

# Helping Children Learn

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

Harford County Public Schools

November 2005

## MOTIVATING YOUR CHILD

### Good organization leads to success

She left her math paper on the kitchen table. Then she lost the first draft of her book report. Sometimes the hardest task parents and teachers face is getting students organized enough to do well in school. One of the biggest favors you can do for your child (and her teachers) is to teach her how to get organized. Consider these tips:

- **Label everything.** From books to backpacks to homework, help your child put her name on items. They're more likely to reach their destinations—and get returned to your child.
- **Set up a study space.** Make sure your child has a tidy spot to do homework. Stock it with necessary supplies.
- **Use colored folders.** Put math papers in blue and spelling in red, for example. This makes it easy for your child to find and file work.
- **Develop a schedule.** Wake up, go to sleep and study at specific times. Routines help children relax and stay on track.
- **Write down tasks.** Whether your child uses a calendar or assignment notebook, help her get comfortable with planning.
- **Make a new rule.** Homework isn't finished until it's in the backpack, by the front door—and then turned in!



Source: Sandra F. Rief, *The ADD/ADHD Checklist: An Easy Reference for Parents & Teachers*, ISBN: 0-137-62395-X (Prentice Hall Publishers, 1-800-631-8571, prenticehall.com).

## REINFORCING LEARNING

### Use an alphabet game to review ABCs

Playing the "Alphabet Words" game is an easy way to practice letters, spelling and word sounds.

Make four columns on a piece of paper. Write the letters A through M in the first column, and N through Z in the third column. Label columns two and four "Word." The goal of the game is to choose a word for every letter of

the alphabet—apple for A, brown for B, etc. To play:

- **Encourage your child** to think of as many words as he can.
- **Give hints when needed.** "I'm thinking of something cold and hard that starts with I." (ice)

For an extra challenge, make all the words match a theme. For instance, think of 26 animals, foods or places.

Source: Peggy Kaye, *Games for Reading*, ISBN: 0-394-72149-7 (Pantheon Books, 1-800-733-3000, www.randomhouse.com).

## WORKING WITH YOUR SCHOOL

### Plan for parent conferences

If your child has a parent-teacher conference coming up, start preparing now. List things to ask, such as:

- **Is my child** progressing well in school?
- **What can I do** to support learning?
- **Are there any problems** I should be aware of?
- **How much time** should my child spend on homework?

## ENCOURAGING WRITING

### Have fun with writing

Writing is one of the most important skills for school success. Here are some exciting ideas to make writing fun for your child:

- **Give your child** a fun pen or pencil to use.
- **Make writing a family project.** Create a funny rhyme or amazing story together.
- **Ask your child to help** with tasks he likes, such as writing holiday cards.



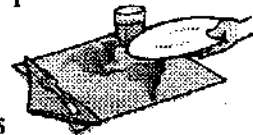
Source: Stephen Stroup, "Parent Support of Early Literacy Development," ERICDigests.org, ericdigests.org/2002-2/parent.htm.

## TALKING AND LISTENING

### Build your child's school skills during family meals

If your family eats dinner together regularly, your child practices important school skills, such as listening, thinking, sharing and speaking up. Try these activities during mealtime:

- **Place an interesting object** in the center of the table to encourage conversation.
- **Laminate old maps** as placemats and talk about far away places.
- **Bring a calendar** to the table and make fun family plans.



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Elementary School  
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## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

### How can you help when your child feels overwhelmed?

**Q:** My fourth grader says school is much harder this year. He's so overwhelmed that he resists learning. How can I help?

**A:** Your son is right. Fourth grade is a lot harder. Assignments in many subjects—from reading to math to social studies—are longer and require more thinking. You can help your child face this challenge in a healthy way.

First, figure out whether he is intimidated by the work or truly unable to do it. Make it clear that everyone must do unpleasant tasks sometimes. But if a job is too hard, it's okay to ask for help.

If you suspect that your child is overwhelmed, talk with his teacher. Has he mastered the skills he needs? Does he have a learning problem that didn't become clear until now? How can you work with the teacher to solve the problem?

Meanwhile, encourage excellent study habits. For example, have a regular study hour and place. Set a minimum amount of time for doing homework. (If your child doesn't have assignments, he can review.) Motivate him with compliments and fun activities when homework is finished.

In time—and with support—your child can adjust to the workload and take pride in his success!



## PARENT QUIZ

### Are you promoting computer safety?

Computers are an increasing part of learning these days. Answer the following questions *yes* or *no* to see if you're encouraging responsible computer use:

1. Do you monitor what your child does online?
2. Do you keep the computer in a central, visible spot?
3. Do you teach your child about Internet safety?
4. Do you set a time limit on computer use?
5. Do you ask your child to tell you if she sees anything questionable online?

**How did you do?** Each *yes* answer means you're being careful about computer use. For each *no* answer, consider ways to change that response to *yes*.

“Adults teach children in three important ways: The first is by example, the second is by example, the third is by example.”

— Albert Schweitzer

## BUILDING RESPONSIBILITY

### Promote good decisions

You want your child to make responsible choices. But how can you teach him this skill? Here are some suggestions:

- **Limit the decisions he makes.** Give your child a small number of options. For example, “You can pick one of these three outfits.”
- **Consider consequences.** Kids don't always connect outcomes with their choices. Ask what might happen if your child misses a homework assignment. Thinking ahead can change his actions.

Source: Valerie Frankel, “Teaching Your Child to Choose,” *Parenting*, October 2002 (The Parenting Group, 1-800-234-0847, [www.parenting.com](http://www.parenting.com)).

## BUILDING SELF-ESTEEM

### Build responsible behavior through volunteer activities

Being a volunteer helps children in many ways. It teaches them new skills. They feel more capable. It encourages kindness and helping others. Studies also show it builds responsibility. This contributes to children caring about school and doing their best.

Source: Shelley H. Billig, Ph.D., “The Impacts of Service-Learning on Youth, Schools and Communities: Research on K-12 School-Based Service-Learning, 1990-1999,” *Learning In Deed*, [learningindeed.org/research/slresearch/slrsrchsy.html](http://learningindeed.org/research/slresearch/slrsrchsy.html).

## MAKING TIME COUNT

### Encourage your child to keep a nature diary

Drawing is a fun way for children to record observations. Consider giving your child a journal. Have her keep track of changes in nature. As winter arrives, what changes does she notice? How can her pictures reflect them? Have her jot down her thoughts in writing, too.



## Helping Children Learn<sup>®</sup>

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