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Elementary School Parents[®]

make the difference!

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Physical activity is linked to better classroom performance

It's no secret that exercise is good for your child. Along with other benefits, it can cut her risk for obesity, diabetes and even some types of cancer. But did you know that physical fitness may also help her in school?

Studies show that, compared with their inactive peers, children who get regular exercise:

- **Have better hand-eye coordination.**
- **Are better listeners.**
- **Are less fidgety in class.**
- **Have better handwriting.**

To give your child lots of opportunities to get her heart pumping:

- **Go on regular walks.** Pick a time, such as before or after dinner, to take a short walk around your neighborhood. Make this a habit.

- **Take the long way.** When you are out running errands, skip the elevators and escalators and take the stairs. Choose parking spots that will allow you to walk a bit farther.
- **Play games.** From catch to tag to hide and seek, there's no end to the fun your family can have.
- **Have contests.** When you watch TV together, challenge your child to a competition. During commercial breaks, see who can do the most jumping jacks or pushups.
- **Put her in charge.** Challenge your child to come up with some creative ways to keep your family moving.

Source: "Physically active children have improved learning and well-being, DMU researchers find," De Montfort University, niswc.com/elem_exercise.

Make an effort to connect with the teacher



Your child's teacher will be a significant person in his life this year. So it's helpful for the two of you to

build a strong bond. That way, you can work together, share information and head off any problems that may come up.

To make a connection:

- **Attend back-to-school night.** While this isn't the time or place for a long one-on-one talk, it will help each of you put a face to a name.
- **Share information.** Changes at home, such as the birth of a baby, loss of a job or pending divorce, can affect a child at school. Write a note, send an email or ask if the teacher can call you to talk. The more she knows about your child, the more she'll be able to support his learning.
- **Let your child know** you respect his teacher. Your attitude will affect your child's behavior in class.
- **Stay engaged.** Read the notes the teacher sends home from school. Fill out and return permission slips and paperwork in a timely manner.

Research shows that goofing off builds your child's brain



School is back in session, and many families start signing children up for after-school activities.

But signing up for too many structured activities could rob your child of an important chance for some “goofing off” time.

Studies show that even when kids' brains are in a “resting” state—that is, not being fed a formal stream of instruction—they're still active. It's just that they're learning in a different way. So, just because your child may not *look* busy, it doesn't mean his brain isn't busy!

To provide some brain-boosting downtime:

- **Let him be bored sometimes.** Don't race to solve your child's every “There's nothing to do!” whimper. Have him figure out how to fill the time himself. Who knows?

It might be just the spark his brain needs to come up with something innovative!

- **Put away the devices.** It's easy to give your child a smartphone or tablet to occupy his downtime. But consistently doing so robs his brain of a chance to actively acquire information (instead of being “fed” information by a screen). What if he looked out the car window, not at an app, during your next drive? What might his mind take in?

Source: L. Waters, Ph.D., “How Goofing Off Helps Kids Learn,” *The Atlantic*, niswc.com/elem_goof.

“Children are not things to be molded, but are people to be unfolded.”

—Jess Lair

Promote effective study habits for a successful school year



Helping your child build homework and study skills is one of the most important ways you can help her succeed in school.

And the start of a new school year is the perfect time to begin. Here's how:

- **Choose a regular time and place** for homework. It should be a quiet, comfortable spot free from distractions. Stock it with supplies, such as paper, pencils and a dictionary.
- **Allow for some free time.** Many kids need to blow off steam after school before settling into homework. Some like to exercise, talk about their days, or head straight for a snack. Keep healthy options available that will energize your child for work and play.
- **Encourage organization.** Effective studying starts with a to-do list. Older elementary school students should make one each day.
- **Pay attention.** Homework time is a chance for you to learn about your child. Does she excel at reading? Have trouble with spelling? Struggle with multiplication?
- **Be supportive.** Don't ever do your child's homework for her. But do stay nearby to supervise. It's OK to answer questions and guide your child through problems. However, if she seems to be struggling, talk with her teacher.

Are you helping your child live a healthy lifestyle?



Children need good health and physical well-being to learn. Are you setting your child up for success

by helping him establish healthy habits? Answer *yes* or *no* to each question below to find out:

- ___ **1. Do you enforce** a regular bedtime? Being well-rested will help your child focus in school.
- ___ **2. Do you make sure** your child starts the day with a nutritious breakfast? Research shows that students who skip breakfast don't do as well in school as students who do eat breakfast.
- ___ **3. Do you encourage** your child to eat nutritious snacks, including fruits and vegetables?
- ___ **4. Do you remind** your child that smoking and substance abuse will hurt his health and ability to learn?
- ___ **5. Do you encourage** your child to have an outlet for stress, such as exercising or writing in a journal?

How well are you doing?

Each *yes* means you are helping your child establish healthy habits. For each *no* answer, try that idea in the quiz.

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The Parent Institute, 1-800-756-5525,
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Improve your child's reading skills by reading yourself!



A parent's example always teaches a powerful lesson. You can't teach your child honesty if you don't tell the truth. You can't teach your child to eat healthy food if you never eat fruits or vegetables.

The same is true with reading. If you want your child to be a good reader, demonstrate reading habits that give the right impression.

You can:

- **Show your child how you read** for information. Say, "I'm trying to figure out how to use a new computer program for work. This article explains how it works."
- **Read for a purpose.** Do you take the bus in the morning? Show your child how you use the bus schedule to see when to leave the house. Are you looking for a new recipe for dinner? Show him how you search online or flip through cookbooks to find one to try.
- **Read for pleasure.** When your child sees you reading just to relax, he will realize that reading isn't just for school or work.
- **Share something you're reading.** If there's an interesting story in the paper, read some of it aloud. Print or cut out an article you think your child will enjoy and leave it on his bed. Your child will see that reading is something that is fun to share.
- **Take your child with you** when you go to the library. Show him how rewarding it can be to browse titles and discover a great book.
- **Bring something to read** with you everywhere you go. Your child will see that reading is a constructive way to pass the time.

Follow guidelines to ensure your child's backpack isn't too heavy



A backpack full of books and supplies can weigh your child down. She may develop neck strain, shoulder pain or a back-

ache. The heavy load could lead to chronic posture and back problems, and possibly missed days from school.

Take these precautions:

- **Weigh your child's backpack.** Have her fill it as she normally would. The rule of thumb is that the backpack shouldn't weigh more than 15 percent of your child's weight. So if your child weighs 60 pounds, the backpack should weigh less than 10 pounds.
- **Make sure your child isn't** carrying more than necessary. Have her check with her teacher if she's not sure.
- **Show your child how** to pack for comfort. Place heavier items—large books and binders—close to her back.
- **Make sure your child puts** the backpack on correctly, with both straps over the shoulders. Teach her how to adjust the straps so they fit snugly.
- **Notice how your child stands** and walks with the backpack on. She should be able to stand up straight, without leaning right or left, back or forward.
- **Be alert for signs of trouble**—red marks where the straps cut into her shoulder. Or complaints of pain in her back, neck or shoulders.

Source: "Backpack Safety," KidsHealth, nswc.com/elem_backpack.

Q: Our family just moved, and my daughter is starting a new school. At her old school, I was a regular volunteer in her classroom, but I am going back to work and can't do that any more. How can I still provide my child and her teacher with help and support?

Questions & Answers

A: There is no question that when parents support their children's education, their children are more successful. However, volunteering in a classroom is just one of many ways you can make a difference. Research shows that the things parents do *outside* the classroom can actually have a bigger impact on learning.

First and most importantly, let your daughter know that school is the top priority. You can do that in several ways:

- **Set a schedule** that allows plenty of time for her to get homework finished.
- **Have conversations** with your daughter about what she's learning in school. Then, make positive comments. Simply saying, "That sounds really interesting. I hope you'll tell me more" can motivate her.
- **Set high expectations.** Tell your child you know she can do well in school. Review her homework. Attend school activities. Compliment your child on her effort.

Although you can't be a regular class volunteer, there may be things you can do at home to support her teacher. Just ask! Perhaps you could type up a roster of class phone numbers, cut out a display for a bulletin board or coordinate supplies for an upcoming class party.

It Matters: Responsibility

Start the school year with a focus on attendance!



Research shows that chronic absenteeism (missing 15 or more days in a school year) damages academic

success. Unfortunately, more than seven million students across the nation miss three weeks or more each school year.

When students miss school or arrive late, *everyone* suffers. Teachers spend time collecting makeup work and reteaching. Meanwhile, other students—who are ready to learn—must wait.

Your child's most fundamental school-related responsibility is to get to school on time every day. To support your child:

- **Stick to a schedule.** Establish evening and morning habits that help your child be prepared. For example, select outfits and pack lunches at night.
- **Schedule carefully.** Make medical and other appointments during non-school hours when possible. School should be a priority when planning family trips, too. If your child must be absent, work with her teacher to help your child complete makeup work.
- **Seek help when needed.** Many problems contribute to missing school. If your family struggles with health, transportation, work, child care or other issues, talk with school staff. Our shared goal is to help children get to school and do their best.

Source: P.W. Jordan and R. Miller, *Who's In: Chronic Absenteeism under the Every Student Succeeds Act*, FutureEd, niswc.com/elem_chronic.

Four tips to help your child take responsibility for learning

While your child is a student, learning is his job. To do it well, he has to be an active learner—one who takes action instead of just listening.

Encourage your child to:

1. **Arrive prepared.** It's not enough just to show up for school. It's also important to get a good night's sleep, eat a nutritious breakfast and bring necessities.
2. **Participate in discussions.** Your child should ask questions, offer opinions and exchange ideas with others.
3. **Stay organized.** Help your child create a system for organizing assignments and other materials. Have him collect a few classmates' phone numbers. When he's



absent, he can call to find out what he's missed.

4. **Be persistent.** Support your child as he tackles assignments and studies for tests. Show confidence that his efforts will pay off!

Performing chores can build responsibility and confidence



Research from a 75-year Harvard study shows that children who are given chores become more independent

adults. However, many kids aren't required to do as much today as they were in the past. That means they may lack chances to develop traits that could help them in school and throughout life.

To make chores an effective part of your child's fall schedule:

- **Choose carefully.** Pick jobs that are challenging yet manageable for your child. Remember that everyday responsibilities, such as putting toys away, aren't "chores."

- **Schedule chore time.** Write chores on your family calendar and post it where everyone will see.
- **Limit rewards.** If you give your child an allowance, separate it from chores. Everyone in your family should be *expected* to pitch in. Make comments like, "It helps so much when you collect the trash! Thank you!"
- **Make work fun.** Chores should not be intolerable or feel like punishments. Turn cleaning into a game by setting a timer to "beat the clock." Or listen to an audio-book or music.

Source: B. Murphy Jr., "Kids Who Do Chores Are More Successful Adults," Inc., niswc.com/elem_chores.