

# Helping Children Learn<sup>®</sup>

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School



September 2017

Clairton City School District  
Dr. Hunt, Superintendent

## Show you value effort, kindness and fairness as well as grades

You want your child to start the school year off right. It is appropriate to care about your elementary schooler's academic success, and helpful to encourage his best efforts. But too much pressure to get high marks can backfire.

Research shows that students do better both academically and socially when their parents focus just as much on developing values such as kindness and fairness as they do on grades.

To balance your expectations:

- **Prioritize effort over outcome.** Your child should not be afraid of your reaction if he comes home with a bad score on a test. Help him learn from it and figure out what he can do differently next time.
- **Ask your child how people treat one another** in school, whether in class or on the playground. Talk about what he can do to make school a pleasant place for everyone to learn.
- **Emphasize the importance of caring and fairness** by modeling them. Have your child help you do something kind for a neighbor. Point out when someone is being treated unfairly. Let your child see you stand up for others.
- **Contact the teacher if you have questions** about how your child is doing in school. Ask how you can support his academic progress and his social development.



Source: Arizona State University, "Parents should avoid pressuring young children over grades, ASU study says," [niswc.com/care](http://niswc.com/care).



## Set your child up for studying success

To get the most out of education, your child needs to develop effective study skills. The start of a new school year is the perfect time to begin. Here's how:

- **Designate a study area.** It should be well lit and as free from distractions as possible. Your child will learn that going to this spot means it's time to study.
  - **Help your child** get organized. Encourage her to make a to-do list of homework tasks each day. Crossing tasks off as she completes them will make her feel capable.
  - **Put homework and studying** before screen time. Electronics and TV are privileges that should come after priorities such as reading, homework and chores.
- As your child studies, stay nearby and pay attention. Is she struggling with a subject? It's OK to answer questions and guide her through problems. But don't ever do her homework for her.
- If your child continues to have difficulty studying or completing homework, let the teacher know.

## Promote active learning

Your child will be exposed to lots of new ideas and information this year. To learn it well, he must take action. Encourage him to:

- **Participate in class** and ask questions if he is confused.
- **Keep papers** and schoolwork organized.
- **Be persistent.** Help your child tackle challenges one step at a time.

## Ease back-to-school fears

For some children, going back to school brings on anxiety. Here are three common sources of worry and ways to relieve them:

- **Harder work.** Reassure your child that she can do the work. Research says brains get smarter with use.
- **Friendships.** Encourage your child to participate in activities she enjoys. She'll meet other people who enjoy them, too.
- **A new teacher.** Tell your child it's common to be nervous about new people. If possible, introduce her to the teacher before the first day.



Source: K. Wallace, "Back to School: What kids are most anxious about is ...," CNN, [niswc.com/worries](http://niswc.com/worries).

## Inspire reading by example

Your child will need strong reading skills in almost every school subject. Encourage him to read by showing him many uses for reading. Let your child see you:

- **Read to find** something out.
- **Read to learn** something new.
- **Read for pleasure** and to relax.
- **Read to pass time** while you wait.



Source: T. Donohue, "10 Reading Tips for Families," Iowa Reading Research Center, [niswc.com/model](http://niswc.com/model).



## How can I help my child in school if I work full time?

**Q:** Our family just moved, and my daughter is new in school. I'd like to get involved, but I work. How can I support my child in school if I can't volunteer during the day?

**A:** You are quite right that children benefit when parents get involved with their education. But volunteering in the classroom is just one way to support your child in school. There are also lots of things you can do at home.

On mornings, evenings and weekends:

- **Ask your child about what she's learning.** Continue the conversation by making positive comments and asking her to tell you more. Talk with her about new things that you learn at your job, too.
- **Help your child manage her time.** Schedule activities so that she has plenty of time for schoolwork, exercise, family and just relaxing. Have her write her assignments on a family calendar so you can both see how much time she has to do them.
- **Make reading enjoyable.** Help your child find books she likes. Take turns reading aloud. You might also read the same book she's reading, and then discuss it over a snack.

When you show your child over and over that school and learning are top family priorities, they'll become her priorities, too.



## Put an end to absences

What's one simple factor that has a huge impact on school success? Attendance. Missing as few as 10% of school days can affect an elementary schooler's academic achievement, make her more likely to be held back and even to drop out entirely.

You have the biggest influence over your child's attendance. To help prevent absences:

- **Create routines**—for homework, for bedtime, for getting ready in the morning.
- **Schedule appointments** and family trips for non-school hours.
- **Talk to your child** about the value of attending school on time every day.

Source: C. Robinson and others, "Reducing Student Absenteeism in the Early Grades by Targeting Parental Beliefs," Harvard Kennedy School, [niswc.com/out](http://niswc.com/out).

## Partner with the teacher

The teacher doesn't work alone to educate your child. She needs your help. Meet the teacher at back-to-school night. Then, throughout the year, share information about your child—such as changes at home or challenges he is facing in school or out.



Let your child know you respect the teacher and you will work with her to help him learn. Your cooperative attitude sets the tone for your child's behavior in class.



## Are you ready for a new school year?

A new school year often means trading relaxed summer habits for more structure. Are you ready to help your child make the shift to school routines? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

- \_\_\_ **1. Have you established** a regular homework and study time for your child?
- \_\_\_ **2. Have you set** a bedtime that lets your child get nine to 12 hours of sleep?
- \_\_\_ **3. Does your family** have a regular daily reading time?
- \_\_\_ **4. Have you established** evening routines—laying out clothes, packing school bags—to make mornings go more smoothly?
- \_\_\_ **5. Have you reviewed** school rules with your child?

### How well are you doing?

*More yes answers mean you are providing a framework to help your child do his best in school. For each no, try that idea from the quiz.*

"We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence then, is not an act, but a habit."  
—Will Durant

## Motivate with praise

Children can spot a fake. Saying "Good girl!" in response to everything your child does won't motivate her or make her trust your opinion. Instead, encourage your child with praise that is:

- **Deserved.** "Your handwriting has gotten much neater."
- **Detailed.** Tell her exactly what she did right so she knows what to do next time.

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Published in English and Spanish, September through May.  
Publisher: L. Andrew McLaughlin.  
Publisher Emeritus: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.  
Editor: Alison McLean.  
Staff Editors: Rebecca Miyares & Erika Beasley.  
Production Manager: Sara Amon.  
Translations Editor: Victoria Gaviola.

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P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474  
1-800-756-5525 • [www.parent-institute.com](http://www.parent-institute.com) • ISSN 1527-1013