

Forty-Four Proven Ideas Parents Can Use to Help Their Children Do Better in School

From the Pages of *Parents Make the Difference!* newsletter

Making Time Count

- **Put specific times on your calendar** each week when you will spend time with your children. During that time, focus your love and attention on your child.
- **Use car time to talk with your children.** There's no phone or TV to interfere. No one can get up and leave. And kids know they really have your ear.
- **Plan to eat at least one meal together** as a family each day.
- **Look for things to do together as a family.** Get everyone involved in choosing how to spend your time together.
- **Try giving children TV tickets.** Each week, each child gets 20 TV tickets. Each ticket can be used for 30 minutes of TV time. Any tickets remaining at the end of the week can be cashed in for 25 cents each. Parents can still veto a certain program, of course.

Reading to Your Child

- **Try relaxing your family's bedtime rules** once a week on the weekend. Let your child know that he can stay up as late as he wants—as long as he's reading in bed.
- **Help your child start their own library**—paperback books are fine. Encourage your child to swap books with friends. Check used bookstores. Give books as gifts.
- **Want your children to be good readers?** Let them see you read. More students than ever have reported that their homes contained few or no reading materials.
- **Try holding D-E-A-R times at your house.** "DEAR" stands for "Drop Everything And Read." During DEAR time, everyone in the family sits down for some uninterrupted reading time.
- **With young children, try reading to them** during bath time.
- **Use the "Rule of Thumb"** to see if a book is on your child's reading level: Have your child read a page of the book aloud. Have her hold up one finger for each word she does not know. If she holds up four fingers and a thumb before the end of the page, the book is probably too hard for her to read alone. But it might be a great book to read aloud.

Building Self-Esteem

- **Have your child make a "book" about themselves**, with their own illustrations and wording. "A Book About Me" is a great way to help your child see herself as "somebody."

- **Help your child discover their roots** by talking with family members during holidays and other visits.
- **Constantly look for ways to tell your children** what you like about them, that you love them. There is no age limit on this. "When I do something well, no one ever remembers. When I do something wrong, no one ever forgets." Those words were written by a high school dropout.
- **Let kids overhear you praising them to others.**
- **Try "King/Queen for a Day"** for good report cards.
- **Help kids learn from problems**, not be devastated by them. Many parents don't ever use the word "failure." They may talk about a "glitch," a "problem," or a "snag." But even when something doesn't work out as they'd planned, successful people try to learn *something* from the experience.

Discipline

- **In good weather**, put two angry kids on opposite sides of a strong window or glass door. Provide each with a spray bottle of window cleaner and a rag. Then let them "attack." Their angry words will turn to laughter . . . and your window will be clean!
- **Try role playing to eliminate constant fighting.** For five minutes, have the fighters switch roles. Each has to present the other person's point of view as clearly and fairly as possible. Odds are, they'll start laughing and make up. Better yet, they may come up with a compromise solution both parties like.
- **For better discipline, speak quietly.** If you speak in a normal tone of voice, even when you're angry, you'll help your child see how to handle anger appropriately. And if you don't scream at your kids, they're less likely to scream at each other . . . or at you.
- **Try a "black hole"** to keep toys and other belongings picked up. All you need is a closet or cabinet with a lock—the "black hole." When something is left out that should be put away, it gets put into the "black hole" for 24 hours. Once a favorite toy or something your child needs is locked up for 24 hours, there is greater incentive to keep it where it belongs. This works best when the whole family participates.

Solving School Problems

- **Try looking over children's study materials** and making up a sample quiz as they study for upcoming tests.
- **Talk with the school "in time of peace"** before major problems develop.

- **How to make report cards a positive experience:**
Preparation. Ask, "What do you think your report card will tell us?" Getting ready is helpful.
Perspective. Understand that a report card is just one small measure of your child. A child with poor grades still has plenty of strengths. **Positive action.** Find something to praise. Focus on how to improve.
- **Be aware that your attitudes about school** affect your child. If you hated math, be careful not to prejudice your child.

Motivating Your Child

- **Children need the 4 "A"s as well as the 3 "R"s:** Attention, Appreciation, Affection, and Acceptance.
- **Some researchers believe every child is gifted—** if we will just look for the ways. Helping a child see his giftedness is very motivating.
- **Encourage children to read biographies** about successful people. As children learn about the traits that made others successful, they are often motivated to adopt those same success patterns in their own lives.
- **Motivate your children in math** by challenging them to figure out how much change you should get back from a purchase. If they get the amount right, they get to keep the change.
- **Praise children constantly.**

Building Responsibility

- **Try a simple cardboard box** to help make your child responsible for school belongings. Have your child choose a place for the box—near the door or in his room. Every afternoon, his *first* task should be to place all belongings in the box. When homework is finished, it goes in the box, too. In the morning, the box is the last stop before heading out the door.
- **Help children understand,** and take responsibility for, the consequences of their choices. "I chose to do my homework. The result was that I got an 'A' on my math test." "I chose to get up 15 minutes late. The result was that I missed breakfast . . . and nearly missed the bus."
- **Try giving your child the responsibility** of growing a small garden—even in just a flowerpot. The positive and negative results of carrying out your responsibilities are very clear.
- **One reader found a way to keep children moving** in the morning: After her daughter wakes up, Mom begins to play her favorite record album. Her daughter has until the side plays through to get herself dressed for school.

Reinforcing Learning

- **Encourage kids to collect things.** Whether they collect rocks, shells, leaves, or bugs is not important. But by collecting, children are learning new ways to make sense out of their world.
- **Estimating is an important math skill.** We estimate how much our groceries will cost. We estimate how much time we'll need to complete a project at work. You can help your child learn to estimate at home. Here's one idea: As you're driving,

estimate the distance to your destination. Then estimate how much time it will take to get there. Use the odometer or a map to check your work.

- **Talk about geography in terms children** can understand: **Go through your house** and talk about where things came from. A calculator may have come from Taiwan. A box of cereal may have a Battle Creek, Michigan address, or White Plains, New York. **Talk about where** the wheat for your bread came from. Where was the cotton for your blue jeans grown? **Tell your children** where your ancestors came from. Find the places on a map.
- **Show your child that writing is useful.** Have them help you write a letter ordering something, asking a question, etc. Then show them the results of your letter.

Homework

- **Try playing "Beat the Clock"** with your child during homework time. Look over the assignment and figure out about how long it should take to complete it. Allow a little extra time and set a timer for that many minutes. No prizes are needed. There is great satisfaction in getting the work done on time.
- **Teach your child to use the formula "SQ3R"** when doing any homework assignment. The letters stand for a proven five-step process that makes study time more efficient and effective: Survey, Question, Read, Restate, Review.
- **Here are five tips to make homework time easier—for you *and* your child:** **1. Have a regular place** for your child to do homework. Use a desk or table in a quiet room. Be sure there's plenty of light. **2. Find a regular time** for homework. You may want to make a rule, "No television until homework is finished." **3. During homework time,** turn off the TV and radio. **4. Help your child plan** how she'll use her time. **5. Set a good example.** While your child is doing homework, spend some time reading or working yourself. Then when homework is done, you can both talk about how much you've accomplished.
- **Nitty gritty homework tips: Do the most difficult** homework first. Save "easy" subjects for when you're tired. **Do the most important assignments first.** If time runs short, the priorities will be finished. **Do what's required first.** Finish the optional assignments later—even if they're more fun.
- **Look over your child's homework everyday.** Start at an early age and keep it up as long as you can. Praise good work. Your interest will encourage good work.
- **Try having your child teach *you* the homework.** The teacher always learns more than the student.

This handout may be reproduced for non-commercial professional use if this credit message is included. Copyright © 2000, The Parent Institute, P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474, 1-800-756-5525.