

# Seven Steps to School Success



A little support from home can go a long way toward helping your child succeed in school. From creating simple, everyday routines to staying in touch with teachers, here are seven ways you can help your youngster do his best.

**1 Keep up healthy routines.** Your child's eating, sleeping, exercise, and TV habits can affect her performance in school. Send her off ready to learn with these suggestions:

- Starting the day with breakfast can help your youngster concentrate, behave better, and learn more in school. A balanced morning meal includes protein (eggs, milk), whole grains (bagel, cereal), and a fruit or vegetable (banana, tomato slices).
- An hour of physical activity a day will help keep your child healthy and energetic. Encourage her to do something active each day (play outside, dance to music). *Tip:* Too much TV can keep your youngster from getting enough exercise. Experts suggest limiting screen time—TV, computers, video games—to an hour a day.
- Children need 10–11 hours of sleep each night to stay alert in school. Have your youngster stick to quiet activities after dinner (homework, board games, coloring), and create a regular bedtime routine (bath, story) so she'll fall asleep more easily.

**2 Stay in touch with teachers.** Regular communication with your child's school can keep you up-to-date on his progress. It also shows him that you and his teacher are a team. Here are some ideas for staying connected:

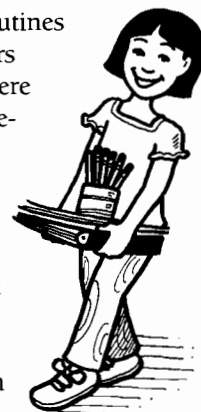
- Check in with the teacher from time to time—with either a call, a note, or an e-mail. She'll appreciate hearing from you when things are going smoothly as well as when you have a concern. For example, you might let her know about a lesson that your youngster enjoyed ("Aidan liked the magnet experiment so much that he showed it to his little sister").



- If your youngster needs extra support with a subject, let his teacher know you want to do your part ("What can we do at home to help Simon learn decimals?"). Your participation can encourage your child and help solve problems faster.
- Volunteer in your youngster's classroom or from home. If you can visit during the school day, the teacher may ask you to decorate bulletin boards or help children select library books, for example. If you work or have younger children at home, you might ask if your child can bring a project home for you, such as putting together a class book or framing student artwork.

**3 Develop a homework habit.** Routines provide consistency and let youngsters know what they're expected to do. Here are ways you can work with your child to create a homework routine:

- Many children need to burn off energy after school. You might set a timer for 30 minutes while your youngster plays. When it goes off, she'll know it's homework time. If you have more than one child, encourage siblings to do homework at the same time. They can motivate and help each other—and there will be fewer distractions.
- Remind your youngster to gather supplies and materials (paper, pencil, ruler, books, dictionary) before she sits down to work. That way, she won't need to get back up to search for items she needs.
- Begin homework sessions by asking your child to explain her assignments. When she's finished, be sure they're complete, but avoid correcting mistakes—homework shows her teacher what she has mastered and what she still needs to work on. *Note:* If you're not there when your youngster does her homework, let her know you'll look it over when you get home.



**4 Show interest in your child's work.**

Spend time talking to your youngster about school every day. She'll see that you care about what she does in class, and you'll know what she's learning. Consider these suggestions:

- When you ask your child about her day, phrase questions so they require more than a "yes" or "no" answer. She'll share more information if you ask, "What happened during your presentation today?" rather than "Was your presentation good?"
- Go through your youngster's backpack together each day, and ask about papers that she brings home ("Who was Booker T. Washington?"). Give specific praise, such as "You included a lot of information!" Your child will listen to what you have to say and be more likely to keep up the good work.
- Attend school events like your youngster's class play, science fair, or spelling bee. While you're there, ask her to show you any of her work that's displayed in the halls or in her classroom. She'll be proud to share her school life with you.



**5 Read, read, read.** Reading builds skills in every subject. Here are suggestions for motivating your child to read more and to understand what he reads:

- Keep reading material handy so your youngster can pick it up anytime. Have books, magazines, and newspapers on shelves or in baskets around the house. *Tip:* On holidays and birthdays, expand your child's collection by suggesting that relatives give him books, magazine subscriptions, or bookstore gift cards.



● Improve your youngster's reading comprehension by discussing books that you read together. For example, you might compare one story to another or to your own experiences.

● Help your child figure out unfamiliar words. You can suggest that he sound them out or use other words in the sentence or paragraph to make a good guess. For example, if he stumbles on the word *buttoned* in the sentence "Claire buttoned her coat before going outside," he might think, "What would she do to a coat that starts with *b*?"

**6 Strengthen study skills.**

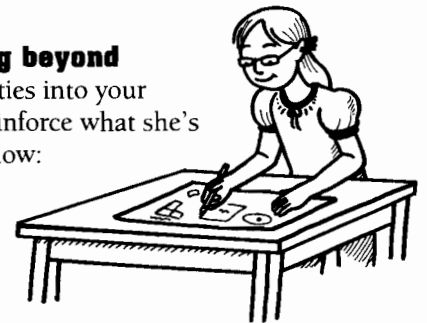
Developing good study habits in elementary school will help your youngster succeed now and later. These strategies can help him do his best on quizzes and tests:

- Help him figure out his learning style. If he's a visual learner (he prefers to look at words and pictures), he might make flash cards to memorize math facts. Or perhaps he is an auditory learner (he'd rather hear information). Suggest that he recite facts into a tape recorder and play them back. And if he is a kinesthetic learner (he likes to move around while studying), try quizzing him while he's jumping rope or bouncing a basketball.
- Compare note taking to a treasure hunt. Tell your child to search for important nuggets of information. Names, dates, and words in bold print are usually worth jotting down, along with an explanation of why each one matters.
- Teach your youngster to pace himself when preparing for a test. Say he has a social studies quiz on Friday. He might build 15 minutes a day, Monday through Thursday, into his homework routine. That way, he'll avoid cramming on Thursday evening.

**7 Extend learning beyond school.**

Fit activities into your child's day that reinforce what she's learning in class. Here's how:

- Give her practical jobs that will help her practice school skills. When she studies maps, for example, have her draw a map of a room in your house with new furniture arrangements you could try. To help her learn about money, she might collect your family's spare change and count it once a week.
- Fit learning into everyday activities such as cooking. Your youngster can measure ingredients to practice fractions. Ask, "How much flour would we need if we doubled this muffin recipe?" When she studies the water cycle, ask her to make ice cubes, or show her the steam when you boil water. Explain that water turns into a solid (ice) when it freezes and into a gas (steam) when it's heated.
- On weekends, plan family outings that relate to school subjects. During a Civil War unit, you might visit a battlefield. Read the historic markers, and suggest that your child pick up a brochure to share in class. Or find out if a school or community theater group is putting on a play based on a story she has read in school.



**Home & School CONNECTION**