

Helping Children Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

Orange Hunt Elementary School
Dr. Judy Ryan, Principal

September 2009

IMPORTANCE OF ATTENDANCE

Encourage attendance all year long

Good attendance has a huge effect on your child's school success. In fact, kids who miss a lot of school—even in the early grades—are more likely to drop out. They have more problems learning material and fall behind easily.

One school district asked families why their kids missed school. Here are their top answers—and some ways you can deal with those problems:

- **Your child feels sick.** If she doesn't have a fever of over 100° and she isn't obviously sick (vomiting, severe coughing, diarrhea), your child can probably go to school. If you do keep your child home, don't make it a "fun" day.
- **Your child won't get up.** Make bedtime earlier. Help her get ready for school the night before.
- **You need your child at home to help with younger kids.** If you work and need child care, be sure to have a backup plan if your sitter gets sick. It's not fair to ask an older child to miss school to care for younger kids.
- **Your child is worried.** Talk with your child. Is it a spelling test that worries her? Help her review the words. If it's something more serious, talk with the teacher. Together, you can probably solve the problem. Meanwhile, tell her the rule is that she *will* go to school—every day.

Source: Joyce L. Epstein and Steven B. Sheldon, "Present and Accounted For: Improving Student Attendance Through Family and Community Involvement," *Journal of Education Research* (Heldref Publications, www.heldref.org/jer.php).



MOTIVATING YOUR CHILD

Get focused on good habits this year

The beginning of the school year is an important time for your child to develop good habits. Here are some to focus on:

- **Planning ahead.** When your child faces a big task, teach him to divide it into small parts. Then he should set a deadline for each section. This makes projects less intimidating. Best of all, it gets them done on time.
- **Being organized.** Inside the door, use a box or shelf as a place for your child to stash all the stuff that has to go to school tomorrow.
- **Managing time.** Make sure your child doesn't commit to too many activities. Always leave time for family and homework. Set a good example yourself by putting family first.

WORKING WITH YOUR SCHOOL

Your involvement matters!

Research shows that children benefit when parents are actively involved in their education and their lives. You can:

- **Talk** to your child about school.
- **Keep** a learning-friendly home.
- **Encourage** reading for pleasure.
- **Be aware** of what he does with friends.
- **Keep** in touch with your child's teacher.
- **Attend** your child's games or events.

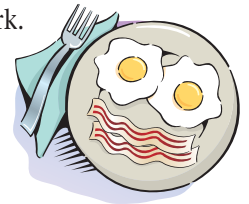
Source: Susan J. Paik, "Ten Strategies That Improve Learning," Educational Horizons, www.pilambda.org/horizons/v81-2/paik.pdf.

MAKING TIME COUNT

Make the most of mornings

Kids thrive at school when they can spend time with parents at home. So if you have to work in the evening:

- **Do some school tasks** in the morning. Get up early to check your child's homework. Help him review for a test.
- **Make breakfast** the main family meal. Sit down. Talk about the school day to come.
- **Plan as much family time** as possible on weekends (or whenever your days off are scheduled).



HOMEWORK

Set up a 'homework hub'

Children need a quiet area for studying. But that doesn't mean your child has to be banished to her room. Some children like to have people around, especially parents who can help. If your child feels this way, brainstorm about a distraction-free spot that might work for her.



September 2009

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

How can parents encourage school friendships?

Q: My son's best friend moved this summer, and he's having trouble making new friends. He says school is "no fun" without his buddy. What should I do?

A: Your son's reaction is common. School just isn't the same without good friends.

Start by talking with his teacher. What does she see in class? Does your son have friends in school? (Kids have been known to exaggerate.)

Does he eat lunch by himself or with other classmates? If students get to choose partners, is he always the last one to be picked?

Then ask the teacher about why your son might be having problems. Are there things he does that seem to annoy other students? Perhaps there are social skills you can practice with him. You may want to meet with the school psychologist or guidance counselor as well.

Meanwhile, have your son invite a classmate over after school. (The teacher might be able to suggest someone.) Plan an activity they're sure to love, such as watching a movie or playing in the backyard.

Finally, let your child pursue his hobbies. He might want to play on a soccer team or take an art class. This will help him meet kids with similar interests. Having pals *outside of school* can give him confidence to socialize at school.



PARENT QUIZ

Is your child building responsibility?

The more your child acts in a responsible way, the more likely she is to do so again—and the lessons you teach at home will show up at school. Answer these questions *yes* or *no* to see if you're helping your child be responsible:

- ___ **1. Is your child** responsible for getting herself up and ready for school?
- ___ **2. Do you have** a regular homework time in your house?
- ___ **3. Does your child** know that choices have consequences?
- ___ **4. Is your child** responsible for getting her homework back to school?
- ___ **5. Do you refuse** to rush an item to school if your child forgets it?

How did you do? Each yes answer means you are helping your child be responsible. For each no answer, try that idea from the quiz.

“Nothing strengthens the judgment ... like responsibility.”
—Elizabeth Cady Stanton

BUILDING SELF-ESTEEM

Goals make the year great

Goals can keep kids motivated all year long. Talk with your child about setting some this year. Does she want to improve math skills? Should she contribute more in class?

Have your child put her goals on a chart. Check them off as they are completed. Celebrate progress! Compliment your child and put stars on the chart to highlight her success. Setting goals is a perfect way for children to recognize how much they can achieve at school.

DISCIPLINE

Back up words with actions

Here's a key to good discipline: Before you name a consequence, be sure you can follow through with it. Don't say, "If you don't quiet down, we'll never go to the movies again." Kids will know you're not serious, so they may not obey. Try saying something like "If you don't quiet down, we're not going to the movies tonight."

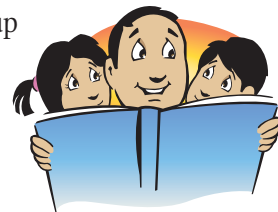
ENCOURAGING READING

Read mysteries as a family

Children of all ages enjoy reading aloud with their parents. If you stopped this habit after your child left preschool, start it up again. Reading mysteries is a fun way to begin.

Take turns reading chapters aloud.

Who can guess what might happen next? How do you think the story might end? Have your child write down ideas and check them later. This is a skill that will help your child no matter what he's reading—a mystery book or a history book!



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Published in English and Spanish, September through May.

Publisher: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.

Editor: Jennifer McGovern.

Staff Editors: Erika Beasley & Rebecca Miyares.

Writer: Pat Hodgdon. Production Manager: Pat Carter.

Head of Translations: Michelle Beal-García.

Illustrations: Maher & Mignella, Cherry Hill, NJ.

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P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474

1-800-756-5525 • www.parent-institute.com • ISSN 1527-1013