

HOW TO HELP YOUR KIDS SUCCEED IN SCHOOL

TIPS & ACTIVITIES FOR PARENTS OF PRESCHOOL TO GRADE 5 KIDS



A Publication of  K5 Learning

WHAT IS THIS BOOK ABOUT ?

This book provides *practical advice* and *specific activities* parents can use to help their kids excel in school.

WHO IS THIS BOOK FOR?

This book is for parents of children in the preschool through elementary school years. Our recommendations are applicable to all kids – from slow learners to the gifted.

WHY DID WE WRITE THIS BOOK ?

We believe – and research shows – that a child’s success in school is often defined at a very early age. We wrote this book to encourage and help parents to be pro-active in getting their kids off on the right foot.

WHO IS K5 LEARNING ?

K5 Learning is an education company which operates an online reading and math program for kindergarten to grade 5 kids. The K5 program assists busy parents in helping their kids succeed in school. Visit K5 Learning at www.k5learning.com.

**ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

Much of the material in this book is contributed from publications by the U.S. Department of Education. We would like to thank the Department for making these materials available.

NOTE:

In this booklet, we refer to a child as “him” in some places and “her” in others. We do this to make the booklet easier to read. Please understand, however, that every point that we make is the same for boys and girls.

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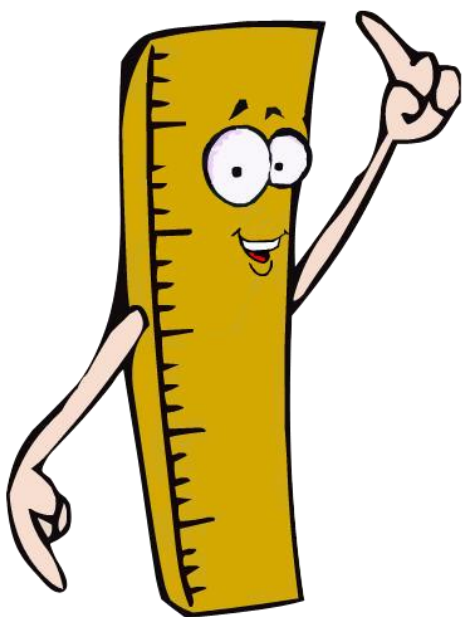
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INTRODUCTION

Every child can succeed in school. The question is: *How* can we help our children succeed? The answer comes from a combination of common sense and research about how children learn and about how to prepare them to learn.

What we say and do in our daily lives can help our children develop positive attitudes toward school and build confidence in themselves as learners. Showing our children that we both value education and use it in our daily lives provides them with powerful models and contributes greatly to their success in school.



It's important that all parents build strong ties to our children's schools. When parents and families are involved in their children's schools, the children do better and have better feelings about going to school. We help our children to succeed by working with their teachers.

However, schools face ever-increasing burdens, and there are limitations to how much personalized attention your child will receive in a class of 30 students. Ultimately, it is up to parents to ensure that their children receive the education they need to fulfill their potential.

The purpose of this book is to help you help your child to succeed in school. The book includes:

- information about how you can contribute to your child's school success;
- activities that you can use to help your child acquire the skills to succeed in school;
- answers to often-asked questions about how to work with teachers and schools; and
- tips on how to help your child with taking tests.

THE BASICS

In North America, the school year averages 180 days; in other nations, the school year can last up to 240 days and students are often in school more hours per day. Clearly, parents need to make education a part of their child's non-school life as well. Here are some things that you can do to help your child to make the most of that time:

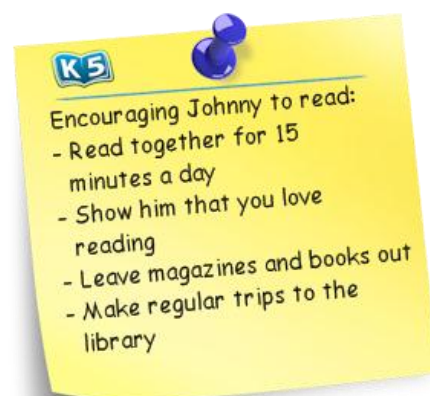
ENCOURAGE YOUR CHILD TO READ

Helping your child become a reader is the most important thing that you can do to help him succeed in school. The importance of reading can't be overstated. Once children learn to read, they spend the rest of their lives reading to learn. Reading is the skill that enables learning in other subjects.

- Start early. If your child is not reading yet, then reading aloud to him should become part of your daily routine. At first, read for no more than a few minutes at a time, several times a day. As you read, talk with your child. Encourage him to ask questions and to talk about the story. Ask him to predict what will come next. When your child begins to read, ask him to read to you from books or magazines that he enjoys.

The joy in reading comes from the content more than the process of reading itself. The sooner your child develops good reading skills – and reading becomes “easier” and “less work” – the sooner he will begin to enjoy the content of the stories he reads. Early reading skill development is a key to developing a “love of reading”.

- The building blocks of reading include phonemic awareness (recognizing different sounds), phonics (associating sounds with letters) and sight words (recognizing common words at sight). Find quality exercises for your child to develop these skills.
- Make sure that your home has lots of reading materials that are appropriate for your child. Keep children's books in the house. Ask family members to consider giving your child books and magazine subscriptions as gifts.
- Turn off the TV and video games! Books can have a hard time competing for a child's attention. A little boredom can result in kids forming a terrific habit: reading.
- Show that you value reading. Let your child see you reading for pleasure as well as reading letters and recipes, directions and instructions, newspapers, online and so forth. Go with her to the library and check out books for yourself. When your child sees that reading is important to you, she is likely to decide that it's important to her, too.



- Get help for your child if he has a reading problem. When a child is having reading difficulties, the reason might be simple to understand and deal with. For example, your child might have trouble seeing and need glasses. If you think that your child needs extra help, ask his teachers about special services, such as after-school. Also ask for names of community organizations and local literacy volunteer groups that offer tutoring services.

TALK WITH YOUR CHILD

It's through speaking with parents and older family members that children develop the language skills they need. Children who don't hear a lot of talk and who aren't encouraged to talk themselves often have problems learning to read. Children who haven't learned to listen carefully often have trouble following directions and paying attention in class.

- Find time to talk any place, for example, as you walk with your child, talk with her about what she's doing at school or as you shop in a store, talk with your child about prices, differences in brands and how to pick out good vegetables and fruit.
- As you read a book with your child, pause occasionally to ask him about what's happening. Ask him what he thinks will happen next, or what he thinks of a particular character.
- When your child talks to you, stop what you're doing and pay attention. Look at him and ask questions to let him know that you've heard what he said. Demonstrate for him how to be a good listener.

MAKE HOMEWORK & HOME STUDY A PRIORITY

Establish the importance of education as a core value in your household. Your child should see education not as something that just happens 'at school' but as a fundamental part of their young lives.

- Make homework a priority in your daily family life. Even if study time is for only a few minutes a day, make sure it is treated as a priority over other activities. Be consistent in this from a young age and your children will understand – through your actions – the importance of school and education.
- Have a designated place for your child to study. The area should have good lighting and it should be fairly quiet. Provide supplies such as pencils, pens, erasers, paper and a dictionary. If possible, keep these items together in one place. This is not a place for toys or other distractions.



- Set a regular schedule for homework. Study time should be before TV or playtime, thus incentivizing children to finish their work and not procrastinate. Having a regular time to do homework clarifies expectations and helps children to finish assignments.
- Remove distractions. Turn off the TV and discourage your child from making and receiving telephone calls or texts during homework time.
- Don't expect or demand perfection. When your child asks you to look at what she's done—from skating a figure 8 to finishing a math assignment—show interest and praise her when she's done something well. If you have criticisms or suggestions, make them in a helpful way. Demand effort and focus, not perfect results.

STUDY OUTSIDE OF SCHOOL

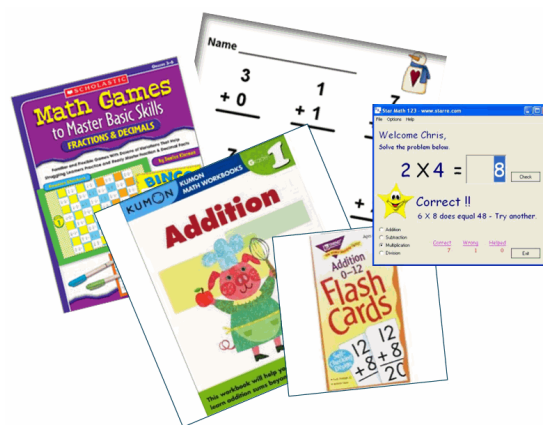
A regular program of academic study outside of school is critical to ensure your child's success in school. It will allow your child to progress academically at their own pace, regardless of what is happening in the classroom. This is critical to fulfilling their potential. Just as important, regular home study will develop good study habits and re-enforce the importance of education.

- At home, allow your child to work as independently as possible. Independent learning – especially overcoming challenges – builds confidence, resiliency and good study habits.
- Home study should be regular (preferably daily). The length of study does not have to be long and depends very much on your child's age and abilities. 5-10 minutes a day may be enough for some 5 year olds. But be sure that for those minutes your child sits down and works on his studies in a focused manner.
- Avoid summer learning loss by continuing home study during the summer months.
- Home study can consist of homework, if there is homework from school. In the absence of sufficient homework it is up to the parent to organize the study materials. This may consist of practicing a particular skill, working on traditional exercise books, educational computer programs or other activities.
- If you don't have the time to oversee your child's home study, then consider some sort of academically based after-school program.

CHOOSE STUDY MATERIALS CAREFULLY

To make the most of your child's home study time, choose the materials he uses carefully:

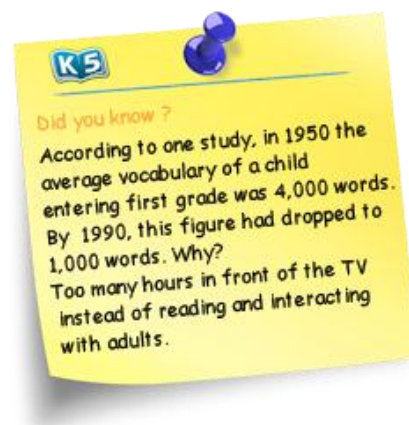
- It is not the delivery medium (worksheets vs. software, etc.) that is important, but the quality of the educational content that you are using. Ask yourself: how much of my child's time is being spent learning vs. 'time wasting' with a particular activity? How well is he being engaged? Is he progressing through materials or repeating work at the same level?
- There are countless free educational websites, many with quality materials. However, most of these sites lack the structure to ensure your child will progress through material in a logical way. Kids will tend to repeat the easiest or most fun activities rather than challenge themselves. If you use these sites, you need to manage your child's use of them closely.
- Choose activities based on their educational value and engagement level rather than their "fun" quotient. Ideally, kids should find study materials interesting and challenging. Activities can also be fun, but we should not build the unrealistic expectation that studying and schoolwork will always be fun, or that only fun things are worth doing.
- Be organized so that you have materials always available and your child progresses through academic material in an meaningful way.
- Remember to emphasise reading and math. If in doubt, materials which are based on school curriculums are a safe bet.
- Be realistic about your own time constraints. If you do not have the time to organize materials every day for your child, then find a system (set of workbooks, website, etc.) that will make the process easier for you.
- If you are struggling to find appropriate activities, ask your child's teacher for recommendations. In any case, emphasise reading and numeracy skills – they form the basis of all future learning.



LIMIT TV VIEWING AND VIDEO GAME PLAYING

American children on average spend far more time watching TV or playing video games than they do completing homework or other school-related activities.

- Limit the time that you let your child watch TV or play video games. Too much television and gaming cuts into important activities in a child's life, such as reading, playing with friends and talking with family members.
- Even the most "educational" TV programs are typically very passive and of little educational value. Likewise, many video games claim educational value but offer little real learning. Do not expect any significant educational value from TV or video games regardless of claims made, unless they are specifically recommended by your child's teacher.
- Set a pre-defined number of minutes that your child can watch TV or play video games, and stick to it. Remind them to complete their studying and chores before playing!



ENCOURAGE YOUR CHILD TO USE THE LIBRARY

Libraries can be places of learning and discovery for children:

- Start taking your child to the library as early as possible.
- See that your child gets his own library card as soon as possible.
- When you take your child to the library, introduce yourself and your child to the librarian. Ask the librarian to show you around the library and recommend specific books. Finding the series of books that captures your child's imagination can be a big step forward in your child learning to love to read.
- Ask the librarian about special programs that your child might participate in, such as summer reading programs and book clubs.
- Let your child know that she must follow the library's rules:
 - Books must be handled carefully.
 - Materials that are borrowed must be returned on time.
 - Shouting, running and being disruptive are not appropriate library behaviors.

HELP YOUR CHILD LEARN TO USE THE INTERNET EFFECTIVELY AND SAFELY

The Internet has become an important part of how we learn and communicate. Show your child how to use the internet effectively and safely:

- Spend time online with your child. Ask her to explain what she is doing and why. Ask her to show you her favorite websites and to tell you what she likes about them. This will help her build self-confidence and pride in her abilities.
- Help your child to locate appropriate websites. Point her in the direction of sites that can help her with reading and numeracy skills.
- Closely supervise what websites your child uses. Beware of both inappropriate content and sites with advertising aimed at kids. You might consider limiting your child to sites you have seen and approved (“whitelisting”) or at least using automatic “filters” to block your child from accessing sites that may be inappropriate.
- Monitor the amount of time that your child spends online. Internet surfing can be just as time-consuming and non-educational as watching TV. Don’t allow any surfing until homework and chores have been done, and limit the amount of time spent on surfing the web. Don’t let surfing crowd out more valuable activities such as reading, traditional games and outdoor activities.
- Teach your child rules for using the Internet safely. He should never:
 - tell anyone his computer password;
 - use bad language or send cruel, threatening or untrue messages;
 - give out any personal information, including his name or the names of family members, home address, phone number, age, school name; or
 - arrange to meet a stranger that he has “talked” with in an online “chat room.”

ENCOURAGE YOUR CHILD TO BE RESPONSIBLE AND TO WORK INDEPENDENTLY

Taking responsibility and working independently are important qualities for school success.

- Establish rules. Every home needs reasonable rules that children know and can depend on. Make sure that you enforce the rules consistently.
- Make it clear to your child that he has to take responsibility for what he does, both at home and at school. For example, don’t automatically defend your child if his teacher tells you that he is often late to class or is disruptive when he is in class. Ask for his side of the story. If a charge is true, let him take the consequences.

- Work with your child to develop a schedule of jobs to do around the house. Children may complain about chores but ‘helping’ can give them a sense of being productive members of the household and be good for their self-esteem.
- Show your child how to break a job down into small steps, then to do the job one step at a time. This works for everything—cleaning a room or doing a big homework assignment.
- Make your child responsible for getting ready to go to school each morning—getting up on time, making sure that he has everything he needs for the school day and so forth. If necessary, make a checklist to help him remember what he has to do.

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL ACADEMICS: THINK READING AND NUMERACY

Kids learn many things during the elementary school years, from self-discipline to working in groups, but the critical *academic* skills are reading and basic math (numeracy). The ability to read quickly and effectively, and confidence and skills with basic numbers operations, are the core skills that kids use to learn other subjects. The content that kids learn in other subjects such as social studies or science will be revisited again in future years in much more depth and are not nearly as critical during elementary school.

- Emphasise basic reading and math skills in all home learning activities.
- Encourage reading and language based activities (writing, spelling, etc.) throughout the day.
- Emphasise basic math skills and ensure sufficient practice is done to achieve proficiency. Math, to a far greater degree than other subject areas, requires proficiency in basic skills before students move on to more difficult tasks. For example, if a child has not mastered his multiplication tables, then he will struggle with the concepts of multi-digit multiplication, because he will be spending all of his time performing basic calculations instead of trying to understand more advanced concepts.
- Math anxiety and underachievement in math is widespread, and largely caused by children not mastering the basics. Ensure your child gets enough practice and masters these skills.
- Encourage mental math (doing math operations in your head) activities and your child’s overall fluency and confidence with numbers.

ACTIVITIES

What follows are activities that you can do with your child to help build the skills, attitudes and behaviors needed for school success. There is no one “right” way to do the activities. You should make changes to suit your child.

We provide some age guidelines with each activity; however, children don’t always learn the same things at the same rate. Use the age levels as guidelines not as hard and fast rules.

CAN YOU TOP THIS? (AGES 4 – 7)

Learning to take turns helps your child build spoken language skills as well as learn to work with others.

WHAT YOU NEED

Nothing!

WHAT TO DO

With your child, make up a story for the two of you to tell together, taking turns saying one sentence at a time.

- Begin by deciding on a topic, such as *pirates*.
- Say the first sentence: “Once upon a time a pirate lived in on a huge ship.”
- Continue taking turns with your child making up and telling parts of the story until you decide to end it.



Working with others, listening to what they say and making good contributions are all valuable in helping children to complete school projects.

LISTEN! (AGES 4 – 7)

Listening to and giving directions helps your child to sharpen listening and speaking skills.

WHAT YOU NEED

Any small object, such as a ball or a photograph.

Some objects that can make noise, such as keys, water glasses, spoons and decks of cards.

WHAT TO DO

- Hide a small object. Give your child directions to find it such as, “Take five steps straight ahead. Turn right. Keep the lamp to your left. Bend down and look to the right.” Next, have your child hide the object and give you directions to find it.
- Have your child close his eyes. Use something to make a sound, such as rattling your keys, tapping a spoon against a glass or riffling a deck of cards. Ask your child to guess what’s making the sound.
- Clap your hands to tap out a rhythm. Have your child listen and then clap that same rhythm back to you. Make the rhythms harder as he catches on.
- Take a walk with your child. Find a place to sit for a few minutes and both close your eyes for 30 seconds or so. Tell each other what you hear: a baby crying, an airplane, a bird singing, cars on the street, leaves rustling.



For success in school,
children need to learn to
listen carefully, to see
and hear details and to
follow and give clear

IT'S A MATCH (AGES 4 - 7)

Sorting and classifying helps your child to pay attention to details and recognize how things are alike and different.

WHAT YOU NEED

Dishes, flatware, glasses, laundry.

WHAT TO DO

- As you empty the dishwasher or wash and dry dishes, ask your child to make stacks of dishes that are the same size, to put glasses that are the same size together and to sort forks, knives and spoons.
- As you empty the clothes dryer, ask your child to match pairs of socks or to put all white things together, all blue things and so forth.



Being able to identify how things are alike and different and to place objects and ideas into categories are important school skills that are used in almost every subject area.

LET'S READ (AGES 4 – 7)

Reading is the single most important way for your child to develop the knowledge needed to become successful in school.

WHAT YOU NEED

Children's books.

Books of riddles, tongue twisters and silly rhymes.

WHAT TO DO

- Read with your child. Take turns, with you reading one page or paragraph and your child reading the next. You might also read the parts of different characters in a story. Be enthusiastic about reading. Read the story with expression. Make it more interesting by talking as the characters would talk, making sound effects and using facial expressions and gestures. Encourage your child to do the same.
- Help your child to read new words by having him use what he knows about letters and the sounds they make to sound out the words.
- If he is unsure of the meaning of a word, help him to use the surrounding words or sentences to figure it out. If this doesn't help, just tell him what the word means and keep reading.
- Buy a children's dictionary—if possible, one that has pictures next to the words. Then start the "let's look it up" habit.



When reading is a regular part of family life, parents send their children a message that it is important and enjoyable.

AUTHOR! AUTHOR! (AGES 4 – 7)

Reading and writing support each other. The more your child does of each, the better he will be at both.

WHAT YOU NEED

Pencils, crayons or markers, writing paper.

Cardboard or heavy construction paper.

Safety scissors.

Yarn or ribbon.

WHAT TO DO

- Write with your child. Talk with him about your writing so that he begins to understand that writing means something and has many uses.
- Hang a family message board in the kitchen. Offer to write notes there for your child. Be sure that he finds notes left there for him.
- Help your child write notes or e-mails to relatives and friends to thank them for gifts or to share his thoughts. Encourage the relatives and friends to answer your child.
- As your child gets older, he can begin to write you longer stories. Ask questions that will help him organize the stories.
- Help your child to turn his writing into books. Paste his drawings and writings on pieces of construction paper. For each book, have him make a cover out of heavier paper or cardboard, then add special art, a title and his name as author.



Writing helps children to
organize their thoughts
and gives them an
important way to
communicate with others.

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