

Class Act

By Colleen Marble

It should come as no surprise that success — or failure — at school starts at home. Studies have linked poor academic performance to factors such as a lack of sleep, poor nutrition, obesity, and a lack of parental support.

The good news is that those same studies also show higher test scores for students who live in homes where healthy habits, regular routines, and good communication exist.

How can you ensure your child heads off to school this fall with the best possible foundation? Follow these 10 tips and watch your child thrive.

Enforce Healthy Habits

You can't perform well when you don't feel good. To help your child have the best chance at doing well in school, make sure she follows healthy habits at home.

Choose a bedtime that will give your child plenty of sleep, and provide a healthy breakfast each morning. Encourage exercise, and limit the amount of time she spends watching TV, playing video games, listening to music, or using the computer.

Stick to a Routine

Most kids thrive on structure and will respond well to routines that help them organize their days. In our house, for

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Help your child succeed in the classroom with these simple acts of support at home.



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example, my son gets dressed, makes his bed, and eats breakfast while I make his lunch and pack his school bag with completed homework and forms. When he gets home in the afternoon, I serve him a snack and he does his homework while I prepare dinner. Your routines may differ, but the key is to make it the same every day so your child knows what to expect.

Create a “Launch Pad”

Veteran parents know it's important to have a single place to put backpacks, jackets, shoes, lunchboxes, and school projects each day. Some call it a “launch pad,” while others call it a “staging area.” Our area is a hook by the back door.

Whatever you call it, find a place where your child can keep the items he needs for school each day and keep him organized. Then you'll know right where to find everything during the morning rush.

Designate a Space

At school your child has a desk or table where she works. There is plenty of light, lots of supplies, and enough room to work.

Why not provide her with the same type of environment for homework? A designated homework space often makes it easier and more fun for children to complete assignments at home. A desk is great, but a basket of supplies and a stretch of kitchen counter work just as well.

Read, Again and Again

It is often said that children spend the first several years learning to read, and the rest of the lives reading to learn. The written word is a gateway to all kinds of learning, and the more you read to your child, the better chance he has of becoming a proficient and eager reader.

Try to sit down with your child to read a little bit every day, give him plenty of opportunities to read out loud to you, as well, and above all have fun. While the importance of reading with your child cannot be stressed enough, it should not be the cause of stress.

Learn Always

Your child may be past the preschool years, but home education is still a critical part of his overall learning experience. “Some of the attitude recently is that it's up to the schools and teachers to figure it all out, to make sure children are learning and healthy and safe,” says Barbara Frankowski, M.D., MPH, FAAP, and member of the AAP Council on School Health. “There's only so much teachers can do. Parents have to fill in with good support at home.”

Look for ways to teach your child throughout the day. For example, cooking combines elements of math and science. Use the time when you make dinner as an opportunity to read and follow directions, to discuss fractions, to make hypotheses (“What will happen when I beat the egg whites?”), and to examine results.

Take the Lead

Children learn by example. Let your kids “catch” you reading. Take time to learn a new skill and discuss the experience with them. Sit down and pay bills or do other “homework” while your kids do their schoolwork.

If you display a strong work ethic and continually seek out learning opportunities for yourself, your kids will begin to model that same behavior in their own lives.

Perhaps the most important way you can support your child's efforts at school is to expect him to succeed.



Talk Often

Do you know how your child feels about her classroom, her teacher, her classmates? If not, ask her. Talk with her about what she likes and doesn't like at school. Give her a chance to express her anxieties, excitements, or disappointments about each day, and continue to support and encourage her by praising her achievements and efforts.

Show Interest

Don't limit your support to your child; extend it to her teachers as well. Meet the teachers and stay in regular contact by phone or e-mail so that you can discuss any concerns as they arise. Not only will it pave the way for you to ask questions, but it will also make the teachers more comfortable with calling you if they have concerns about your child.

Expect Success

Perhaps the most important way you can support your child's efforts at school is to expect him to succeed. That doesn't mean that you demand he be the best student or the best athlete or the best artist. Rather, let him know that you expect him to do “his best” so that he'll be proud of what he can accomplish.

If you make that expectation clear and provide a home environment that promotes learning, then your child will have a greater chance of becoming the best student he can be. ●

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