

School Success—10 Ways Parents Can Help

Check our expert tips on how parents can help their child succeed this year.

1. Create a routine.

“Kids benefit from having structure in their home life,” says Michael Popkin, PhD, author of [Helping Your Child Succeed in School](#) and founder of Active Parenting Publishers. He recommends getting up at the same time each morning, eating a nutritious breakfast, and establishing a bedtime ritual that includes 20 minutes of reading (up to middle school).

2. Prepare for the morning the night before.

A bad morning practically ensures a difficult day at school. Avoid morning chaos by eliminating the need for last-minute decisions. Set up a spot for backpacks so they're easy to grab before heading out, make sure outfits are selected and meals are packed the night before, and make sure homework and projects are already packed so nothing important is forgotten.

3. Help your child get organized.

Kids need help developing a system for handling school-related items so that they feel in control of their success. Stacy DeBroff, author of [The Mom Book Goes to School](#) and founder of the website [Mom Central](#), suggests using color-coded folders so kids learn to easily connect a color with a subject (and find material quickly). Helping children keep backpacks uncluttered and storing all school items in a safe place can also reinforce organizational habits that will serve them well throughout their lives.

4. Provide a quiet place for homework, but let your child work alone.

A regular time and a good workspace to complete homework are essential, and homework should be a household priority. On the other hand, remember that the work is your child's responsibility, not yours. “Keep the house quiet during homework time, but don't stand over your child while he or she is doing homework,” Popkin says. Remember that homework provides important information about student comprehension to teachers, so you do your child a disservice if you correct answers. If you feel that you must help, point out mistakes but let your child figure out how to fix them. Read our recent article called [“Homework Tips for Parents”](#) for ideas on ways to help your child stay focused at homework time.

5. Limit distractions.

Television, computers, and video games can be huge competitors for your child's attention, especially when it comes to homework, so limit these activities, at least on school nights. “TV encourages children to be passive recipients of information and trains their brain to pay attention to rapidly changing, highly stimulating information,” says Robert Needlman, a developmental and behavioral pediatrician at [MetroHealth Medical Center](#) in Cleveland, Ohio. “As a result, kids



tend to turn off and tune out less stimulating information, such as someone reading to them or a teacher talking to them.”

6. Encourage intellectual curiosity.

Engage your child in dinner table conversations. Share your own interests, such as what you've learned recently about gardening or playing the piano. Talk about current events. Nourish your child's curiosity about the world, and you will help instill a love of learning.

7. Allow free time.

Every child needs time to unwind, so be sure that at least part of each day is free of responsibilities. In particular, try not to overschedule your child with too many afternoon activities. Unstructured play gives kids the opportunity to release stress and recharge their batteries. The absence of such free time creates unnecessary anxiety.

8. Build relationships with teachers.

Having open lines of communication with the teacher is key. Schools often distribute a back-to-school survey asking parents to share key information about their child: what motivates her, her likes and dislikes, her strengths and weaknesses, etc. This is the start of the teacher getting to know your child, but it is up to you to continue the dialogue throughout the year. Our article called [“Make Parents Your Partner”](#) offers helpful tips on how parents and teachers can build strong relationships .

9. Focus on effort rather than grades.

Show confidence in your children's abilities but don't ask too much of them. “If you're always raising the bar, they never feel quite good enough,” says Popkin. Start with strengths: Focus on what they do well. Then talk about how they feel about anything they are struggling with and whether the results represent a good effort for them or if they need to work on it.

10. Learn how to step back.

When evaluating your child's overall performance, be careful not to let your own ambitions take over. Resist the urge to micromanage your child's education. School is your child's job, not yours.