

# 10 Ways to Help Your Child Succeed in Elementary School

Medically reviewed by: [Larissa Hirsch, MD](#)

Support from their parents helps kids do well academically. Here are 10 ways parents can keep their kids on track to be successful students.

## 1. Go to Back-to-School Night and Parent-Teacher Conferences

Kids do better in school when parents are involved in their academic lives. Attending back-to-school night at the start of the school year is a great way to get to know your child's teachers and their expectations. School administrators may discuss school-wide programs and policies too.

Going to parent-teacher conferences is another way to stay informed. These are usually held once or twice a year to discuss a student's progress. They're a chance to discuss strategies to help kids do their best in class. Meeting with the teacher also lets kids know that what goes on in school will be shared at home.

For kids with special learning needs, other meetings with teachers and school staff can help parents set up or revise individualized education plans (IEPs), 504 education plans, or gifted education plans.

Keep in mind that parents or guardians can request meetings with teachers, principals, school counselors, or other school staff any time during the school year.

## 2. Visit the School and Its Website

Knowing the physical layout of the school building and grounds can help you connect with your child when you talk about the school day. It's good to know the location of the main office, school nurse, cafeteria, gym, athletic fields, playgrounds, auditorium, and special classes.

On the school website, you can find information about:

- the school calendar
- staff contact information
- upcoming events like class trips
- testing dates

Many teachers maintain their own websites that detail homework assignments, test dates, and classroom events and trips. Other resources for parents and students are usually available on the district, school, or teacher websites.

### **3. Support Homework Expectations**

Homework in grade school reinforces and extends classroom learning and helps kids practice important study skills. It also helps them develop a sense of responsibility and a work ethic that will benefit them beyond the classroom.

Besides making sure your child knows that you see homework as important, you can help by creating a good study environment. Any well-lit, comfortable, and quiet workspace with the needed supplies will do. Avoiding distractions (like a TV in the background) and setting up a start time and end time can also help.

Typically, expect about 10 minutes each night of homework or studying per elementary grade level. Fourth-graders, for example, should have about 40 minutes of homework or studying each school night. If you find that it's often taking a lot longer than this guideline, talk with your child's teacher.

Be available to help with assignment instructions, offer guidance, answer questions, and review the completed work. But try not to provide the correct answers or do the assignments yourself. Learning from mistakes is part of the process and you don't want to take this away from your child.

## **4. Send Your Child to School Ready to Learn**

A nutritious breakfast fuels up kids and gets them ready for the day. In general, kids who eat breakfast have more energy and do better in school. They're also less likely to miss school, and make fewer trips to the school nurse with stomach complaints related to hunger.

Help boost your child's attention span, concentration, and memory with breakfast foods that are rich in whole grains, fiber, and protein, and low in added sugar. If your child is running late, send along fresh fruit, nuts, yogurt, or half a peanut butter and banana sandwich. Many schools provide nutritious breakfast options before the first bell.

Kids also need enough sleep to be alert and ready to learn all day. Most school-age kids need 9–12 hours of sleep a night. Bedtime problems can come up at this age for a variety of reasons. Homework, sports, after-school activities, games and TV, and hectic family schedules can lead to kids not getting enough sleep.

Lack of sleep can cause irritable or hyperactive behavior and might make it hard for kids to pay attention in class. It's important to have a consistent bedtime routine, especially on school nights. Leave enough time before lights-out for your child to unwind, and limit media use like TV, video games, and Internet access.

## **5. Teach Organizational Skills**

When kids are organized, they can stay focused instead of spending time looking for things and getting sidetracked. Kids should have an assignment book and homework folder (many schools supply these) to keep track of homework and projects.

Check your child's assignment book and homework folder every school night so you're familiar with assignments and your child doesn't fall behind. Set up a bin for papers that you need to check or sign. Also, keep a special box or bin

for completed and graded projects and toss papers that you don't need to keep.

Talk to your child about keeping their school desk in order so papers that need to come home don't get lost. Teach them how to use a calendar or personal planner to help stay organized.

You also can teach your child how to make a to-do list to help prioritize and get things done. It can be as simple as:

- *homework*
- *soccer*
- *put clothes away*

No one is born with great organizational skills — they need to be learned and practiced.

## **6. Teach Study Skills**

Introducing kids to study skills now will pay off with good learning habits throughout life.

In elementary school, kids often take end-of-unit tests in math, spelling, science, and social studies. Be sure to know when a test is scheduled so you can help your child study ahead of time rather than just the night before. You also might need to remind your child to bring home the right study materials, such as notes, study guides, or books.

Teach your child how to break down bigger tasks into smaller, manageable chunks so preparing for a test isn't overwhelming. You also can introduce your child to tricks to help them recall information. For example, taking a break after a 45-minute study period is a key way to help kids process and remember information.

Your child probably will begin standardized testing in elementary school. While students can't really study for standardized tests, some teachers provide practice tests to help ease students' worries.

In general, if studying and testing becomes a source of stress for your child, talk about it with the teacher or school counselor.

## **7. Know the Disciplinary Policies**

Schools usually list their disciplinary policies (sometimes called **the student code of conduct**) in student handbooks. The rules cover expectations — and consequences for not meeting them — for things like student behavior, dress codes, use of electronic devices, and acceptable language.

The policies may include details about attendance, vandalism, cheating, fighting, and weapons. Many schools also have policies about bullying, such as the school's definition of bullying, consequences for bullies, support for victims, and how to report bullying.

Your child should be aware of what's expected at school and know that you'll support the consequences if expectations aren't met. It's easiest for students when school expectations match the ones at home. That way, kids see both settings as safe, caring places that work together as a team.

## **8. Get Involved**

No matter what grade your kids are in, consider volunteering at school. It's a great way to show them you're interested in their education.

Many grade-schoolers like to see their parents at school or at school events. But follow your child's cues to find out what works for you both. If your child seems uncomfortable with you being at the school or involved in an extracurricular activity, consider a more behind-the-scenes role. Make it clear that you aren't there to spy — you're just trying to help the school community.

Parents can get involved by:

- being a classroom helper or homeroom parent
- organizing and/or working at fundraising activities and other special events, like bake sales, car washes, and book fairs
- chaperoning field trips
- planning class parties
- attending school board meetings
- joining the school's parent-teacher group
- working as a library assistant
- reading a story to the class
- giving a talk for career day
- attending school concerts or plays

Check the school or teacher website to find volunteer opportunities that fit your schedule. Even giving a few hours during the school year can make a strong impression on your child.

## **9. Take Attendance Seriously**

It's important for kids to get to school on time every day, because having to catch up can be stressful and interfere with learning. But sick kids should stay home from school if they have a fever, are nauseated, vomiting, or have diarrhea. Kids who lose their appetite, are clingy or tired, complain of pain, or who just don't seem to be acting "themselves" also might benefit from a sick day. If your child misses a lot of school due to illness, check with the teacher about any work that needs to be done.

Sometimes students want to stay home from school because of problems with classmates, assignments or grades, or even teachers. This can lead to real symptoms, like headaches or stomach aches. If you think there's a problem at school, talk with your child — and then perhaps with the teacher — to find out more about what's causing the stress. The school counselor or school psychologist also might be able to help.

## **10. Talk About School**

Usually, it's easy to talk with elementary students about what's going on in class and the latest news at school. You probably know what books your child is reading and are familiar with the math being worked on. But make time to talk with your child every day, so they know that what goes on at school is important to you. When kids know parents are interested in their academic lives, they'll take school seriously too.

The way you talk and listen to your child can influence how well they listen and respond. Listen carefully, make eye contact, and avoid multitasking while you talk. Be sure to ask questions that go beyond "yes" or "no" answers.

These early years of schooling are an important time for parents to be informed and supportive. It sets the stage for children to develop and grow as young learners.

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Article can be found at:

<https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/school-help-elementary.html>