

# *HOW TO HELP YOUR KIDS SUCCEED IN SCHOOL*

TIPS & ACTIVITIES FOR PARENTS OF PRESCHOOL TO GRADE 5 KIDS



A Publication of  K5 Learning

**WHAT IS THIS BOOK ABOUT ?**

This book provides *practical advice* and *specific activities* parents can use to help their kids excel in school.

**WHO IS THIS BOOK FOR?**

This book is for parents of children in the preschool through elementary school years. Our recommendations are applicable to all kids – from slow learners to the gifted.

**WHY DID WE WRITE THIS BOOK ?**

We believe – and research shows – that a child’s success in school is often defined at a very early age. We wrote this book to encourage and help parents to be pro-active in getting their kids off on the right foot.

**WHO IS K5 LEARNING ?**

K5 Learning is an education company which operates an online reading and math program for kindergarten to grade 5 kids. The K5 program assists busy parents in helping their kids succeed in school. Visit K5 Learning at [www.k5learning.com](http://www.k5learning.com).

**ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

Much of the material in this book is contributed from publications by the U.S. Department of Education. We would like to thank the Department for making these materials available.

**NOTE:**

In this booklet, we refer to a child as “him” in some places and “her” in others. We do this to make the booklet easier to read. Please understand, however, that every point that we make is the same for boys and girls.

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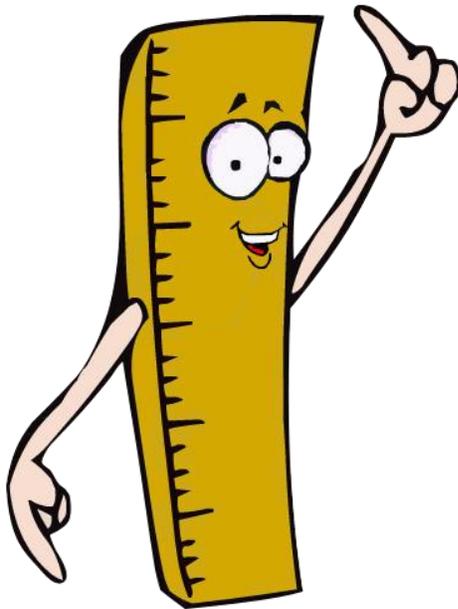
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## INTRODUCTION

Every child can succeed in school. The question is: *How* can we help our children succeed? The answer comes from a combination of common sense and research about how children learn and about how to prepare them to learn.

What we say and do in our daily lives can help our children develop positive attitudes toward school and build confidence in themselves as learners. Showing our children that we both value education and use it in our daily lives provides them with powerful models and contributes greatly to their success in school.



It's important that all parents build strong ties to our children's schools. When parents and families are involved in their children's schools, the children do better and have better feelings about going to school. We help our children to succeed by working with their teachers.

However, schools face ever-increasing burdens, and there are limitations to how much personalized attention your child will receive in a class of 30 students. Ultimately, it is up to parents to ensure that their children receive the education they need to fulfill their potential.

The purpose of this book is to help you help your child to succeed in school. The book includes:

- information about how you can contribute to your child's school success;
- activities that you can use to help your child acquire the skills to succeed in school;
- answers to often-asked questions about how to work with teachers and schools; and
- tips on how to help your child with taking tests.

## THE BASICS

In North America, 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. Clearly, parents need to make education a part of their child's non-school life as well. Here are some things that you can do to help your child to make the most of that time:

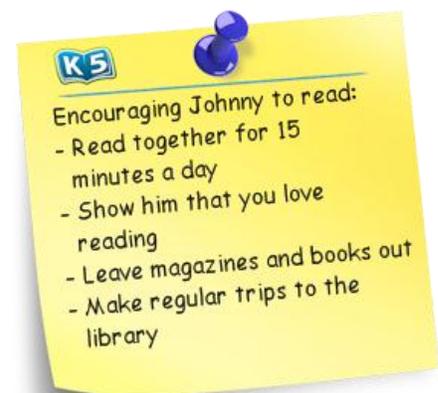
### ENCOURAGE YOUR CHILD TO READ

Helping your child become a reader is the most important thing that you can do to help him succeed in school. The importance of reading can't be overstated. Once children learn to read, they spend the rest of their lives reading to learn. Reading is the skill that enables learning in other subjects.

- Start early. If your child is not reading yet, then reading aloud to him should become part of your daily routine. At first, read for no more than a few minutes at a time, several times a day. 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. When your child begins to read, ask him to read to you from books or magazines that he enjoys.

The joy in reading comes from the content more than the process of reading itself. The sooner your child develops good reading skills – and reading becomes “easier” and “less work” - the sooner he will begin to enjoy the content of the stories he reads. Early reading skill development is a key to developing a “love of reading”.

- The building blocks of reading include phonemic awareness (recognizing different sounds), phonics (associating sounds with letters) and sight words (recognizing common words at sight). Find quality exercises for your child to develop these skills.
- Make sure that your home has lots of reading materials that are appropriate for your child. Keep children's books in the house. Ask family members to consider giving your child books and magazine subscriptions as gifts.
- Turn off the TV and video games! Books can have a hard time competing for a child's attention. A little boredom can result in kids forming a terrific habit: reading.
- Show that you value reading. Let your child see you reading for pleasure as well as reading letters and recipes, directions and instructions, newspapers, online and so forth. Go with her to the library and check out books for yourself. When your child sees that reading is important to you, she is likely to decide that it's important to her, too.



- Get help for your child if he has a reading problem. When a child is having reading difficulties, the reason might be simple to understand and deal with. For example, your child might have trouble seeing and need glasses. If you think that your child needs extra help, ask his teachers about special services, such as after-school. Also ask for names of community organizations and local literacy volunteer groups that offer tutoring services.

### TALK WITH YOUR CHILD

It's through speaking with parents and older family members that children develop the language skills they need. Children who don't hear a lot of talk and who aren't encouraged to talk themselves often have problems learning to read. Children who haven't learned to listen carefully often have trouble following directions and paying attention in class.

- Find time to talk any place, for example, as you walk with your child, talk with her about what she's doing at school or as you shop in a store, talk with your child about prices, differences in brands and how to pick out good vegetables and fruit.
- As you read a book with your child, pause occasionally to ask him about what's happening. Ask him what he thinks will happen next, or what he thinks of a particular character.
- When your child talks to you, stop what you're doing and pay attention. Look at him and ask questions to let him know that you've heard what he said. Demonstrate for him how to be a good listener.

### MAKE HOMEWORK & HOME STUDY A PRIORITY

Establish the importance of education as a core value in your household. Your child should see education not as something that just happens 'at school' but as a fundamental part of their young lives.

- Make homework a priority in your daily family life. Even if study time is for only a few minutes a day, make sure it is treated as a priority over other activities. Be consistent in this from a young age and your children will understand – through your actions – the importance of school and education.
- Have a designated place for your child to study. The area should have good lighting and it should be fairly quiet. Provide supplies such as pencils, pens, erasers, paper and a dictionary. If possible, keep these items together in one place. This is not a place for toys or other distractions.



- Set a regular schedule for homework. Study time should be before TV or playtime, thus incentivizing children to finish their work and not procrastinate. Having a regular time to do homework clarifies expectations and helps children to finish assignments.
- Remove distractions. Turn off the TV and discourage your child from making and receiving telephone calls or texts during homework time.
- Don't expect or demand perfection. When your child asks you to look at what she's done—from skating a figure 8 to finishing a math assignment—show interest and praise her when she's done something well. If you have criticisms or suggestions, make them in a helpful way. Demand effort and focus, not perfect results.

## STUDY OUTSIDE OF SCHOOL

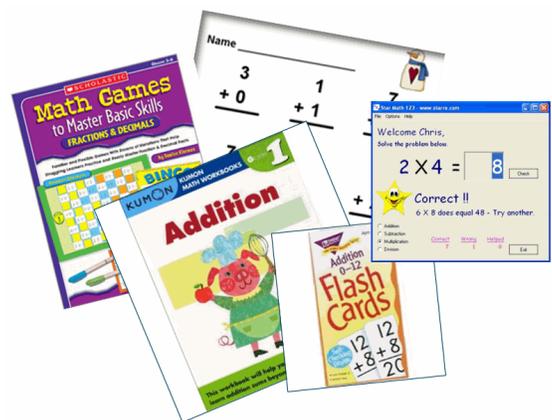
A regular program of academic study outside of school is critical to ensure your child's success in school. It will allow your child to progress academically at their own pace, regardless of what is happening in the classroom. This is critical to fulfilling their potential. Just as important, regular home study will develop good study habits and re-enforce the importance of education.

- At home, allow your child to work as independently as possible. Independent learning – especially overcoming challenges – builds confidence, resiliency and good study habits.
- Home study should be regular (preferably daily). The length of study does not have to be long and depends very much on your child's age and abilities. 5-10 minutes a day may be enough for some 5 year olds. But be sure that for those minutes your child sits down and works on his studies in a focused manner.
- Avoid summer learning loss by continuing home study during the summer months.
- Home study can consist of homework, if there is homework from school. In the absence of sufficient homework it is up to the parent to organize the study materials. This may consist of practicing a particular skill, working on traditional exercise books, educational computer programs or other activities.
- If you don't have the time to oversee your child's home study, then consider some sort of academically based after-school program.

## CHOOSE STUDY MATERIALS CAREFULLY

To make the most of your child's home study time, choose the materials he uses carefully:

- It is not the delivery medium (worksheets vs. software, etc.) that is important, but the quality of the educational content that you are using. Ask yourself: how much of my child's time is being spent learning vs. 'time wasting' with a particular activity? How well is he being engaged? Is he progressing through materials or repeating work at the same level?
- There are countless free educational websites, many with quality materials. However, most of these sites lack the structure to ensure your child will progress through material in a logical way. Kids will tend to repeat the easiest or most fun activities rather than challenge themselves. If you use these sites, you need to manage your child's use of them closely.
- Choose activities based on their educational value and engagement level rather than their "fun" quotient. Ideally, kids should find study materials interesting and challenging. Activities can also be fun, but we should not build the unrealistic expectation that studying and schoolwork will always be fun, or that only fun things are worth doing.
- Be organized so that you have materials always available and your child progresses through academic material in an meaningful way.
- Remember to emphasise reading and math. If in doubt, materials which are based on school curriculums are a safe bet.
- Be realistic about your own time constraints. If you do not have the time to organize materials every day for your child, then find a system (set of workbooks, website, etc.) that will make the process easier for you.
- If you are struggling to find appropriate activities, ask your child's teacher for recommendations. In any case, emphasise reading and numeracy skills – they form the basis of all future learning.



## LIMIT TV VIEWING AND VIDEO GAME PLAYING

American children on average spend far more time watching TV or playing video games than they do completing homework or other school-related activities.

- Limit the time that you let your child watch TV or play video games. Too much television and gaming cuts into important activities in a child's life, such as reading, playing with friends and talking with family members.
- Even the most "educational" TV programs are typically very passive and of little educational value. Likewise, many video games claim educational value but offer little real learning. Do not expect any significant educational value from TV or video games regardless of claims made, unless they are specifically recommended by your child's teacher.
- Set a pre-defined number of minutes that your child can watch TV or play video games, and stick to it. Remind them to complete their studying and chores before playing!



## ENCOURAGE YOUR CHILD TO USE THE LIBRARY

Libraries can be places of learning and discovery for children:

- Start taking your child to the library as early as possible.
- See that your child gets his own library card as soon as possible.
- When you take your child to the library, introduce yourself and your child to the librarian. Ask the librarian to show you around the library and recommend specific books. Finding the series of books that captures your child's imagination can be a big step forward in your child learning to love to read.
- Ask the librarian about special programs that your child might participate in, such as summer reading programs and book clubs.
- Let your child know that she must follow the library's rules:
  - Books must be handled carefully.
  - Materials that are borrowed must be returned on time.
  - Shouting, running and being disruptive are not appropriate library behaviors.

**HELP YOUR CHILD LEARN TO USE THE INTERNET EFFECTIVELY AND SAFELY**

The Internet has become an important part of how we learn and communicate. Show your child how to use the internet effectively and safely:

- Spend time online with your child. Ask her to explain what she is doing and why. Ask her to show you her favorite websites and to tell you what she likes about them. This will help her build self-confidence and pride in her abilities.
- Help your child to locate appropriate websites. Point her in the direction of sites that can help her with reading and numeracy skills.
- Closely supervise what websites your child uses. Beware of both inappropriate content and sites with advertising aimed at kids. You might consider limiting your child to sites you have seen and approved (“whitelisting”) or at least using automatic “filters” to block your child from accessing sites that may be inappropriate.
- Monitor the amount of time that your child spends online. Internet surfing can be just as time-consuming and non-educational as watching TV. Don’t allow any surfing until homework and chores have been done, and limit the amount of time spent on surfing the web. Don’t let surfing crowd out more valuable activities such as reading, traditional games and outdoor activities.
- Teach your child rules for using the Internet safely. He should never:
  - tell anyone his computer password;
  - use bad language or send cruel, threatening or untrue messages;
  - give out any personal information, including his name or the names of family members, home address, phone number, age, school name; or
  - arrange to meet a stranger that he has “talked” with in an online “chat room.”

**ENCOURAGE YOUR CHILD TO BE RESPONSIBLE AND TO WORK INDEPENDENTLY**

Taking responsibility and working independently are important qualities for school success.

- Establish rules. Every home needs reasonable rules that children know and can depend on. Make sure that you enforce the rules consistently.
- Make it clear to your child that he has to take responsibility for what he does, both at home and at school. For example, don’t automatically defend your child if his teacher tells you that he is often late to class or is disruptive when he is in class. Ask for his side of the story. If a charge is true, let him take the consequences.

- Work with your child to develop a schedule of jobs to do around the house. Children may complain about chores but ‘helping’ can give them a sense of being productive members of the household and be good for their self-esteem.
- Show your child how to break a job down into small steps, then to do the job one step at a time. This works for everything—cleaning a room or doing a big homework assignment.
- Make your child responsible for getting ready to go to school each morning—getting up on time, making sure that he has everything he needs for the school day and so forth. If necessary, make a checklist to help him remember what he has to do.

#### ELEMENTARY SCHOOL ACADEMICS: THINK READING AND NUMERACY

Kids learn many things during the elementary school years, from self-discipline to working in groups, but the critical *academic* skills are reading and basic math (numeracy). The ability to read quickly and effectively, and confidence and skills with basic numbers operations, are the core skills that kids use to learn other subjects. The content that kids learn in other subjects such as social studies or science will be revisited again in future years in much more depth and are not nearly as critical during elementary school.

- Emphasise basic reading and math skills in all home learning activities.
- Encourage reading and language based activities (writing, spelling, etc.) throughout the day.
- Emphasise basic math skills and ensure sufficient practice is done to achieve proficiency. Math, to a far greater degree than other subject areas, requires proficiency in basic skills before students move on to more difficult tasks. For example, if a child has not mastered his multiplication tables, then he will struggle with the concepts of multi-digit multiplication, because he will be spending all of his time performing basic calculations instead of trying to understand more advanced concepts.
- Math anxiety and underachievement in math is widespread, and largely caused by children not mastering the basics. Ensure your child gets enough practice and masters these skills.
- Encourage mental math (doing math operations in your head) activities and your child’s overall fluency and confidence with numbers.

## ACTIVITIES

What follows are activities that you can do with your child to help build the skills, attitudes and behaviors needed for school success. There is no one “right” way to do the activities. You should make changes to suit your child.

We provide some age guidelines with each activity; however, children don’t always learn the same things at the same rate. Use the age levels as guidelines not as hard and fast rules.

### CAN YOU TOP THIS? (AGES 4 – 7)

Learning to take turns helps your child build spoken language skills as well as learn to work with others.

#### WHAT YOU NEED

Nothing!

#### WHAT TO DO

With your child, make up a story for the two of you to tell together, taking turns saying one sentence at a time.

- Begin by deciding on a topic, such as *pirates*.
- Say the first sentence: “Once upon a time a pirate lived in on a huge ship.”
- Continue taking turns with your child making up and telling parts of the story until you decide to end it.



Working with others, listening to what they say and making good contributions are all valuable in helping children to complete school projects.

**LISTEN! (AGES 4 – 7)**

Listening to and giving directions helps your child to sharpen listening and speaking skills.

**WHAT YOU NEED**

Any small object, such as a ball or a photograph.

Some objects that can make noise, such as keys, water glasses, spoons and decks of cards.

**WHAT TO DO**

- Hide a small object. Give your child directions to find it such as, “Take five steps straight ahead. Turn right. Keep the lamp to your left. Bend down and look to the right.” Next, have your child hide the object and give you directions to find it.
- Have your child close his eyes. Use something to make a sound, such as rattling your keys, tapping a spoon against a glass or riffling a deck of cards. Ask your child to guess what’s making the sound.
- Clap your hands to tap out a rhythm. Have your child listen and then clap that same rhythm back to you. Make the rhythms harder as he catches on.
- Take a walk with your child. Find a place to sit for a few minutes and both close your eyes for 30 seconds or so. Tell each other what you hear: a baby crying, an airplane, a bird singing, cars on the street, leaves rustling.



For success in school, children need to learn to listen carefully, to see and hear details and to follow and give clear

**IT'S A MATCH (AGES 4 - 7)**

Sorting and classifying helps your child to pay attention to details and recognize how things are alike and different.

**WHAT YOU NEED**

Dishes, flatware, glasses, laundry.

**WHAT TO DO**

- As you empty the dishwasher or wash and dry dishes, ask your child to make stacks of dishes that are the same size, to put glasses that are the same size together and to sort forks, knives and spoons.
- As you empty the clothes dryer, ask your child to match pairs of socks or to put all white things together, all blue things and so forth.



Being able to identify how things are alike and different and to place objects and ideas into categories are important school skills that are used in almost every subject area.

## LET'S READ (AGES 4 – 7)

Reading is the single most important way for your child to develop the knowledge needed to become successful in school.

## WHAT YOU NEED

Children's books.

Books of riddles, tongue twisters and silly rhymes.

## WHAT TO DO

- Read with your child. Take turns, with you reading one page or paragraph and your child reading the next. You might also read the parts of different characters in a story. Be enthusiastic about reading. Read the story with expression. Make it more interesting by talking as the characters would talk, making sound effects and using facial expressions and gestures. Encourage your child to do the same.
- Help your child to read new words by having him use what he knows about letters and the sounds they make to sound out the words.
- If he is unsure of the meaning of a word, help him to use the surrounding words or sentences to figure it out. If this doesn't help, just tell him what the word means and keep reading.
- Buy a children's dictionary—if possible, one that has pictures next to the words. Then start the "let's look it up" habit.



When reading is a regular part of family life, parents send their children a message that it is important and enjoyable.

**AUTHOR! AUTHOR! (AGES 4 – 7)**

Reading and writing support each other. The more your child does of each, the better he will be at both.

**WHAT YOU NEED**

Pencils, crayons or markers, writing paper.

Cardboard or heavy construction paper.

Safety scissors.

Yarn or ribbon.

**WHAT TO DO**

- Write with your child. Talk with him about your writing so that he begins to understand that writing means something and has many uses.
- Hang a family message board in the kitchen. Offer to write notes there for your child. Be sure that he finds notes left there for him.
- Help your child write notes or e-mails to relatives and friends to thank them for gifts or to share his thoughts. Encourage the relatives and friends to answer your child.
- As your child gets older, he can begin to write you longer stories. Ask questions that will help him organize the stories.
- Help your child to turn his writing into books. Paste his drawings and writings on pieces of construction paper. For each book, have him make a cover out of heavier paper or cardboard, then add special art, a title and his name as author.



Writing helps children to organize their thoughts and gives them an important way to communicate with others.

**NOW YOU SEE IT, NOW YOU DON'T (AGES 4 – 7)**

Doing simple science experiments at home can prepare your child to learn important science concepts—and the need to be patient.

**WHAT YOU NEED**

2 ice cube trays  
Clock  
Small bowls  
Paper and pencil  
Water and other liquids, such as fruit juices

**WHAT TO DO**

- Give your child a pencil and paper and tell her that she is going to be a scientist and take notes about what she observes in some experiments.
- Together with your child, fill one ice cube tray to the top with water (or fruit juice). Fill the other tray only half full. Put both trays in the freezer. Have your child record the time. Tell her to watch the clock and check every 30 minutes or so to see if the water in each tray has frozen (if not, wait until it *has* frozen).
  - Ask your child to write down how long it took the water in each tray to freeze.
  - Ask her which amount of water froze faster?
- Have your child take one ice cube from each tray and put them in separate bowls to melt. Ask her to write down which cube melts faster—the larger one or the smaller one.
- Put one ice cube in a window and another in the refrigerator (not the freezer) and have your child write down how long they each take to melt.



Careful observation  
and note taking are  
valuable school skills.

**HOW MUCH DOES IT WEIGH? (AGES 4 – 7)**

Build your child's interest in math and science by helping him to observe, estimate and weigh objects at home.

**WHAT YOU NEED**

Bathroom scale

Objects to weigh, such bags of sugar, flour, potatoes or onions; shoes of different sizes, etc.

Paper and pencil

**WHAT TO DO**

- Show your child two objects such as a five-pound bag of sugar and a ten-pound bag of potatoes and ask him to guess which weighs the most. Show him how to use a scale to weigh the objects. Have him record the weights.
- Next show him several objects and ask him to guess how much each weighs. Have him write his estimates, then weigh the objects.
- Have your child estimate his own weight, as well as that of other family members and use the scale to check his guesses.



Using simple bathroom and kitchen scales at home prepares children for using equipment in school to weigh and measure.

## START TO FINISH (AGES 4 – 7)

Organization has to be learned. Help your child learn to plan, begin and finish a job.

## WHAT YOU NEED

Pencil and paper

Items used to do a job around the house, such as watering plants or setting the table.

## WHAT TO DO

- Together with your child, select a job he usually does around the house, such as watering the plants. Ask him to make a chart like the one below, then write down or tell you the “Plan,” “Do,” and “Finish” steps needed to do his job well. Look over these steps together and talk about possible changes.

Plan	Do	Finish
Get supplies: 1. watering can 2. paper towels	1. Fill can 2. Water plants 3. Wipe up spills 4. Pick up dead leaves	1. Throw away used towels and dead leaves. 2. Put away can.

- List the “Plan,” “Do,” and “Finish” steps of one or two jobs that you do around the house. Ask your child to help you think of ways that you can improve each step.
- When you give your child a new task, help him to plan the steps so that he can do the job well and have a sense of accomplishment.



Students who can plan a task are usually more successful and can do it in a shorter amount of time.

**WHERE DID I PUT THAT? (AGES 7 – 9)**

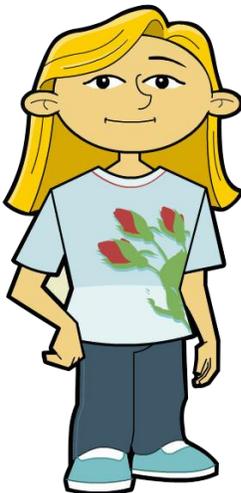
Older children also need help getting organized. Creating a special place for school items will help make mornings smoother for both you and your child.

**WHAT YOU NEED**

Cardboard box  
Crayons or markers

**WHAT TO DO**

- Find a sturdy cardboard box or carton large enough to hold notebooks and other school things. Let your child decorate it with pictures, words or artwork and her name.
- Let your child know that her school things should go in the box as soon as she comes home from school. All homework and anything else she needs for school the next day also should go into it.
- Let your child make a rainy day box and put it in a different place (or make it a different color). Have her fill it with “treasures”—games, books, photographs, souvenirs and keepsakes.
- Show your appreciation when your child keeps things in order.



Keeping all school items in one place helps teach children how much easier life can be when they are organized and plan ahead.

**MAKING MONEY (AGES 7 – 9)**

Help your child learn about money. Children can be confused by money. Some might think that the larger a coin is the more valuable it is—so a penny or nickel would be more valuable than a dime.

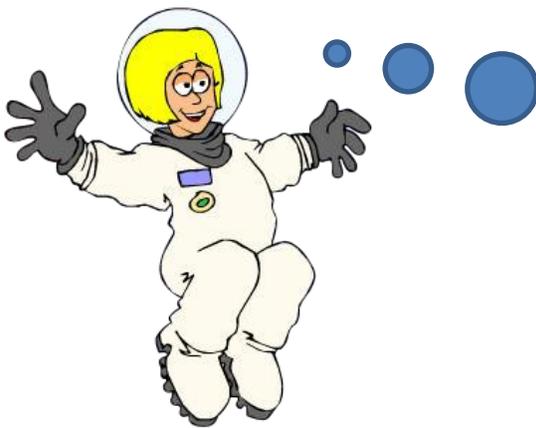
**WHAT YOU NEED**

Dice

Pennies, nickels, dimes, quarters

**WHAT TO DO**

- This is a good game to play with the family. Have each player roll the dice and say the number. Then give the player that number of pennies.
- When a player gets five pennies, replace the pennies with a nickel. When he gets ten pennies, replace them with a dime.
- The first player to reach the set amount—25 or 50 cents, for example—wins.
- If your child can add and subtract, have him pretend to be a cashier at the store and make change for items that you ‘buy’.



Playing money games at home can be valuable in helping children deal with numbers and math concepts in school.

## READING ON THE GO (AGES 7 – 9)

Show your child that reading has value in everyday life.

## WHAT YOU NEED

Map of your areas

Bus, subway and/or train schedules for your area

## WHAT TO DO

- Help your child use a map to mark a route to a special place, such as his school, the football stadium, the mall or his grandmother’s house. Help him to figure out the distance to the place.
- Next, give him a bus, subway or train schedule and have him find departure and arrival times and the rates. Have him figure out how long the trip takes and how much it costs.



Children need to learn that reading is not just something they do in school—it is important in all parts of their lives.

**MY TIME LINE (AGES 7 – 9)**

You can help your child use events in her own life to gain both a sense of time and to understand the order in which things happen.

**WHAT YOU NEED**

Shelf paper

Yardstick

Pencils, markers or crayons

**WHAT TO DO**

- Place a long piece of shelf paper on the floor. Have your child use a yardstick to draw a line that is three feet long.
- Talk with your child about important dates in her life—the day she was born; her first day of kindergarten, of first grade; the day her best friend moved in next door; and so forth. Tell her to write the dates on the line. Invite her to add dates that are important for the whole family—the day her baby brother was born, the day her favorite aunt got married—and the dates of any important historical events.
- Display the finished time line and ask your child to tell other family members and friends what it shows.



Making and reading time lines helps children to learn about the flow of history and to develop an understanding of cause and effect.

## TIME FLIES (AGES 9 – 11)

“I don’t have time to do that!” Sound familiar? Planning time is one of the most useful things that your child can learn. Knowing how long something will take can save time and prevent temper tantrums.

## WHAT YOU NEED

Paper and pencil  
Clock  
Calendar

## WHAT TO DO

- Together with your child, write down estimates of how long it takes each of you to do certain tasks (such as getting ready for school or work in the morning; ironing a blouse; making toast). Use a clock to time at least one of these tasks. Then take turns timing each other. (Be realistic—it’s not a race.)
- Talk with your child about what part of a job can be done ahead of time, such as deciding at bedtime what to wear to school the next day.
- Talk about at least two places that you and your child go where you must be on time. What do you do to make sure you are on time?



Being on time or not being on time affects other people. It is important for children to understand their responsibility for being on time—it’s not just for grown-ups.

## HOMEWORK MADE EASY (AGES 9 – 11)

A homework chart can show your child exactly what he needs to do and when he needs to do it.

### WHAT YOU NEED

Poster board or large sheet of sturdy paper  
 Marker, pen or pencil  
 Clock

### WHAT TO DO

- Help your child to create a homework chart like the following out of a large piece of sturdy paper:

Subject	Mon.	Tue.	Wed.	Thur.	Fri.
Language Arts					
Social Science					
Math					
Science					

Depending on how many subjects your child has, he may be able to put three or four weeks on each piece of paper.

- Help him to attach a colored marker or pen to the chart so that it is always handy.
- After school each day, have your child put a check mark in each box in which there is a homework assignment. Circle the check when you have seen that the homework is completed.
- Tell your child to try to figure out how long it will take him to complete each homework assignment so that he will be able to schedule his time.



Children need to know that their family members think homework is important. If they know their families care, children have a good reason to complete assignments and to turn them in on time.

**DIVIDE AND CONQUER (AGES 9 – 11)**

Just about anything is easier to do if it's divided into smaller pieces. As your child's assignments get longer and more complicated, she needs to acquire more organizing and planning skills.

**WHAT YOU NEED**

Homework assignments or chores  
Paper & Pencil

**WHAT TO DO**

- Have your child choose a big homework assignment to talk about, such as a geography project. Help her to make a list of what she needs to complete the job. For example:

Reference Materials (books, maps)

Ask: Can you complete the assignment by just using your textbook? If not, do you need to go to the library? If so, can you check out books or will you have to allow time to stay there and use reference books? Can you use computer websites? Do you have the addresses for approved sites? Does your teacher have them?

Taking Notes.

Do you have a notebook? Pencils?

Finished Project

Can you do this assignment on a computer? Will you need to staple the pages together? Do you need a report folder or cover? Do you need to draw pictures or make charts?

- Help your child to decide the order in which the parts of the job need to be done. Have her number them. To help her estimate how long each part of the assignment will take, tell her to work backward from the date the assignment is due. Have her write down start and finish dates next to each part and record them on her calendar.
- Together, think about a household job, such as cleaning out a closet or mowing the yard. Help your child to divide it up into smaller parts.
- Talk with your child about how you divide work at your job or at home.



Learning to see big jobs in small pieces can make them less overwhelming for a child.

## HELP WANTED (AGES 9 – 11)

Older children are interested in life beyond school. You can help your child to have a realistic sense of that life and what he can do to prepare for it.

### WHAT YOU NEED

Pencil and paper  
Newspaper help-wanted ads

### WHAT TO DO

- Talk with your child about what he wants to be and do in the future. Ask, for example, “What job do you think you’d like to do when you get out of school? What kind of education or training do you think you’ll need to get this job?”
- Suggest that your child pick two adults he or she knows and talk with them briefly about their jobs. Help him to think of at least three questions to ask. Have him write the questions, leaving space for the answers. Here are some sample questions:  
What is your job?  
How long have you had it? Do you like it?  
Did you need to go to college to get your job?  
Did you need any special training?  
What kind of classes do I need to take in high school for a job like yours?
- After the interview, talk with your child about what he learned.
- Next, show your child the newspaper help wanted ads. Have him find ads for three jobs that he might want to have in the future. Have him read aloud the requirements for a job and talk with him about the skills, education and training he would need to have to do the work.



Help your child understand that many jobs require advanced education, and almost all jobs require good reading and math skills. Emphasise the importance of being well educated.

## WORKING WITH TEACHERS AND SCHOOLS

Many teachers say that they don't 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.

The following questions and answers can help you to get the most out of talking to your child's teacher.

### Q: WHAT DO I DO FIRST?

Learn everything that you can about your child's school. Ask for a school handbook; if your school doesn't have a handbook, ask questions. Ask the principal and teachers, for example: What special programs does the school offer? What are your expectations for my child? How does the school measure student progress? Does it meet state standards? What are the school's rules and regulations?

Ask if the school has a Web site and, if so, get the address. School Web sites can provide you with access to all kinds of information—schedules of events, names of people to contact, rules and regulations and so forth.

Most of all, ask “What can I do to support, academically or otherwise, what the teacher is trying to accomplish in the classroom?”

Keep informed throughout the school year. If your schedule permits, attend PTA / PTO / PAC meetings.

### Q: WHEN SHOULD I TALK WITH MY CHILD'S TEACHER?

Early and often. Contact your child's teacher at the beginning of the year or as soon as you can. Get acquainted and show your interest.

Tell teachers what they need to know about your child. If she has special needs, make these known from the beginning.

If you notice a big change in your child's behavior, school performance or attitude during the school year, contact the teacher immediately.

Report cards are one indication of how well your child is doing in school. But you also need to know how things are going between report cards. For example, if you think your son is having trouble in math, contact the teacher to find out what is being studied and how you can provide extra help, as well as when the next math test is scheduled. Address the problem before it gets bigger.

**Q: WHAT IF MY CHILD HAS A PROBLEM, SUCH AS WITH HOMEWORK OR NOT UNDERSTANDING WHAT'S HAPPENING IN CLASS?**

Contact the teacher if your child has an ongoing problem with his schoolwork. You shouldn't wait for report-card time to begin addressing any difficulties. By alerting the teacher, you can work together to solve a problem in its early stages.

Approach the teacher with a cooperative spirit. Believe that the teacher wants to help you and your child, even if you disagree about something. Don't go to the principal without first giving the teacher a chance to work out the problem with you and your child.

**Q: HOW DO I GET THE MOST OUT OF PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCES?**

Be prepared to listen as well as to talk. It helps to write out questions before you leave home. Be prepared to take notes during the conference and ask for an explanation if you don't understand something.

In conferences, the teacher should offer specific details about your child's work and progress. If your child has already received some grades, ask how your child is being evaluated.

Talk about your child's talents, skills, hobbies, study habits and any special sensitivities such as concern 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 an upcoming move. Ask about specific ways to help your child at home. Try to have an open mind.

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.

**Q: WHAT IF I DON'T AGREE WITH A SCHOOL RULE OR WITH A TEACHER'S ASSIGNMENTS?**

First, be careful about disagreeing with the teacher or speaking negatively about him or the school in front of your child. It is counterproductive to undermine the teacher's or school's stature in your child's eyes.

Set up a meeting to talk about the issue. Before the meeting, plan what you are going to say—why you think a rule is unfair or what exactly you don't like about an assignment. Try to be positive and remain calm. Listen carefully. If the teacher's explanation doesn't satisfy you, arrange to talk with the principal or even the school superintendent. An educator's primary responsibility is to ensure the success of each and every student.

**Q: WHAT'S THE BEST WAY FOR ME TO STAY INVOLVED IN MY CHILD'S SCHOOL ACTIVITIES?**

Attend school events. Go to sports events and concerts, attend back-to-school night, parent-teacher meetings and awards events. Volunteer in your school. If your schedule permits, look for ways to help out at your child's school. The better you know the school's teachers and other parents, the faster you will be able to identify problems that may occur.

**HELPING YOUR CHILD WITH TEST-TAKING**

- Do talk to your child about testing and explain why schools give tests. Explain that tests are yardsticks that teachers and schools use to measure how well students are learning. These tests are associated with the grades on report cards. The results tell the teacher, students and parents whether students are keeping up with the class, need extra help or are ahead of other students.
- Do encourage your child. Praise her for the things that she does well. If your child feels good about herself, she will do her best on a test. Children who are afraid of failing are more likely to become anxious when taking tests and more likely to make mistakes.
- Do meet with your child's teacher to discuss his progress. Ask the teacher to suggest activities for you and your child to do at home to improve your child's understanding of schoolwork.
- Do make sure that your child attends school regularly. Remember, tests reflect children's overall achievement. The more effort and energy your child puts into learning, the more likely it is that he will do well on tests.
- Do provide a quiet, comfortable place for studying at home and make sure that your child is well rested on school days. Children who are tired are less able to pay attention in class or to handle the demands of a test.
- Don't get upset because of a single test score. Many things can influence how your child does on a test. Talk it over with your child to understand what happened and make sure they understand your expectations, but do not overdo it. Remember, one test is simply one test.
- Don't place so much emphasis on your child's test scores. This is elementary school. Emphasise learning, not scores. Demand effort and focus, not perfect results.



- Do help your child avoid test anxiety. It's good for your child to be concerned about taking a test. It's not good for him to develop "test anxiety." Students with test anxiety can become very self-critical and lose confidence in their abilities. Instead of feeling challenged by the prospect of success, they become afraid of failure. Emphasise the learning process, not the results to your child. The test results may be an indicator to you that additional work in certain areas are needed; do not over-emphasise the importance of test scores with your elementary school child.
- After the test, review the graded exam paper with your child to discuss where he had difficulty and why. Often a child simply misread a question. Reviewing test results is especially important for classes in which the material builds from one section to the next, as in math.



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