

Helping Children Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School



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Romulo D. Martinez Elementary
Patricia Viera, Principal

Help your child set and achieve New Year's learning goals

January is a good time for you and your child to review her progress and set goals for the rest of the school year. So encourage your child to make some learning resolutions. Even better, help her learn how to achieve her goals.

When your child thinks about goals, help her choose one she can reach fairly soon. It should also be specific. For instance, "Be smart in social studies" is too broad. "Learn Civil War facts," on the other hand, can be observed and measured.

Then have your child follow these steps:

- 1. State the goal.** "My goal is to learn my Civil War dates and terms by February." She should write her goal down and post it where she'll see it.
- 2. Plan how to meet the goal.** "I will make flash cards and study them for 15 minutes every night. I will ask Mom to quiz me on Fridays."
- 3. Talk about the goal with others.** Your child should tell her teacher what she plans to do. This strengthens her commitment to the goal.
- 4. Follow each step in the plan.** If problems arise, she can brainstorm solutions with you. For example, if she's too tired after homework time to review flash cards, perhaps she could study them over breakfast, instead.
- 5. Motivate and celebrate.** Encourage your child to take pride in each step she takes toward her goal. She could say, for example, "I'm proud I studied my Civil War facts today. I'm going to do it tomorrow, too." When she achieves her goal, celebrate that her efforts paid off!



Speak up! Your words build your child's vocabulary

What's one of the best things you can do to build your child's language skills? Talk to her! Here are some topics to discuss:



- **The world around you.** Visit places together. Use new words to describe them: "Look at the *scaffolding* on that building!"
- **Books.** Ask your child about what she's reading. Tell her about books you love.
- **Things you each wonder about.** "Why don't clouds fall out of the sky?" Brainstorm, then read to find the answer.

Foster classroom behavior

When a teacher is continually interrupted by students who misbehave, the whole class misses out on learning. To help your child develop self-control:

- **Talk to him about school rules.**
- **Show him the respect** you want him to show others.
- **Set consistent limits** at home.
- **Praise responsible behavior**, both his and that of others.

Write it all on the calendar

A new year means it's time for a new family calendar. Posted in a central location in your home, a family calendar is great for:



- **Scheduling family time.** Show your child that time together is important enough to write on the calendar.
- **Keeping track of family schedules.** Use a different color for each person.
- **Planning homework time.** Each week, look at the calendar with your child. Discuss her schedule and how she plans to use her time to complete assignments.



Poor attendance hurts school success

Parents often wonder if taking their young child out of school for a vacation or an appointment can really affect his success. Research on students in kindergarten through third grade suggests that chronic absence (missing 10 percent or more of school days) is linked to:

- **Low performance in school.** It's also connected to dropping out, substance abuse and more.
- **Lost learning time** for classmates, when teachers must help kids who were absent catch up.
- **Help your child get organized** each evening so that he can get out the door the next morning with everything he needs.
- **Enforce a regular bedtime.**
- **Review your child's schedule.** If after-school activities leave him too tired to do homework or wake up easily, it's time to cut back.

To make sure your child's learning won't suffer from poor attendance:

- **Help your child get organized** each evening so that he can get

Source: H. Chang and C. Leong, "Early Intervention Matters: How Addressing Chronic Absence Can Reduce Dropout Rates," Attendance Works, niswc.com/chronic.



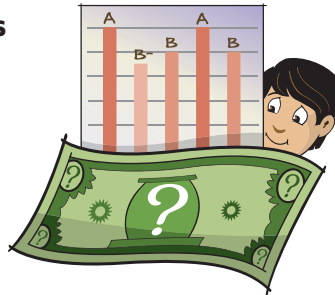
Will getting paid for grades make my child work harder?

Q: My son gets average grades, but I know he could do better. Some parents pay their children for good grades. Is this a good idea?

A: We all want our children to do their best in school, and parents are constantly looking for ways to motivate children to achieve. But most experts agree that paying students for getting good grades is not effective. There are several reasons. Paying for grades:

- **Deprives your child of the pure satisfaction of learning.** Children naturally love to learn. As they master new skills or memorize new facts, they gain self-esteem and self-confidence. When you pay your child for grades, he is less likely to appreciate these rewards of learning.
- **Doesn't recognize effort.** If your child has tried his hardest, neither he nor you should worry too much whether he receives an A or a B. And if he's worked hard but earned a low grade, it's a signal that you and the teacher should figure out how to better help him.
- **Decreases motivation.** When kids get paid for doing some things, they might expect to get paid for everything they do. Pretty soon, your child may have his hand out every time you ask him to do a chore.

So what can you do to get your child's grades up? Help him focus on what he's learning. Call his attention to his new skills. And praise him for working hard and doing his best!



To get more information, share first, then ask

If you ask your child a lot of questions about school each day but get few answers, give this strategy a try: Before you ask a question, tell him several things about your day. *Then* ask him to tell you about his.

You can use this strategy to discuss schoolwork, too. If your child brings home a picture, for example, you could say what you like about it or what it reminds you of. Then ask, "What does it mean to you?"

Your child can be a leader!

All kids have the ability to become leaders. To nurture your child's leadership skills:

- **Watch leaders** in the news. When a story features a successful team effort, remind your child that somebody led that group. Discuss what makes a good leader.
- **Teach your child** to see things from other peoples' points of view.
- **Let your child** lead a family meeting or take charge of a family project.

Source: L. Balter and C.S. Tamis-LeMonda, *Child Psychology: A Handbook of Contemporary Issues*, Psychology Press.

Teach the need to read

To help your child understand the value of reading, point out how essential it is to so many daily activities, such as:



- **Communication.** Life without mail, email, texts and notes would be difficult—and not as interesting.
- **Business.** Show your child contracts, bills and other documents. Point out that reading skills help with understanding the "fine print."
- **Instructions.** Have your child read a recipe as you cook. Ask if he thinks he could make the dish without reading the instructions.

Parent Quiz

Are you making study time positive?

Few children *love* doing homework. But when parents make homework a positive experience, kids will usually do it without a battle. Are you setting your child up for homework success? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

- ___ **1. Do you give** your child choices—such as which subject to do first, or whether to study after school or before dinner?
- ___ **2. Are you available** and nearby to offer support when your child studies?
- ___ **3. Is homework time** a quiet time for your whole family? Do you turn off the TV and read, work or study?
- ___ **4. Do you help** your child study by quizzing her on spelling words or using flash cards?

- ___ **5. Do you praise** your child for a good effort?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are making homework time a productive time for your child. For each no, try that idea.

“As much as we watch to see what our children do with their lives, they are watching to see what we do with ours.”
—Joyce Maynard

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P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474

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