



Making the Best of the School Year

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August 2025

Children who are given the basics of love, healthy food, enough sleep, clothing, and a safe and healthy home have a natural head start at school. These kids are ready to learn.

Here are some other ways you can help your child get the most from school.

Expect your children to be nervous or scared until they get used to their new teachers, new bus routes, and new classmates. Let them know you love them.

- Talk to them.
- Listen.
- Understand their feelings.
- Be patient.

Many children need to have a time to “let off steam” after they come home from school.

- They may need to relax before they start their homework.

Try to pick a time for homework when everyone in the family can be quiet.

- If it's the same time each day, it can become a routine, and it will be much easier to settle down and get straight to work. Choose a time for homework that isn't too rushed and a time before children are too tired to do a good job.
- Little brothers and sisters that do not have homework might use this time for coloring, puzzles, cutting out pictures from magazines or quietly listening to story records.

Help your children get what they need for homework assignments ahead of time.

- Looking for paper, pencils, crayons, rulers, and scissors can waste time.

Let your children know you are interested in their homework.

- Students do better in school when their parents are involved. Grades improve with regular homework.
- If your child attends an after-school program (or is in the care of someone after school), be sure to discuss with them when and how you want your child's homework completed. Once you are home with your children, set aside a regular time each evening to check over their homework and to help them with any problems. This will let your children know how important you feel homework is, and will help you stay connected with your child's schooling.

The right attitude makes homework easier.

Learn the teacher's homework policies.

- Find out the purpose of the homework, the type of assignments, the time to be devoted to it, and the teacher's expectations.

Help your children set reasonable guidelines for how long it takes to do homework.

- One-half hour for grades 1-3 and one hour for grades 4-6 is plenty of homework for an elementary school student. Junior high and high school students who are expected to assume more responsibility for their own learning may need more time.

Work with teachers if your child needs help.

- Talk to the school principal, psychologist, guidance counselor or other specialist for

advice. Know that homework can be harmful if it is way too difficult.

Let your children know that you support the school and the teachers.

- Be interested in what goes on in the classroom. Keep in touch (telephone calls, short written notes, emails and/or visits) with the classroom teacher and the school counselor if they are working with your child. Let the teachers know that you support your children and want to see that they get the best education possible.

More ways to help your child do well in school

Read to each other.

- Try reading aloud for half an hour one or two evenings a week. There are many books that can be enjoyed by both adults and children. Ask adults or older children to take turns being the reader. Some families set aside a “reading time” each day. The idea is to help children learn to love books.

Use your local library or bookmobile.

- A weekly or monthly trip to the library together will encourage children to read. Everyone is sure to find something of interest. Your library and its services are free.

Play games to sharpen your children’s thinking skills.

- Naming singing groups, cities, cars and other games are helpful and can be played anywhere. Puzzles, checkers, and chess help your child learn how to organize. Games also provide fun family times.

Promote Healthy Habits

- Supporting a child's overall well-being is key to academic success. Help your child thrive by ensuring they eat a balanced diet, get regular exercise, maintain good sleep habits, and practice proper hygiene.

Making the Most of School

Let your children know you expect them to do well.

- “Children do better in school when their parents and teachers expect them to do well. On the other hand, some parents are too pushy and set standards that are too high for their children. It’s hard to find the right balance” (1).

Expectations are really a daily matter, built in small pieces.

- “These include turning off the television set, saying no to missing a day of school, adding a book to the birthday presents, and so on. Expectations flow from family values and habits that, taken together, add up to the belief that children will achieve” (1).

To decide on appropriate expectations for your child, you can:

- Talk with the teachers about their goals for your child.
- Talk with other parents in your child’s class to see what their children are doing.
- Check out the resources for parents at www.cyfernet.org/

When parents support learning at home, their children almost always do well at school.

Children from such families are likely to:

- attend school regularly,
- respect school rules and routines,
- take their class work seriously, and
- do their homework.

Your values and the ways you encourage your children are key.

- “Your priorities will influence what your children think is important and, to a large extent, what they accomplish. Fortunately, all parents who value education can — regardless of their own educational background — communicate clearly that school achievement is a top priority” (1).

School Days

This game can help parents and children make the most of the school year.

What do we need?

- recorder or spiral-bound notebook
- single sheets of paper
- envelopes
- someone's backpack
- Electronic devices (if necessary)

What do we do?

A. At the beginning of the semester:

1. If desired, prepare a “backpack grab bag” by wrapping a few school supplies (notebooks, pens, eraser, etc.).
2. Schedule an evening sometime during the first weeks of school for the family to have a special meal.
3. Following the meal, assemble the family to tape-record or write down “interviews” with each student about:
 - His /her first thoughts about teachers, classes, schedules, classmates, etc.
 - What does he/she foresee for the year (which classes will be the most/least enjoyable, etc.)
4. Give each child an envelope and a piece of paper to write their goals:
 - grades child will try to get
 - a sport or other extra activity he/she will pursue
 - a new friend child will get to know
5. Have children write their names on the envelopes and put their list of goals inside. Collect the envelopes and put them away until the end of the semester.
6. Decide on “homework rules.” For example, your family may decide to limit guests, phone calls or television during “study hours.” Record those rules on a piece of paper and post somewhere so they will serve as a frequent reminder.

7. End the celebration by having each student take a gift to unwrap from the “backpack grab bag.”

B. At the end of the semester

1. Arrange for the family to share another special meal after semester grades have been received. Afterward, play back or read aloud the interviews made at the beginning of the semester.
2. Pass out the envelopes with the goals made at the beginning of the semester.
3. Congratulate children on each goal they met. Encourage them for the goals they nearly reached.
4. You can repeat the goal-setting activity for the next semester.
5. Discuss any changes that need to be made in study habits, homework schedules, etc.

References

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Information adapted from materials prepared by Dr. William J. McCormick, Delaware Department of Education, from Making the Best of Schools by (1) Jeannie Oakes and Martin Lipton and from Family Times developed by the University of Wisconsin-Extension and used with permission from the Wisconsin Clearinghouse, Box 1468, Madison, WI 53701.

Suggested citation: Nelson, P. T. (Ed) (2012). Making the best of the school year in Families Matter! A Series for Parents of School-Age Youth. Newark, DE: Cooperative Extension, University of Delaware.

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