found that children are more likely to stay interested and engaged during homework sessions when parents:



- **Make homework time pleasant.** Offer your child a nourishing snack, so he's not hungry. Maintain a positive attitude about the work and your child's ability to do it. If you see your child getting frustrated, have him take a break for a few minutes.
- **Encourage independence.** Help your child feel capable. Instead of saying, "Here's what you should do," say "Are the directions clear?" or "What do you think is the best way to solve this problem?"
- **Offer hints on how to move forward** if your child gets stuck. "That's a tough word. Let's look it up in the dictionary."
- **Provide occasional words of support.** Saying "You are on the right track" or "You seem like you've really got this" can help him stay focused.

Source: G.L. Doctoroff and D.H. Arnold, "Doing homework together: The relation between parenting strategies, child engagement, and achievement," *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, Elsevier.



Five tips can ease morning 'rush hour'

If mornings are so rushed at your house that your child forgets things or leaves them undone, use these strategies to get her off to school smoothly:

1. **Start the night before.** Make lunches and lay out clothes. Your child should make sure things she needs for school are ready to go.
2. **Account for time.** Figure out how much time your child really needs between waking up and leaving the house. Have her take responsibility for setting an alarm—and getting up.
3. **Post checklists.** List all the tasks—brush teeth, make bed, etc.—your child needs to do in the morning. Make another day-of-the-week list of items to remember. If it's Tuesday, where is her library book?
4. **Play Beat the Clock.** Can your child take two minutes less time tomorrow to get ready than she did today?
5. **Assign daily breakfasts.** If Monday always means cereal, no one has to stop to think about it.

Put geography on the map

Geography Awareness Week is November 12-18. Celebrate the relationships between people and places with your child. Together:

- **Locate places** mentioned in the news on a map.
- **Explore** your community. Why is your town located where it is? What connects it (roads, industry) to the places nearby?



Healthy habits aid learning

Is your child ready to learn when she gets to school in the morning? To help her do her best throughout the day:

- **Serve nutritious meals.** Eating well gives kids energy and helps them focus.
- **Help your child stay fit.** Exercise builds strength and stamina. Make it fun. Set up an obstacle course or play a family game of tag.
- **Make sure she gets enough sleep.** Create a relaxing nighttime routine, then stick to a consistent bedtime.

Encourage critical thinking

Your child is not only learning facts in school, he is also learning to think. Help him think about:



- **Science.** Encourage him to use what he knows. "The leaves have fallen. What do you call a tree that loses its leaves?"
- **Reading.** Before, during and after reading time, ask your child *why* and *what if* questions. "What if that character had made a different choice?"
- **Math.** Challenge your child to catch mistakes. If you count by twos and say "2, 4, 6, 7, 9" can he figure out what's wrong?



How can I help my child get organized for school?

Q: My child is so messy! She can never find what she needs to study. When I looked in her backpack, I found crumpled homework, dirty socks and an apple slice stuck to a flier for an event that happened weeks ago. How can I help her get organized?

A: Your daughter has already experienced the frustration that disorganization causes. Remind her of it and explain that you are going to help her create a system so she'll be able to find what she needs for school more easily. Then:



- 1. Have your child take everything out of her backpack.** She should uncrumple all the papers and sort other items into piles. Together you can decide what's important and what to throw away.
- 2. Make sure your child has a different colored binder** or folder for each subject. Then she can remember that red is for math and yellow is for science. All the material for each subject goes in its folder.
- 3. Establish a routine.** Every day when she gets home from school, your child should empty her backpack. She should put papers and forms for you in one pile and things she needs for homework in another. When the homework is complete, it goes back in the subject folder. Do a daily check so she will get in the habit of putting things where they belong.



Are you helping your child manage time?

Does your child sit down to relax for a minute before studying and get up hours later with nothing done? Students need strong time management skills. Are you helping your child use his time wisely? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

- 1. Have you reviewed** your child's study schedule recently to make sure it's working?
- 2. Do you have** your child write test dates and project due dates on your family's calendar?
- 3. Do you help** your child break big projects down into smaller tasks?
- 4. Do you maintain** a balance between your child's activities and the rest of his life? If he's eating dinner in the car, it may be time to cut an activity.

- 5. Do you have** your child make a daily to-do list?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are building your child's time management skills. For each no, try that idea.

"Time is a created thing. To say 'I don't have time,' is like saying, 'I don't want to.'"
—Lao Tzu

Give your child new words

Reading aloud with your child is one of the best ways to build her vocabulary. When you read aloud together:

- **Read many different kinds** of books.
- **Point out new words.** "It says here that Sonia Sotomayor *aspired* to a career as a lawyer. What do you think *aspire* means? Let's look it up."

Source: K. Kindle, *Using Read-Alouds to Teach Vocabulary*, Scholastic.

Math is made to measure

Estimating and measuring are basic math skills that all students need to develop. To help your child practice both processes:



- **Play with water.** Give your child some measuring spoons and cups. Ask him to estimate how many teaspoons are in a one-cup measure. Then have him measure the water carefully to check.
- **Have a scavenger hunt.** Ask your child to go around the house and find six things that he thinks are six inches long. Then, give him a ruler and have him measure the items. How close did he come?

Relieve the stress of tests

The word *test* sounds serious and scary to some students—and some parents! But the things you can do to reduce anxiety and help your child prepare for tests are simple:

- **Create a study schedule.** Plan several short study sessions over time. That's more effective than one long session.
- **Help your child make** and use study tools, like flash cards and practice tests.
- **Offer encouragement,** not pressure. "You are prepared, and all I ask is that you do your best."

Source: "Test Anxiety," Anxiety and Depression Association of America, nswc.com/anxious.

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