

20 Ways You Can Help Your Children Succeed in School

By: Colorín Colorado (2008)

As a parent, you are your child's first and most important teacher. When parents and families are involved in their children's schools, the children do better and have better feelings about going to school. In fact, many studies show that what the family does is more important to a child's school success than how much money the family makes or how much education the parents have. There are many ways that parents can support their children's learning at home and throughout the school year. Here are some ideas to get you started!

Develop a partnership with your child's teachers and school staff

1. Meet your child's teacher. As soon as the school year starts, try to find a way to meet your child's teacher. Let the teacher know you want to help your child learn. Make it clear that you want the teacher to contact you if any problems develop with your child. Talk with your child's teacher^[1] offers some great tips for developing a partnership with your child's teacher.

If you feel uncomfortable speaking English, don't let a language barrier stop you. What you have to say is more important than the language you say it in! Ask the school to find someone who can interpret for you. There may be a teacher or parent liaison who can help. Or you can bring a bilingual friend or relative with you.

2. Get to know who's who at your child's school. There are many people at your child's school who are there to help your child learn, grow socially and emotionally, and navigate the school environment. Who's Who at Your Child's School^[2] describes the responsibilities of teachers, administrators, and district staff. Each school is different but this article will offer a general introduction to personnel of your child's

school.

3. Attend parent-teacher conferences and keep in touch with your child's teacher.

Schools usually have one or two parent-teacher conferences each year. You can bring a friend to interpret for you or ask the school to provide an interpreter. You can also ask to meet with your child's teacher any time during the year. If you have a concern and can't meet face-to-face, send the teacher a short note or set up a time to talk on the phone. For more ideas about how to prepare for parent-teacher conferences, see [Tips for Successful Parent-Teacher Conferences at Your Child's School](#)^[3].

Support your child academically

4. Find out how your child is doing. Ask the teacher how well your child is doing in class compared to other students. If your child is not keeping up, especially when it comes to reading, ask what you or the school can do to help. It's important to act early before your child gets too far behind. Also be sure to review your child's report card each time it comes out. For more information, see [How To Know When Your Child Needs Extra Help](#)^[4].

5. Apply for special services if you think your child may need it. If your child is having problems with learning, ask the school to evaluate your child in his or her strongest language. The teacher might be able to provide accommodations for your child in class. If the school finds out your child has a learning disability, he can receive extra help at no cost. For more information, see [Where To Go For Help](#)^[5].

6. Make sure that your child gets homework done. Let your child know that you think education is important and that homework needs to be done each day. You can help your child with homework by setting aside a special place to study, establishing a regular time for homework, and removing distractions such as the television and social phone calls during homework time. [Helping Your Child With Homework](#)^[6] offers some great ideas for ensuring that your child gets homework done.

If you are reluctant to help your child with homework because you feel that you don't know the subject well enough or because you don't speak or read English, you can help by showing that you are interested, helping your child get organized, providing the necessary materials, asking your child about daily assignments, monitoring work to

make sure that it is completed, and praising all of your child's efforts. Remember that doing your child's homework for him won't help him in the long run.

7. Find homework help for your child if needed. If it is difficult for you to help your child with homework or school projects, see if you can find someone else who can help. Contact the school, tutoring groups, after school programs, churches, and libraries. Or see if an older student, neighbor, or friend can help.

8. Help your child prepare for tests. Tests play an important role in determining a student's grade. Your child may also take one or more standardized tests during the school year, and your child's teacher may spend class time on test preparation throughout the year. As a parent, there are a number of ways that you can support your child before and after taking a standardized test, as well as a number of ways you can support your child's learning habits on a daily basis that will help her be more prepared when it's time to be tested. Learn more standardized tests and general test-taking in [How to Help Your Child Prepare for Standardized Tests](#)^[7].

Get involved with your child's school

9. Learn what the school offers. Read the information the school sends home, and ask to receive information in your native language if necessary. Talk to other parents to find out what programs the school offers. Maybe there's a music program, after-school activity, sports team, or tutoring program your child would enjoy. Remember to keep track of events throughout the school year.

10. Volunteer at your child's school and/or join your school's parent-teacher group. Teachers appreciate it when parents help out at the school! There are many ways you can contribute. You can volunteer in your child's class or in the school library. You can make food for a school event. If you work during the day, you can attend "parents' night" activities or your child's performances. At most schools, a group of parents meets regularly to talk about the school. This group is usually called the PTA or PTO. The meetings give you a good chance to talk with other parents and to work together to improve the school. [How to Get Involved in Your Child's School Activities](#)^[8] offers some more ideas that you can get involved, especially for busy parents.

Get informed and be an advocate for your child

11. Ask questions. If something concerns you about your child's learning or behavior, ask the teacher or principal about it and seek their advice. Your questions may be like these — What specific problem is my child having with reading? What can I do to help my child with this problem? How can I stop that bully from picking on my son? How can I get my child to do homework? Which reading group is my child in?

12. Learn about your rights. It's important to know what your rights are as the parent regarding special services, English instruction, immigration status, and more. Learn more in *Your Rights as the Parent of a Public School Student*^[9].

13. Let the school know your concerns. Is your child doing well in school? Is he or she having trouble learning, behaving, or studying? Is there a problem with another student, teacher, or administrator? If you have a concern, *How to Let the School Know About Your Concerns*^[10] describes some steps to take.

Support your child's learning at home

14. Demonstrate a positive attitude about education to your children. What we say and do in our daily lives can help them to develop positive attitudes toward school and learning and to 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.

In addition, by showing interest in their children's education, parents and families can spark enthusiasm in them and lead them to a very important understanding—that learning can be enjoyable as well as rewarding and is well worth the effort required.

15. Monitor your child's television, video game, and Internet use. American children on average spend far more time watching TV, playing video games and using the Internet than they do completing homework or other school-related activities. *How to Monitor TV Viewing and Video Game Playing*^[11] and *Help Your Child Learn to Use the Internet Properly and Effectively*^[12] offer some ideas for helping your child use the media effectively.

16. Encourage your child to read. Helping your child become a reader is the single most important thing that you can do to help the child to succeed in school—and in life.

The importance of reading simply can't be overstated. Reading helps children in all school subjects. More important, it is the key to lifelong learning. Learn more in [Fun Reading Tips and Activities](#)^[13] and [Fun and Effective Ways to Read with Children](#)^[14].

17. Talk with your child. Talking and listening play major roles in children's school success. It's through hearing parents and family members talk and through responding to that talk that young children begin to pick up the language skills they will need if they are to do well. For example, children who don't hear a lot of talk and who aren't encouraged to talk themselves often have problems learning to read, which can lead to other school problems. In addition, children who haven't learned to listen carefully often have trouble following directions and paying attention in class. It's also important for you to show your child that you're interested in what he has to say. [Talking With Your Child](#)^[15] offers some great ideas for using conversation to stimulate language development.

18. Encourage your child to use the library. Libraries are places of learning and discovery for everyone. Helping your child find out about libraries will set him on the road to being an independent learner. Remember that libraries also offer a quiet place for students to complete homework, and are often open in the evening. Learn more about resources for students in [Library Services for School-Aged Children](#)^[16].

19. Encourage your child to be responsible and work independently. Taking responsibility and working independently are important qualities for school success. You can help your child to develop these qualities by establish reasonable rules that you enforce consistently, making it clear to your child that he has to take responsibility for what he does, both at home and at school, showing your child how to break a job down into small steps, and monitor what your child does after school, in the evenings and on weekends. If you can't be there when your child gets home, give her the responsibility of checking in with you by phone to discuss her plans. Learn more in [Encourage Responsibility, Independence, and Active Learning](#)^[17].

20. Encourage active learning. Children need active learning as well as quiet learning such as reading and doing homework. Active learning involves asking and answering questions, solving problems and exploring interests. Active learning also can take place when your child plays sports, spends time with friends, acts in a school play, plays a musical instrument or visits museums and bookstores. To promote active learning, listen to your child's ideas and respond to them. Let him jump in with questions and

opinions when you read books together. When you encourage this type of give-and-take at home, your child's participation and interest in school is likely to increase.

1. <http://www.colorincolorado.org/families/school/whynottalk>
2. <http://www.colorincolorado.org/article/26293>
3. <http://www.colorincolorado.org/article/19516>
4. <http://www.colorincolorado.org/families/home/howtoknow>
5. <http://www.colorincolorado.org/families/home/wheretogo>
6. <http://www.colorincolorado.org/article/20468>
7. <http://www.colorincolorado.org/article/23148>
8. <http://www.colorincolorado.org/article/26541>
9. <http://www.colorincolorado.org/families/school/parentalrights>
10. <http://www.colorincolorado.org/families/school/yourconcerns>
11. <http://www.colorincolorado.org/article/26555>
12. <http://www.colorincolorado.org/article/26551>
13. <http://www.colorincolorado.org/families/letsread/readingtips>
14. <http://www.colorincolorado.org/families/home/funways>
15. <http://www.colorincolorado.org/article/26570>
16. <http://www.colorincolorado.org/families/letsread/libraryvisit/schoolage>
17. <http://www.colorincolorado.org/article/26572>