



Help Your Child  
Succeed in  
Elementary School

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## Introduction

When it comes to your child's education, you are your child's first and most important teacher. Your child has been following your example from the very beginning, looking to you for direction and for information on what is and is not important. Your child's interest in school will also come from you. Studies show that children whose parents are involved in their education get better grades, have better social skills and better behavior.

This handbook will show you how to be an active partner in your child's education. It contains tips for creating connections between home and school, working with their teachers, helping with homework, and more.





# **1. Get Involved in Your Child's Education**

Studies show that children whose parents are involved in their education tend to do better in school than those whose parents take a hands-off approach. In fact, your involvement is more important to your child's success than your own level of education, how much money you make or how old your child is.

## **Learn About Your Child's School**

Your child's school may be a lot different from the one you went to. Instead of chalkboards, teachers may use a smartboard to explain lessons. Your student may use a computer tablet along with traditional text books. Becoming familiar with the school and how it operates will help you feel part of the community.

- Read the school's handbook, if it has one. The handbook will lay out the school's policies, regulations and educational philosophy.
- Visit the school's website regularly for listings of events, holiday schedules and more. Find out if your child's teacher has their own page on the website.
- Sign up for email, text or phone alerts about important events and news happening at the school.
- Use the online parent portal, if your school offers this service. Your child's assignments, grades and classes will be listed there.
- Attend back-to-school night. Most schools hold these in the fall.

## **Get to Know Your Child's Teacher**

Introduce yourself to your child's teacher when the school year begins or during back-to-school night. Try not to take up too much of their time because other parents will also want to meet them. You can always make an appointment to talk later if you need more time. Or you can follow up with an email to the teacher.

- Find out how the teacher likes to be contacted, whether by email, text, social media or phone.
- Let the teacher know anything about your child that may affect their learning or behavior in the classroom, such as a new baby at home or a parent's deployment.
- Ask the teacher how you can help support them and help your child learn at home.

## Make the Most of Back-to-School Night

Back-to-school night offers a chance to see your child's classrooms, meet the teachers and other staff members, and learn more about a typical school day. The teacher will likely give a formal presentation and there may be time for you to visit other areas of the school, such as the gymnasium, media center and more.

During the evening, expect to find out about:

- The curriculum and learning goals for each subject
- Homework expectations
- The typical daily and weekly schedule
- Classroom rules
- The teacher's philosophy on education
- How the teacher will communicate to parents, for example through email, classroom newsletter or parent portal
- Opportunities for parent involvement

### Explore the classroom and ask questions

Take a moment to look around the classroom. Is it stimulating? Well organized? Warm and inviting? How are the desks arranged? Are they in rows, clusters for group work or formed into a circle? If there is time for questions at the end of the teacher's presentation, you might ask:

- How do you work with children who are at different learning levels?
- How often does the class visit the media center?
- Are children allowed to use calculators during math?
- Will there be any field trips?
- How do you handle discipline?

Ask the teacher what kind of help they would like from the parents. They may suggest that you read with your child every night or ask for specific help, such as by volunteering your time.



## Prepare for the Parent-Teacher Conference

Most schools hold parent-teacher conferences toward the end of the first marking period. These meetings are usually brief because the teacher has a lot of parents to fit in during a short period of time.

- Bring a list of questions to ask the teacher.
- Find out from your child what they like best and least about school.
- Ask your child if they have trouble with any subjects and which subjects are their favorites.
- When you get home, tell your child the good things the teacher had to say. Talk about any concerns the teacher may have brought up and how you can all work together to address them.

### Questions to Ask at Your Parent-Teacher Conference

During the parent-teacher conference, the teacher may show you examples of your child's work and update you on grades. Ask:

- ☐ What are my child's strengths and weaknesses?
- ☐ How is my child doing compared to their classmates?
- ☐ How is my child's behavior?
- ☐ Does my child have close friends? How do they get along with their classmates?
- ☐ How much time should my child spend on homework?
- ☐ What can I be doing at home to help my child do well in school?

## 2. Volunteer Your Time at School

There's no better way to learn about your child's school than by becoming an active volunteer. Giving your time also shows your child that their education is important.

*If you have a lot of time to give:*

- Volunteer to be the class parent. This is the go-to person who helps the teacher with projects and coordinates other parent volunteers.
- Volunteer in the school library.
- Be a recess or lunchroom monitor.

*If you can help out occasionally:*

- Chaperone field trips.
- Ask the teacher if you can share something special about your family with the class. You might create a presentation about your culture, your military service or your job.
- Be a "guest reader," coming in to the classroom occasionally to read to the kids.

*If you are not free during the day:*

- Ask the teacher if you can help out with special projects that you can do at home, like updating the class website or assembling materials for class projects.
- Volunteer to help at evening or weekend special events, such as book fairs, science nights and plays.
- Help plant, weed, and maintain the school's flower beds with your family on weekends or after work.

### **The Parent Teacher Organization**

Your school's parent-teacher organization offers a window into your child's school and the people who work there. As an active PTO member, you will meet other parents and school personnel and enjoy meaningful opportunities to support the school.

PTOs generally meet once a month in the evening. If you can't make it to the meetings, read the organization's newsletter or website so you can stay up-to-date on what's happening. Support the parent group by attending its events and participating in its fundraisers. Sign up to be a volunteer. Indicate the type of projects or events that you are interested in helping with.

## Other Ways to be Engaged

- Go to school assemblies, plays, classroom parties, etc. Bring younger siblings and family members, such as grandparents, aunts and uncles.
- Attend school board meetings. If you can't make it to the meetings, find out if they're aired on local cable TV or live-streamed online. Your local newspaper may also cover board meetings.
- Get to know other parents and exchange contact information.





### 3. Know Your Child's Learning Style

You may already have an idea of how your child learns. Some kids are happiest with their nose in a book. Others can't sit still. They absorb information best when they're moving. Many children use a combination of methods to learn, though they may prefer one over the others.

The chart below will help you understand how your child learns best. Share this information with their teacher and help your child study and learn at home with methods that match their learning style.

How Does Your Child Learn Best?		
Learning Style	Likes to ...	Ways to Help Your Child Learn
<b>Visual</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Read</li><li>• Watch videos</li><li>• Look at pictures, images, maps and charts</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Use flash cards to help with studying</li><li>• Give your child highlighters for underlining and color-coding</li><li>• Provide written instructions</li></ul>
<b>Auditory</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Listen to directions and lessons</li><li>• Sing songs</li><li>• Play instruments</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Talk with your child about what he's learning in school</li><li>• Record them explaining a lesson and play it back</li><li>• Use rhymes to help with memorization</li></ul>
<b>Physical</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Be active physically</li><li>• Use body and hand gestures when telling a story</li><li>• Learn by doing</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Do hands-on activities and projects at home</li><li>• Give your child a stress ball to play with while studying or doing homework</li><li>• Encourage them to take study breaks by getting up and moving</li></ul>

## 4. Support Learning at Home

Your child's education doesn't end with the last bell of the school day. As a parent, you can encourage learning at home and make sure your child has the tools that make learning possible.

- Feed them a nutritious diet. Kids need the right kind of fuel to function at their best. Send your child off to school with a healthy breakfast rich in protein, whole grains and fiber.
- Limit their screen time. Talk about what type of and how much media your child may use each day. Create "media-free" zones in your home, such as bedrooms and the dinner table.
- Make sure they have at least one hour of physical activity each day.

### Help Your Child Be Organized

Organization is an important skill. When a child does poorly in school, being disorganized is often the reason why.

- Make a checklist of everything they need for school and post it somewhere visible, such as the front door.
- Pack lunches and pick out school clothes the night before
- Have a designated spot for their backpack and other things they bring back and forth to school each day
- Teach them to put completed homework assignments in a folder or binder that stays in their backpack

### Talk with Your Child About School

Try to set aside a few minutes each day to talk with your child about school. Let the conversation happen naturally, rather than peppering your child with questions.

- Give them time to settle back in at home. They may not be ready to talk about school the minute they walk in the door.
- Ask open-ended questions, such as "What did you like best about today?" or "Tell me about one thing that you learned today."
- Ask them to teach you what they learned.
- Praise their effort rather than grades. It's the work your child puts into learning that is important.
- Tell them something interesting or funny about your own day. Sometimes that can be the opening your child needs to describe their own day.

## Reinforce Lessons from School

Get a copy of your child's curriculum and find out from the teacher what the class is working on each month.

- Ask the teacher for ideas for activities to do at home that reinforce what the class is learning in school.
- Review any schoolwork they bring home. Go over the work together so you can talk about it.
- Display schoolwork or art projects in a prominent place in your home.
- Go over corrected tests together.
- When they are excited about a lesson from school, explore the topic together. Search the internet, borrow books from the library, visit museums and find other ways to indulge their interests.



## 5. Helping with Homework

Let your child know that homework is a priority in your household by helping in the following ways:

- Give them a place to do their homework. It might be a desk in their room or a place at the kitchen table.
- Stock the area or a portable caddy with supplies, such as pens, pencils, erasers, paper and a ruler.
- Limit distractions. Consider making homework time “quiet time” for the entire family.
- Be on hand to help them without doing the homework for them.

Create a homework completion chart like the one below on a family white board, chalk board or a sheet of paper. Each day, ask your child to put a check mark in the box for the subject in which they have homework. Let your child circle the check or mark it with a sticker when the assignment is complete.

Homework Chart					
SUBJECT	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI
Language Arts					
Math					
Social Studies					
Science					
Reading					

