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Illustrated by Joe Mignella

Children do better in school when parents are involved

At the start of a new school year, parents make sure their kids have school supplies. But research shows the most important “school supply” is a dose of parent involvement.

Researcher Charles Izzo followed children from kindergarten through third grade in 27 schools. He found that when parents did just a few simple things, their children did better in school.

The most crucial thing parents can do is support their children's school work at home. From setting regular study times to encouraging children to do their best, parents of the most successful children are partners with the school.

Parents should also:

- **Stay in touch.** Meet your child's teacher. Let the teacher

know when things are going well and when they're not. Write a note, send an email or pick up the phone.

- **Build a relationship** with your child's teacher. Kids learn best when they feel that home and school are on the same team.
- **Come to school.** Mark the date for Open House on your calendar. Bring your child to Math Night. Every time you walk in the building, you help strengthen the feeling your child has that “school is important.”

Source: Charles Izzo, Roger Weissberg, Wesley Kasprow, Michael Fendrich, “A Longitudinal Assessment of Teacher Perceptions of Parent Involvement in Children's Education and School Performance,” *American Journal of Community Psychology*, www.springerlink.com/index/L6530133R1063107.pdf.

Building Responsibility

Attendance is directly linked to achievement



Parents who let their kids miss a lot of school are setting them up for school failure. Researcher Mary Frase tracked students who dropped out of high school. One thing that nearly all of them had in common was poor attendance.

One of the most important things you can do as a parent is to get your child to school on time every day. The start of a new school year is a time to help your child make this a habit.

Follow these tips:

- **Enforce a regular bedtime** for your child.
- **Make sure your child** is organized so she can get out the door with what she needs.
- **Remember that everything** you add to a schedule means something must be taken away. For example, if you add lots of before- and after-school activities, you take away time for your child to read, play and study.

Some kids can handle a busier schedule. But if youth sports leave your child too tired to do homework or to get up in the morning, it's time to cut back.

Source: Joan Gaustad, “Identifying Potential Dropouts,” *ERIC Digest*, ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management, www.ericdigests.org/1992-5/dropouts.htm.

Discipline

Improve your discipline by using consequences



Having consequences for misbehavior helps children learn to behave. Consequences provide structure and help children know where they stand.

Consequences are most effective when you:

- **Pose them** in a positive manner. Say, "Yes, you can go play as soon as you finish cleaning your room." Avoid saying, "No, you can't play because you haven't cleaned your room."
- **Focus on the behavior** you want, rather than the consequence. You don't always need to tell your child what the consequence is. Knowing the consequence may actually

encourage her to weigh her options at times.

- **Get your child** to come up with the consequence. This beats just imposing it. For example, what should happen if your child fights with a sibling?

By being involved, a child feels more ownership for the result. This encourages her to take more responsibility for her behavior.

If your child doesn't come up with a suitable consequence at first, keep asking, "What else?"

Source: Marvin Marshall, *Discipline Without Stress, Punishments or Rewards: How Teachers and Parents Promote Responsibility & Learning*, ISBN:0-9700606-1-0 (Piper Press, 1-800-606-6105, www.piperpress.com).



Parent Quiz

Is your child making the most of the library?

Kids who know how to make the most of the library do better in school, says research by the U.S. Department of Education. Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to see if you're helping your child learn to use the library:

- ___ **1. I teach my child** how to behave in the library.
- ___ **2. We go to the library** to find answers to our questions.
- ___ **3. We use the library** to find books for fun. We ask the librarian to suggest titles kids like.
- ___ **4. We use the library** to find extra information for homework.
- ___ **5. We attend the library's** children's story hours and book clubs.

How did you score?

Each *yes* answer helps your child make the most of a great learning resource: your local library.

Encouraging Writing

Have fun with descriptive words



Here's a fun way to help your child use descriptive words. Write an "accordion sentence." It's a sentence that can be expanded, word by word.

Start with a short sentence: "The cat lay by the window."

Then take turns adding one word at a time. 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.

Source: Martha Cheney, *How to Develop Your Child's Gifts and Talents in Writing*, ISBN: 1-565-65797-7 (Contemporary Books Lowell House, 877-833-5524, www.mcgraw-hill.com).

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**Questions
& Answers**

Q: Last year, my son rarely made it to school with everything he needed. I made many trips to drop off his lunch or a book. How can I make him more responsible for getting to school with everything he needs?

A: A few kids are born organized. The rest need help in managing the details. While it isn't rocket science, you can borrow some tips from our space program to get your son out the door with everything he needs.

• **Set up a "launch pad."**

Here's where he stores everything that has to go to school. His book bag goes here when he walks in the door.

Don't wait until morning to help him get organized.

• **Don't wait until morning** to help him get organized. As a regular part of your evening routine, sit down together to plan for the next day. While you lay out bills to mail, he can pack his homework and permission slips. He should make his lunch and store it in the refrigerator.

• **Have a morning** "count-down" before it's time to head out the door, with a five-minute and two-minute warning. If he's easily distracted, don't let him watch TV or play video games before school.

If he's still late to the bus, you can try another sneaky mom trick—setting the clocks ahead. Some families swear that even a five-minute speedup makes their mornings less chaotic.

—Kristen J. Amundson
The Parent Institute

Building Character

Teach your child how to be unspoiled & self-reliant



Your child is supposed to be doing homework. But she pouted so much you let her watch TV instead.

It may be a minor hassle for you at home. But when a teacher faces 30 kids, each of whom expects to get her own way every minute, things can get out of hand. Sooner or later, people have to learn that they can't always get to call the shots.

One of the best ways to help your child be more successful in school is to help her realize that the world does not revolve around her. Here are some tips on raising an unspoiled child:

• **Teach your child how** to deal with disappointments that arise in life. It's not your job to make your child happy every minute.

- **Teach your child to think** about other people. Unspoiled kids know that they can't always put themselves first. Give money to or volunteer for a charity your child chooses. Ask questions like, "How would Jill feel about that?"
- **Teach your child** about limits. Parents aren't always popular. Your child does not need you to be a friend. Your child needs you more to help her learn about limits.
- **Ask yourself**, "Am I raising my child to be self-reliant? Am I teaching her to live on her own one day?" If you always give her money when she wants something, she will not learn to live within her means.

Source: Michele Borba, "Nine Tips for Raising Unspoiled Kids," www.micheleborba.com/Pages/ArtBMI05.htm.

Motivating Your Child

Try motivating your child with a positive attitude



Your child is dragging a bit as she comes to the breakfast table. What do you say to her?

Some parents might sympathize. "You poor thing, going to school on such a nice day."

But that sends exactly the wrong message. Try saying, "Just think. You're going to learn new and interesting things today. You're going to spend time with your friends."

The same approach works when kids are doing homework. Instead of telling your child she

has to do homework before she has fun, try to help her see that homework can be fun. "I can't wait to see what you're going to write about the book you're reading."

If your child sees all work as drudgery, step in. Help her see the link between what she's learning now and what she can do in the future. The goal is for your child to grow up with a positive feeling about working hard.

Source: Lucy Calkins, *Raising Lifelong Learners*, ISBN: 0738200247 (Perseus Books Group, 1-800-345-5359, www.perseusbooks.com).

Homework

Give your child the right kind of homework help



Homework is a vital link between home and school. Teachers give homework to help children understand and review class work. Parents find out what their child is studying by being involved in homework.

But being involved does not mean *doing* your child's homework for him. That will give the teacher a false reading of your child's progress. Plus you'll prevent your child from building confidence in his ability to do the work himself.

Here are ways to help your child do well with homework:

- **Make sure your child** understands assignments. Have him read the directions to you. If he doesn't read yet and the teacher has sent home instructions, read the directions to him. Then ask him to explain the assignment in his own words. Ask questions to check understanding.
- **Review homework** every day. Even if you're not home when your child does his homework, always ask to see it. Your interest sends the message that homework is important.
- **Don't let your child** become too frustrated. Let him take a break if you notice he's blocked. Then help him with what is frustrating him.
- **Ask your child to show** you homework that's been corrected by the teacher. Notice where he's having problems and focus your attention on those areas.

Sources: "How to Help: Provide Guidance—Helping Your Child With Homework," Ed.gov, www.ed.gov/parents/academic/help/homework/part7.html; "Help Your Student Get the Most Out of Homework," National Education Association, www.nea.org/parents/homework.html.

Encouraging Reading

Tickle your child's funny bone to encourage reading

Parents often take their children's reading seriously. Sometimes, treat your child to the lighter side of reading to get her excited about it. Create a "Funny Reading" night.

Gather funny resources—a joke book, a story told in riddles, comic books and small sheets of paper.

Before your fun night, ask your child to bookmark a funny part of a book she's reading. Share how you're putting place marks in your books.

On Funny Reading night:

- **Read the marked** paragraphs to one another.
- **Take turns reading jokes.**
- **Help your child read** the riddle story or comics to you.
- **Play a word game.** On separate sheets of paper, have your child write a word from the funny resources. Ask her to place each sheet in a row



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on the floor. Then help her rearrange the words to make a funny sentence. Fill in words like *a*, *to*, *of* and *the*. For example, "The purple cat skipped into the flying backpack."

Making Time Count

Go on a scavenger hunt to help your child explore fall



Explore the changing seasons with your child to develop his curiosity in science.

A scavenger hunt is ideal for fall.

Decide where to have the hunt—a nearby park or your backyard. Prepare for the hunt by seeing what's there. Look for twigs, stones, acorns, pine cones, bird feathers, flowers and leaves. Also shop your local garden center for special treasures—pumpkins, gourds, Indian corn.

Before the hunt, hide any items you're adding to the outdoor hunt. Make a list of items

your child can find on the hunt.

For the hunt:

- **Give your child a bag** or basket to tote his treasures.
- **Walk with him** and help him read the list, if needed.
- **Explain each treasure** as he finds it. Tell him how it's special to the season.

Later, use the acorns or other seeds your child finds for a science project. Have him wrap the acorns in a damp paper towel. Put them on a window sill. Have him check the towel, keeping it damp. After the acorns sprout, plant them outside.