

# 10 Ways to Help Your Child Succeed in School – The Right Way!

## 1. Teach them that learning is their 'job.'

Parents often ask what they can do to get their child interested in a particular subject or task. Lesson No. 1 is the most important lesson a child can learn about school: No one cares whether or not a child is interested in something. Of course, children learn better when they find the subject matter interesting, but what children really need to learn is that they must also learn things that they don't find particularly interesting. That's the job children have.

## 2. Aim high.

You don't have to be a Tiger mom, but you have to realize that parental expectations have a huge impact when it comes to student performance. If you don't expect your child to do well, your expectations will likely be met.

## 3. Distinguish studying from learning.

Very often a parent asks a child if the child has done his or her studying – and the child has. Not good enough! The parent needs to verify that the child has learned the lesson. Quiz the child to be sure (this gets more difficult as the child gets older and begins to take more advanced subjects). Quiz the child again on the same material a few days later, and then again a week later. What good is learning something that is forgotten a week later? Remember that employers later in life will care less about the diplomas your child has and will care more about the skills and knowledge he or she has acquired.

## 4. Prioritize study time.

All children need down time, and playing both alone and with other children is good for both their intellectual and social skills. However, as a matter of priority, children should, within reason, be encouraged to work first and play second. Eventually a

well-developed work ethic will result in a big pay-off. Children also should have regular study hours during which to complete their schoolwork. As the child gets older, this designated study time should get longer.

### **5. Provide a proper homework environment.**

Be sure your child has all the tools needed to do his or her best – desk, a chair, good lighting, necessary school supplies (paper, pencils, pens, calculators, computers, rulers, compasses, protractors, paper clips, note pads, etc.) and, most important, a quiet place to work.

### **6. Let them figure things out on their own.**

Have your children think about problems at length before asking you for help. Remember that every time you tell a student an answer to a question, you have deprived that student of the opportunity to figure out the answer on his or her own. At the same time, it is appropriate to help a student who has made a legitimate, but unsuccessful, effort to learn something without assistance.

### **7. Teach proper reading comprehension skills.**

So many children read something without remembering what they've read or understanding what it means. To aid in that gap to learning, children should know that when reading, they should not go to the next paragraph in their reading until they have understood what they have already read; if they do, they usually won't understand the next paragraph, either. You should also teach children to take notes on what they read (or, better yet, to outline what they have read). Taking notes and writing outlines reinforces what the student has learned from reading and will allow the student to be better prepared for written examinations.

### **8. Have them go above and beyond.**

Generally, the more students practice, the more thoroughly they learn and the more they retain. Students get more practice (and more learning) if they complete all the problems and exercises in their textbooks – not just the ones the teacher assigns.

Parents who want to help their children succeed should encourage their kids to do more than the minimum.

### 9. Make learning a four-season endeavor.

School is out in the summer, but that should not mean that children should take three months off from learning. Summer is a good time for reviewing, for learning things that may not have been taught in school (perhaps some of those chapters that were skipped in history class), for going to the library and browsing (always a good idea) and for trying to develop new intellectual skills, such as how to play games of strategy like chess, checkers or backgammon, or how to follow recipes carefully.

### 10. Set a good example.

Let your child see that learning doesn't end when we leave school. Model good learning behavior in the way you deal with your job and household responsibilities and let your children know that you are still learning. Parents who are still in school, perhaps pursuing a graduate degree or finally finishing up that bachelor's, can be particularly influential. If you cut class, what do you think your children will do when given the opportunity? If you have bad study habits, you can't expect your children to do better. Be sure that you show your child – through your own action – that good educational habits yield great academic rewards.

– *Mark R. Solomon is the chairman of the taxation and business law department at [Walsh College in Troy](#) and counsel to the law firm of [Strobl and Sharp, P.C. in Bloomfield Hills](#). He has about 40 years of teaching experience, including five years as a junior high school and high school mathematics teacher.*

**1. Meet your child's teacher.** As soon as the school year starts, try to find a way to meet your child's teacher. Let the teacher know you want to help your child learn. Make it clear that you want the teacher to contact you if any problems develop with your child. [Talk with your child's teacher](#) offers some great tips for developing a partnership with your child's teacher.

If you feel uncomfortable speaking English, don't let a language barrier stop you. What you have to say is more important than the language you say it in! Ask the school to find someone who can interpret for you. There may be a teacher or parent liaison who can help. Or you can bring a bilingual friend or relative with you.

**2. Get to know who's who at your child's school.** There are many people at your child's school who are there to help your child learn, grow socially and emotionally, and navigate the school environment. [Who's Who at Your Child's School](#) describes the responsibilities of teachers, administrators, and district staff. Each school is different but this article will offer a general introduction to personnel of your child's school.

**3. Attend parent-teacher conferences and keep in touch with your child's teacher.** Schools usually have one or two parent-teacher conferences each year. You can bring a friend to interpret for you or ask the school to provide an interpreter. You can also ask to meet with your child's teacher any time during the year. If you have a concern and can't meet face-to-face, send the teacher a short note or set up a time to talk on the phone. For more ideas about how to prepare for parent-teacher conferences, see [Tips for Successful Parent-Teacher Conferences at Your Child's School](#).

### **Support your child academically**

**4. Find out how your child is doing.** Ask the teacher how well your child is doing in class compared to other students. If your child is not keeping up, especially when it comes to reading, ask what you or the school can do to help. It's important to act early before your child gets too far behind. Also be sure to review your child's report card each time it comes out. For more information, see [How To Know When Your Child Needs Extra Help](#).

**5. Apply for special services if you think your child may need it.** If your child is having problems with learning, ask the school to evaluate your child in his or her strongest language. The teacher might be able to provide accommodations for your child in class. If the school finds out your child has a learning disability, he can receive extra help at no cost. For more information, see [Where To Go For Help](#).

**6. Make sure that your child gets homework done.** Let your child know that you think education is important and that homework needs to be done each day. You can help your child with homework by setting aside a special place to study, establishing a regular time for homework, and removing distractions such as the television and social phone calls during homework time. [Helping Your Child With Homework](#) offers some great ideas for ensuring that your child gets homework done.

If you are reluctant to help your child with homework because you feel that you don't know the subject well enough or because you don't speak or read English, you can help by showing that you are interested, helping your child get organized, providing the necessary materials, asking your child about daily assignments, monitoring work

to make sure that it is completed, and praising all of your child's efforts. Remember that doing your child's homework for him won't help him in the long run.

**7. Find homework help for your child if needed.** If it is difficult for you to help your child with homework or school projects, see if you can find someone else who can help. Contact the school, tutoring groups, after school programs, churches, and libraries. Or see if an older student, neighbor, or friend can help.

**8. Help your child prepare for tests.** Tests play an important role in determining a student's grade. Your child may also take one or more standardized tests during the school year, and your child's teacher may spend class time on test preparation throughout the year. As a parent, there are a number of ways that you can support your child before and after taking a standardized test, as well as a number of ways you can support your child's learning habits on a daily basis that will help her be more prepared when it's time to be tested. Learn more about standardized tests and general test-taking in [How to Help Your Child Prepare for Standardized Tests](#).

### **Get involved with your child's school**

**9. Learn what the school offers.** Read the information the school sends home, and ask to receive information in your native language if necessary. Talk to other parents to find out what programs the school offers. Maybe there's a music program, after-school activity, sports team, or tutoring program your child would enjoy. Remember to keep track of events throughout the school year.

**10. Volunteer at your child's school and/or join your school's parent-teacher group.** Teachers appreciate it when parents help out at the school! There are many ways you can contribute. You can volunteer in your child's class or in the school library. You can make food for a school event. If you work during the day, you can attend "parents' night" activities or your child's performances. At most schools, a group of parents meets regularly to talk about the school. This group is usually called the PTA or PTO. The meetings give you a good chance to talk with other parents and to work together to improve the school. [How to Get Involved in Your Child's School Activities](#) offers some more ideas that you can get involved, especially for busy parents.

### **Get informed and be an advocate for your child**

**11. Ask questions.** If something concerns you about your child's learning or behavior, ask the teacher or principal about it and seek their advice. Your questions may be like these — What specific problem is my child having with reading? What can I do to help my child with this problem? How can I stop that bully from picking on my son? How can I get my child to do homework? Which reading group is my child in?

**12. Learn about your rights.** It's important to know what your rights are as the parent regarding special services, English instruction, immigration status, and more. Learn more in [Your Rights as the Parent of a Public School Student](#).

**13. Let the school know your concerns.** Is your child doing well in school? Is he or she having trouble learning, behaving, or studying? Is there a problem with another student, teacher, or administrator? If you have a concern, [How to Let the School Know About Your Concerns](#) describes some steps to take.

## Support your child's learning at home

**14. Demonstrate a positive attitude about education to your children.** What we say and do in our daily lives can help them to develop positive attitudes toward school and learning and to 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.

In addition, by showing interest in their children's education, parents and families can spark enthusiasm in them and lead them to a very important understanding—that learning can be enjoyable as well as rewarding and is well worth the effort required.

**15. Monitor your child's television, video game, and Internet use.** American children on average spend far more time watching TV, playing video games and using the Internet than they do completing homework or other school-related activities. [How to Monitor TV Viewing and Video Game Playing](#) and [Help Your Child Learn to Use the Internet Properly and Effectively](#) offer some ideas for helping your child use the media effectively.

**16. Encourage your child to read.** Helping your child become a reader is the single most important thing that you can do to help the child to succeed in school—and in life. The importance of reading simply can't be overstated. Reading helps children in all school subjects. More important, it is the key to lifelong learning. Learn more in [Fun Reading Tips and Activities](#) and [Fun and Effective Ways to Read with Children](#).

**17. Talk with your child.** Talking and listening play major roles in children's school success. It's through hearing parents and family members talk and through responding to that talk that young children begin to pick up the language skills they will need if they are to do well. For example, children who don't hear a lot of talk and who aren't encouraged to talk themselves often have problems learning to read, which can lead to other school problems. In addition, children who haven't learned to listen carefully often have trouble following directions and paying attention in class. It's also important for you to show your child that you're interested in what he has to say. [Talking With Your Child](#) offers some great ideas for using conversation to stimulate language development.

**18. Encourage your child to use the library.** Libraries are places of learning and discovery for everyone. Helping your child find out about libraries will set him on the road to being an independent learner. Remember that libraries also offer a quiet place for students to complete homework, and are often open in the evening. Learn more about resources for students in [Library Services for School-Aged Children](#).

**19. Encourage your child to be responsible and work independently.** Taking responsibility and working independently are important qualities for school success. You can help your child to develop these qualities by establish reasonable rules that you enforce consistently, making it clear to your child that he has to take responsibility for what he does, both at home and at school, showing your child how to break a job down into small steps, and monitor what your child does after school, in the evenings and on weekends. If you can't be there when your child gets home, give her the responsibility of checking in with you by phone to discuss her plans. Learn more in [Encourage Responsibility, Independence, and Active Learning](#).

**20. Encourage active learning.** Children need active learning as well as quiet learning such as reading and doing homework. Active learning involves asking and answering questions, solving problems and exploring interests. Active learning also can take place when your child plays sports, spends time with friends, acts in a school play, plays a musical instrument or visits museums and bookstores. To promote active learning, listen to your child's ideas and respond to them. Let him jump in with questions and opinions when you read books together. When you encourage this type of give-and-take at home, your child's participation and interest in school is likely to increase.

**Share your ideas about the importance of education with your child.**

Talk about ties between what your child is learning today and how that knowledge might be used in the future. Begin to talk about possible education goals for your child. If you begin to think about goals, your child will, too. Talk about technical and professional schools in your area, careers that you find interesting, or people you have met that seemed to enjoy their work. Let your young student know that they have many educational possibilities!

**Be careful not to pass on negative attitudes about school that may be a part of your own past experience.**

Without realizing it, you could start your child off on the wrong foot by recalling bad memories from your own school days. Giving children the idea that school is too difficult, that teachers are unfair, or that school isn't important will discourage them from doing well. Instead, talk about your friends from school, your favorite teachers or your best subject. If school was a bad experience for you, you might tell them you made the mistake of not liking school and you don't want them to do the same.

**A positive attitude about school is perhaps the most important gift you can give your child.**

**Help your child set education goals, both short term and long term.**

Talk to your child about the future and plans for high school, technical school or college. Tell your child you hope they will be successful in school.

A short-term goal may be finishing a writing assignment by Sunday night.

A long-term goal could be attending a trade school, the local community college or a university after high school.



**Talk to your child about what they are learning at school.**

From kindergartner to high school senior, it's important to ask students about their school subjects. Ask open-ended questions about their class work —questions that can't be answered with a "yes" or "no." Share any knowledge you have, and if you are curious, read the textbook!

**Help your child get organized to do homework.**

Create a study area or corner for homework. You can start this as early as first grade, and it becomes more important as homework is assigned. Have a table and chair in a quiet place away from the TV, perhaps in the corner of a bedroom. Add a lamp, if needed. Add a box for books and supplies. Make a special trip to the store to buy supplies such as paper, pencils, and colored pens. As your child gets older, add a clock. Help keep this area tidy and ready for use.

**Have a place to keep all communications from school.**

All schools are making an effort to keep in better touch with parents. Most communication is on paper and is sent home with your child. This includes reports on your child's grades, lunch menus, coming events, newsletters, requests for materials from home, and so on. After you have read them, save them all in a box, basket, or easy-to-find location. This system will save the day over and over when a form needs to be read or returned to the school and your child is hurrying out the door. It takes some effort to make this plan work, but it also lets your student know that these communications from school are important to you.

**Make rules about homework.**

Decide with your child on a good time to do homework and stick to that schedule as much as possible. Try to keep noise down during study times.

Ask what homework your child has been assigned and look it over when it is finished. Don't be a tyrant about homework, though. The goal is for the student to be responsible for getting it done without excessive nagging. If homework isn't getting done, talk to the teacher about ways to help your child. A joint effort may work better than "laying down the law." Some schools post assignments and grades online or record homework assignments on telephone voice mail.

Help with assignments if you are asked, but don't feel bad if you are unfamiliar with a subject. School has changed since you attended! The teacher is always there for additional help.

**Make interactive homework fun.**

Many teachers assign projects that require a student to interview adult family members. For example, elementary students may ask questions about their ancestors: what was their country of origin and when did they come to North America Your young interviewer may ask opinions on current events, favorite books





or hobbies. Respond with enthusiasm and give your child as much help and good information as you can. One of the purposes of this type of assignment is to practice good conversation skills with your children.

A study of students who get good grades showed that children whose parents talk to them almost every night at dinner do better in school than children who rarely talk to their parents except to argue. Message: try to eat one meal seated together and talk about what's going on in everyone's life *without arguing*.

**Do a community service project together.**

Watch for opportunities for the whole family to join a park cleanup, to collect food for the hungry, or simply to help an elderly neighbor with chores. Doing things together for others helps students practice cooperation and caring, skills they will need to be successful in school and on the job.

**Help your child do research projects at your library, museum or nature center.**

Provide transportation to the library for work on projects. Access to learning centers other than school introduces children to the world of learning outside of school.

## Help your child succeed at school—work with the teacher!



One reason parents say they don't know how to help their children at school is because schools have changed so much since they were students. Subject matter and teaching methods are different and unclear to parents. Parents often feel that teachers talk down to them or that teachers are not honest with them. Student learning patterns have also become much more visual and fast-paced with the advent of television and video games.

These barriers are very real. The good news is that schools are aware of these communication problems and want to work with both teachers *and* parents for the good of the student. These problems will not be solved immediately, but at least they are out in the open and can be discussed. Much of what is needed between the parent and the teacher is better communication. By being open minded and willing to try new ways, you will help your child succeed in school.