

Succeed in School

Make learning a habit in just 21 days

The best way to ensure your child is learning every day is to make a habit of it. Research shows that it takes only 21 days to create a lifelong habit—so here are 21 simple activities you can do with your child at home to promote school success. Try at least one activity every day for 21 days. After 21 days, you will have created a learning habit that will last a lifetime!

1 Have a family “Read-In.” Gather your family in a cozy room. Everyone brings a favorite book or magazine. After 30 minutes or so of reading, allow each family member to read aloud to the others.

2 Cook dinner together. Make each family member responsible for one part of the meal. Cooking reinforces important math skills, such as fractions and measurements.

3 Organize family photos. Gather some family photos and let your child organize them into albums. She’s practicing sorting and classifying as she searches for pictures with common themes.



4 Write a letter to a family member. Your child can write about anything—school, sports, a book he has read. He will strengthen his writing skills and make a member of your family feel special!

5 Read age-appropriate poetry together. It will improve your child’s listening, vocabulary and sense of timing. Let your child experiment with writing her own poems.

6 Discuss the five W’s and H—Who, What, Where, When, Why and How. After watching the news together or reading a newspaper article, challenge your child to write down the five W’s and H of the story.

7 Have fun with puzzles. Start with easy ones and work up to challenging ones as your family improves. Doing puzzles teaches logic and enhances spatial skills.

8 Have a geography bee. Where in the world is ... Madagascar? Prague? Easter Island? Or use local geography and landmarks—is school next to a pond or the woods? Check your answers with globes and maps.

9 Make lists. Tell your child what you need from the store and have her write it down. Not only will this give her practice writing, it will help her develop a sense of responsibility. Suggest she make her own to-do lists.

10 Make a craft challenge. It will create a sense of resourcefulness in your child and build responsibility. Ask your child to reuse items around the house for a project. He can decorate grocery bags to create gift-wrap, for example, or cover a can to make a pencil holder.

11 Review math facts with a deck of cards. Have your child remove all of the jokers and face cards. Now deal the cards—half to you, half to your child. Turn over two cards. Add them together (or multiply them). The person with the highest sum takes all four cards. Go through the entire deck. The person with the most cards at the end is the winner.

12 Use an “accordion sentence.” Start with a short sentence, like: “The cat lay by the window.” Then take turns adding one descriptive word at a time to expand the sentence. For example: “The *yellow* cat lay by the window.” “The *fat, yellow* cat lay by the window.” “The *fat, yellow* cat lay by the *sunny* window.”

13 Ask your child to sort the mail into two stacks—one for junk mail, one for regular mail. Define junk mail and help her recognize it. Then help her figure out: “If we get the same amount of junk mail every day, how much will we get in a week?” “What percentage of our total mail is junk mail?”

14 Review spelling words. Have your child use all the assigned words to create 5 or 10 silly sentences. Or be authors and write a brief story using all of the words. Your child could even hunt for his spelling words in a newspaper or magazine.

15 Try family storytelling to build language skills and creativity. Have one family member say the name of a person, animal or thing. Have another think of an action. Another, a location. Have the storyteller tell a story using all three suggestions.

16 Take a walk with your child. Take paper and a pencil with you so you can keep a record of what you see on your walk. Walk for 100 steps. Then stop for 30 seconds. Make a record of everything you see and hear. Repeat. What has changed?

17 Experiment! Have your child put a large pan in your kitchen sink (to protect it). Put an empty jar in the pan. Pour some syrup, colored water and oil into the jar. Do they mix? Which is heaviest? Which is lightest? Add 1/4 cup vinegar and two tablespoons baking soda to the liquid. Watch as the potion bubbles. Drop small pieces of uncooked pasta into the liquid. Do they float or sink?

18 Have your child teach you. Help her choose what to teach—how to play a game or how to get to a friend’s house. Have her write step-by-step instructions. Remind her to be clear, brief and accurate. Together, review and test her instructions.

19 Ask questions. After reading a story, ask your child, “Why do you think that character made that decision?” “What would you have done?” “How else could the story have ended?”

20 Teach your child how to recognize coins and help him develop problem-solving skills, too. Put one of each kind of coin on a table. Pick one of the coins and give your child hints to help him figure out which coin it is. “Five of these coins equal one quarter.” Or practice making trades. Tell him that you’ll give him twenty pennies for a quarter and ask him if that’s fair.

21 Estimate. Fill a jar with small items. Ask family members to estimate how many items are in the jar. Once each person has made a guess, ask your child to count the items. The person who comes closest to the actual amount wins!

