

Positive

September—October 2007



Parenting

YOUR PARTNERS IN PARENTING

Helping Children Learn to Learn

Fall is coming and most children have already returned to school to start a new academic year. No doubt your children were excited to get to see their friends, enjoy extracurricular activities, and attend the first football game of the fall. But were they excited to be returning to classes or did they seem to be worried and anxious about jumping back into a children's version of the rat race?

Learning should be fun, even though learning can be hard work, too. Sometimes, for some children, learning new more advanced information can be challenging. When you see your child struggling with homework or feeling discouraged when the solution to a new math problem doesn't come easily, don't you wish you could help them learn? Well, you can! You can help your child learn how to learn!

Make Your Home a Learning Place

Begin by showing your children that you love to learn. We all know the adage, "Do as I say, not as I do." Children often learn more by observing what parents do than by being told

what they should do. So let them see you enjoying learning!

Read and enjoy books, magazines, and newspapers.

Keep a dictionary and set of encyclopedias in your home and use them often to look up answers to questions when they arise.

Instead of an encyclopedia, you could look up information on-line using a home computer. Of course, we recommend [Ohioline \(http://ohioline.osu.edu\)](http://ohioline.osu.edu), our own Ohio State University Extension web site as a great place to start. Another web site where you can find high quality research based information is [eXtenion \(pronounced E – extension: http://www.extension.org/\)](http://www.extension.org).

Talk with your children about the things they are learning in school. Let them know that you are excited to learn about those things, too.

Tell them about things you are learning that you find to be exciting, too.

Set aside some quiet time for reading – without having the television playing in the background!

Plan Family Learning Activities

Sometimes we make the mistake of separating "learning" activities from "fun" activities. But what if we could make learning one of the pleasurable things we do together, just like going to the movies?

Make trips to the library a fun family activity. Get excited about helping your children select their own books. Celebrate when they get their own library cards.

Take your children to children's museums, art museums, historic sites, planetariums, or science exhibits. Many of these are free or low cost. Talk about what you see and ask them what they enjoyed.

Don't forget that learning goes on in ordinary places, too. Trips to the

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Homework Help— Start the School Year Off Right!

It's 4 p.m. and your child has a book report due, a quiz to study for and soccer after dinner. You know the evening would run smoother if only he'd do his homework now. He, of course, has other ideas.

Sound familiar? You're not alone.

Homework can be a battle for some kids. Others seem to breeze through the worksheets and dioramas without any trouble at all. Regardless, every family benefits when the homework rules are clear, well-established -- and rarely negotiable.

Create a Homework Plan

Here are some tips to creating a homework plan that works for you:

- Set a schedule. Just like you have a time for dinner and bed, establish a time for homework. Bear in mind that each child might need a different schedule. Some do best getting their work done after school -- they're too exhausted later. Others need to unwind first.
- Create a study nook. Maybe it's the kitchen table or a desk -- doesn't matter. The important point is that your kids have a regular place to do their homework.

- Make a homework box. Pack a school box with all the supplies your kids will need to complete homework: glue stick, pencil, crayons, ruler, protractor. Not having to scramble for supplies will make finishing homework much less stressful.



Whose Homework Is It, Anyway?

It's important to remember that doing the homework isn't your job -- no matter how much your child struggles. Help your child, yes, but once you take the pencil into your own hand -- you've crossed the line.

By the time your child is in fifth grade, he or she should be showing signs of independence on the homework front. It's not a good idea to micro-manage their homework at this point. It's crucial that they learn to work independently -- and accept the consequences if they don't.

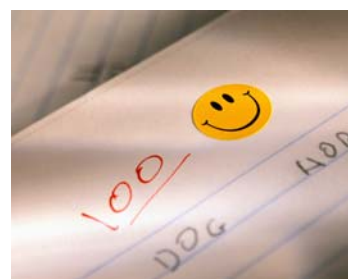
How do you know if your child is on top of the game? Grades. If your child is slipping, then it's time to step in and talk about homework.

It's important for the teacher to know if your child is struggling with a particular assignment. Sometimes sending a note to the teacher is helpful so he or she can give your child some extra attention on the topic.

So what is a parent's job when it comes to homework?

- For one, stay on top of the assignments due. Some teachers send home a list of assignments; others have web sites. Find out how your child's teacher operates.
- Praise your child's efforts.
- If your child struggles, try to get to the bottom of the difficulty. Is it organizational skills? Reading troubles? Boredom?

Try and make it fun. Maybe put out a fun snack for homework time, or agree to a game or outside play when homework's finished.



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Children and School Connectedness

School Connectedness? What is it and why does it matter?



Do your children feel that they receive support and caring from specific adults in their school?

Do they feel that they receive empathy, attention, and praise from teachers and peers?

Do they feel that they belong and are encouraged to become the best persons they can be?

If your children experience these feelings, then they feel connected to their school in important ways.

Why is School Connectedness Important?

Children who experience a sense of school connectedness are more likely to feel engaged with their schools and their peers, to work harder, and to be involved with positive activities inside and outside of school. In addition, children who experience connection with school are less likely to be violent, engage in risky sexual behavior, try or use drugs, or

drop out of school.

What Helps a Child Feel Connected to School?

The two most important factors that have been identified as influencing children's sense of connection with their school are parents and school climate.

Parents and School Connectedness

Parents play a big role in shaping children's connections at school. Parents who provide children with support, self-esteem, and a sense of personal competence provide their children with the skills they need to form the bonds of connection. Unfortunately, children who experience parental neglect or violence in early life are less likely to feel connected to school during the middle and high school years. These children are often labeled early as being "troubled" and are less likely to receive the kinds of support and positive attention they need from teachers and other adults to form positive connections.



School Climate and School Connectedness

A second factor that has been found to influence children's sense of connection with their school is school climate.

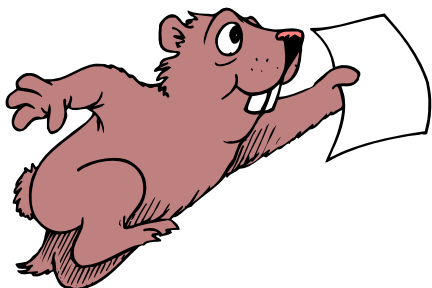
School climate is measured by asking children's views about several important aspects of life at school including (a) opportunities to affect classroom policies and procedures, (b) having positive relationships with adults at school, (c) believing that adults at school do not discriminate based on appearances, (d) opportunities for creative activities, and (e) believing the school rules and policies communicate care, value, respect, and trust for students.

Research studies indicate that the more positively students rate each aspect of school climate, the more likely they are to feel connected to their school. So ask your children if they feel a sense of belonging at school. Celebrate if they do, and talk about it if they don't. It may make a world of difference!

Adapted from:
Whitlock, J. (2003). *Fostering School Connectedness*. ACT for Youth - Upstate Center of Excellence.

Prevent the Early Morning Rush!

Summertime, and the livin' was easy. Not any more! Now there lunches to pack, notes to sign, and shoes to find! How can families make mornings more manageable?



Do mornings feel more like a nightmare than the bright start to a new day? Then you may want to try a few tips to help prevent morning madness!

Start the Night Before

Planning ahead and starting the preparations for tomorrow before going to bed tonight night can make a huge difference in the way your morning goes! Lay out clothing the night before for everyone in the family—including YOU! This not only gives you more time in the morning, it prevents unpleasant surprises. For example, by laying out your son's outfit before going to bed, you won't discover there's a stain on the shirt he is wearing to have his school picture taken as he's running out the door to catch the bus. It will also prevent the daily

search for shoes that seems to begin with every school year.

Start Going to Bed Earlier

Parents resist an earlier bedtime as much as children do, but it can make a big difference in how well you feel—and that can make a big difference in how well you function throughout the day. Of course, children need to go to bed earlier, too. It will help them awaken alert and ready to get up.

Start Getting Up Earlier, Too

You probably don't need to do anything drastic—just try setting your alarm clock to ring 15 minutes earlier than usual. You may find that it is well worth it.

Take Time for Breakfast

You might want to use those extra 15 minutes to enjoy a healthy breakfast. And having breakfast with the family—even something as simple as cereal, and fruit can make a big difference in how you and your children feel all day. Research findings suggest that individuals who eat breakfast perform better at work and school, and may see the added benefit of a smaller waist line, too!

Prepare Lunches While Preparing Breakfast

This is one kind of multitasking that is likely to be effective! While you're getting things in and out of the refrigerator and

cleaning up the counters, make two meals instead of one!

Have a Place for Everything and Make Sure Everything Needed is in Place

How much of your morning is spent looking for keys? Shoes? Homework or books? One way to avoid these searches is to have a place where keys, shoes, homework and other necessities belong, and then develop the habit of ALWAYS putting them in that place. One method to accomplish this goal is to have box or basket for each family member. Each person is



responsible for putting books, lunch money, hats and gloves or anything else that's needed in their basket.

Practice a few new morning management skills, and it won't be long before mornings will be the happy start to a new day that we always hoped they could be!

Adapted from:

Dealing with Morning Madness. Backpack Buddies BB-F-1. Ohio State University Extension

(...continued from page 1)

grocery store, home store, or bank all offer opportunities for learning.

Make a family game night at home and remember to play games in the car or while waiting in line at the grocery store. Not only will it help focus your children's attention on something other than the toys and candies positioned to attract them, it will help them polish their thinking skills!

Reward Learning with Love

While it might seem to make sense to offer children a money

reward for earning good grades, this may not be as helpful as it appears. Consumer Science educators advise parents to use caution when rewarding children's learning successes with money. While money incentives can be beneficial under some circumstances, research indicates that giving children money for good grades can sometimes prevent children from developing a love for learning. That is, instead of developing and enjoying a sense of personal satisfaction that comes from learning, children may think of the money as the reason for studying. Learning, then, becomes like any other chore that has to be done to get the reward.

Instead of offering money for grades, try rewarding children for good behavior or good grades with kind words or a hug. Tell your children you are proud of them, and complement the study skills they used to achieve success.

Sources:

Janet Bodnar, Dollars and Sense for Kids Kiplinger: Washington, DC

Helping Your Children Succeed at Learning. <http://www.aces.edu/pubs/docs/H/HE-0676/> **HE-676, Printed October 1996.** Current contact is **Ellen Abell**, *Extension Family and Child Development Specialist*, Associate Professor, Human Development and Family Studies, Auburn University. This publication was originally written by **H. Wallace Goddard**, former *Extension Family and Child Development Specialist*.

Positive Parenting



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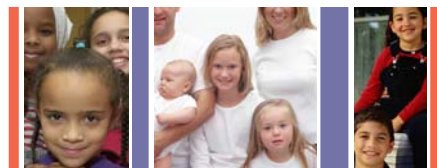
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<http://ohioline.osu.edu/> and
<http://hec.osu.edu/famlife>



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