

Home & School

Working Together for School Success

CONNECTION®

September 2015



SHORT NOTES

TV-free mornings
Consider keeping the

TV off on school mornings. When your child is ready for school before it's time to leave, he might draw, work on a jigsaw puzzle, or sort his baseball cards instead. Doing something that actively engages his brain, rather than zoning out in front of the television, will get him ready to learn.

Family teamwork

A big project like washing the car, painting a room, cleaning out the garage, or planting a garden can teach your youngster about teamwork. Plus, it's more fun when the whole family pitches in. An added bonus: Including younger children in adult jobs builds useful skills for later.

Parent education

Make parenting a little easier by arming yourself with as much information as possible. Look for free parent education nights offered by your youngster's school or in your community. For instance, you could learn about topics like discipline, nutrition, single parenting, or ADHD.

Worth quoting

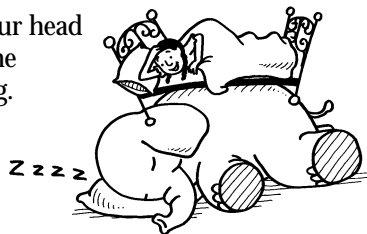
"Be happy with what you have while working for what you want."

Helen Keller

JUST FOR FUN

Q: How do you know if there's an elephant under your bed?

A: Your head hits the ceiling.



Organized for success

Does your child know that being organized can help her do better in school? As she launches into the new year, here are tools and strategies for keeping track of activities, homework, and school supplies.

Use a calendar

Hang a family calendar in a handy spot, and put your youngster in charge of adding things like picture day, field trips, and study group meetings. She could also color-code days she has special classes. For instance, maybe she'll put a green dot on band day to remember her instrument and a blue dot on library day so she doesn't forget her books. Then each evening, she should check the calendar as part of her getting-ready routine.

Write to-do lists

Starting each day with a to-do list is a good lifelong habit. Your child can use her student planner or a spiral notebook to make a list in the morning or the night before. She could list items in order of importance, or put stars by the most critical tasks. And she might put a time frame by each one. ("Practice



presentation from 4 to 4:30 p.m.") Have her cross off each item as she accomplishes it—she'll feel a nice sense of satisfaction.

Make a "school zone"

Set aside a special spot at home where your youngster can keep everything school-related. It might be in a corner of the kitchen or a basket in her room. Then, she could stock it with items like books, supplies, paperwork, long-term projects she's working on, and the school lunch menu. Encourage her to keep the area neat so she can easily find what she needs.

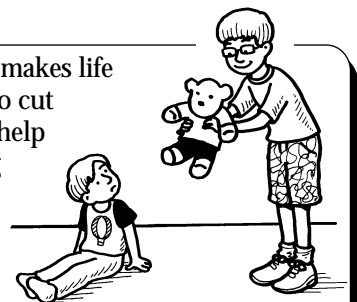
"I know how you feel"

In the classroom and at home, showing empathy makes life more pleasant for everyone—and has been shown to cut down on bullying. With these suggestions, you can help your youngster learn to sense how others are feeling and to reach out to them.

Show empathy. When your child is sad or anxious, tell him that you understand how he feels, and share a time you felt the same way. *Example:*

"My best friend moved when I was 7, and I felt lonely."

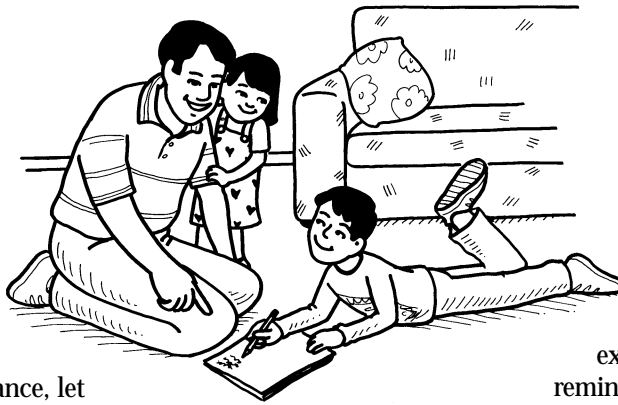
Recognize empathy. If you see your child (or someone else) being empathetic, point it out. ("You could tell your little brother was upset. It was nice of you to give him your stuffed animal to hold.") Your youngster will be inspired to show empathy for others in the future.



Expectations: Aim high

If you have high, yet reasonable, expectations for your child, he will be more likely to rise to them. Consider this advice for setting and communicating your expectations:

Focus on your youngster's actions rather than his intelligence. For instance, let him know you expect him to work hard, turn in every assignment, and listen to you and his teacher (rather than "I know you're smart, so you'll get good grades").



Remind your child of your expectations regularly. You can state them directly ("I expect you to follow the rules in class") or indirectly ("I wonder what you'll study in college"). You could also express them as encouragement: "I know you'll try your best on today's science quiz."

Help your youngster set high expectations for himself. One way is to remind him to think of himself as a good student, perhaps by mentioning past achievements. For example, if he's experiencing writer's block, pull out a creative story that his teacher wrote a nice comment on.

ACTIVITY CORNER

Word games to go

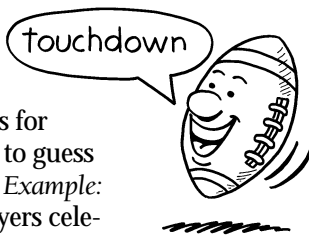
Watch your child's vocabulary grow by playing word games with her. Here are two you can enjoy anywhere you go.

Words to grow by

One person says a two-letter word, such as *do*. The next player says a three-letter word beginning with the same letter (*dog*). Then, the next person says a four-letter word that starts with the letter (*drum*). Continue until you can't think of a word that is one letter longer.

Riddle me this

Pick any word. Pretend to be the word, and give clues for other players to guess who you are. *Example:* "Football players celebrate me." "The endzone is my favorite place." "I start with *t* and end with *n*, and I have 9 letters." (*Answer: touchdown.*)



Q & A Choosing an activity

Q: My daughter would like to try after-school activities this year. Should I sign her up for a few?

A: Extracurricular activities are great for helping children learn new skills and make friends who share their interests. On the other hand, too big of a time commitment to after-school clubs and teams can interfere with schoolwork, family time, and just playing and being a kid.

Look over an activity list together from the school, community center, or parks department. Then, let her pick just one to start with. For example, she might choose a running club, an arts and crafts group, or a student council committee. If she's interested in more than one, she could try one now and add another if she successfully juggles everything. You can support her by working out rides home, attending events, and asking her how it's going.



Steps to parent-teacher teamwork

Start the year off on the right foot with these four ideas for getting to know your youngster's teacher.

1. Try to meet the teacher as early in the year as possible—back-to-school night is a good opportunity. You'll get an overview of your child's daily routine and what he'll be learning, and you'll show the teacher you want to work together.
2. Find out the best way to stay in touch (notes, emails, phone calls). Communicate regularly

so it will be easier to reach out with questions or concerns.

3. Tell the teacher about your youngster's home life. You could write a note introducing your child and your family. ("Andy loves science and music. He and his big sister are at their dad's house every other weekend.")

4. Ask what you can do at home or in the school building to help your youngster and the teacher. She might offer tips for reading aloud to your child or invite you to volunteer in the classroom.



OUR PURPOSE

To provide busy parents with practical ideas that promote school success, parent involvement, and more effective parenting.

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www.rfeonline.com
ISSN 1540-5621

Hints for homework time

Make homework more pleasant for your youngster with these ideas for starting out strong and staying on task.

Get comfortable. Some children concentrate best by sitting at a desk, while others do better sprawled on a bed or the floor. Kids who tend to fidget might think better while balancing on a big exercise ball. Let your child experiment to see what she prefers. Then, she'll be able to focus on her work—not on getting comfortable.

Get focused. Your youngster could work in her room, away from siblings and the TV. If she shares a room or likes doing

homework in the kitchen or living room, help her set up a file-folder “cubicle” to block out distractions. She should staple together file folders (long edge to long edge) and stand them up to block off her work area. Idea: Have her write helpful information on the sides facing her, such as math facts or words she frequently misspells.

Get started. Sometimes beginning her homework is the hardest part. Encourage your child to start with an easier assignment—the satisfaction she feels from finishing it may give her momentum to tackle more challenging work. Or she could tell herself that if she completes one subject, she can take a break to ride her scooter or call a friend.

Q & A How to be careful online

Q: My son is just starting to use the Internet. We set up “parental controls,” but I know they're not perfect. Other than watching him every second, what can I do to help him stay safe online?

A: Parental controls and supervision are important, but it's also a good idea to teach your son habits to use on his own.

First, explain that “real life” safety rules apply online. For instance, he shouldn't talk to strangers or go places that you haven't approved. When he wants to visit a new website, he needs to let you know so you can make sure it's appropriate. Keep in mind that sites with user comments or chat features usually aren't good choices because they allow strangers to post or to talk to him.

Finally, just as in real life, he should tell you right away if a stranger tries to contact him or if he sees something confusing or upsetting.

ACTIVITY CORNER

Shaky science

Can your child create a building strong enough to withstand an “earthquake”? With this activity, he will practice thinking like an engineer.

1. Together, prepare an 8½ x 11 pan of gelatin dessert. Cover and refrigerate overnight, until set.
2. Have your youngster connect toothpicks with marshmallows to create a building that rises out of the gelatin.
3. Grasping opposite ends of the pan, gently shake it back and forth to create an earthquake. Does his building tumble, or do pieces fall off? He can redesign and test again. Which designs work best?
4. Talk about how engineers might make earthquake-proof buildings. For example, a low, wide building may fare better than a tall, narrow one. Also, which shapes (squares, rectangles, triangles) make the base or walls stronger?

PARENT TO PARENT

Fun with family photos

My daughter Annabelle loves storytelling. She often uses her imagination to act out tales with her miniature people and animal figures. When I heard her naming them after our family members and pets, I had an idea.

We gathered family photos, including ones with her grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. Then, I helped her flatten empty pasta and cracker boxes and glue photos to them. She cut out around each person

and pet and stuck the cardboard figures in globs of play dough to make them stand up.

Now Annabelle likes to act out family stories using the figures. She reenacts beach vacations, holiday meals, and more. Sometimes we play along with her, each pretending to be a different person. It's a great way to build her language skills—and to “spend time” with relatives we don't see often.

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