

Preparing Your Children for School

Part1 – Parents as First Teachers and Listeners

If your children are entering kindergarten, middle school or high school, or if they are enrolling in a new school, preparing them for the transition will influence their success as students.

While schooling is foremost about academic learning, it is also about socialization, emotional growth, decision making, cognitive development, communication, written and oral self-expression, and assimilation. If we are concerned about developing the whole child, then math and science are not enough.

How can we help our kids attain competence in all these areas?

As their child's first teachers, parents play a role that is vital to their youngster's success. Parents establish the basics of language, numbers, communicating with others, and the importance of learning and schooling. Parents also must convey the importance of being able to read and write, speak and listen, work in groups, and lead and follow.

Family trips, whether to a museum or grandma's house, help prepare students for school. Geographers tell us that it is difficult to teach a child about geography if he or she never travels. Additional lessons occur as the child is exposed to other people and places. Family dinner conversation where world and national events, work experiences, and school events are discussed is a major springboard for learning how the world works and for instilling your own family values.

Listening is an extremely important skill for parents who are interested in helping their children succeed in school and in life. Authoritarian parents who make all of the decisions reveal to the child that listening is not important and, by extension, neither is he nor she.

Next month, in Part 2, Dr. Michael Litow will discuss communication, homework, meaningful praise, and expectations. For more information, please contact Dr. Litow at The Education Center of Developmental Resources at (630) 420-7807.

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Preparing Your Children for School Part 2 – Communication, Homework, Meaningful Praise and Expectations

As the first day of school approaches, try to visit the school, teacher and other school personnel with your child. Talk to your youngster about topics related to school. Children need the opportunity to express their concerns. As the year progresses, talk with your children about what is happening at school, listen to their experiences each day, and learn about their concerns.

Parents have an important role to play in helping their youngsters with homework. Acting as a coach, help your kids learn how to do their homework successfully, but don't do it for them. Check their homework. Make sure it is completed. Provide a place in your home where homework can be done with limited interference. Help your youngster learn time-management skills by helping them establish a time for homework, a time for chores, a time for TV, a time to "hang" with friends, a time to go to bed, and a time to start a new day. Teaching them time management is different from personally establishing the schedule for your child.

You will have many opportunities throughout the year to encourage, reinforce, and express interest in your child. "Being there" is one of them. Attending the open house, the parent-teacher conference, the game, the concert, the play, all send messages of parental care and support. Reinforcing your child's school successes need not be monetary. The best reinforcement is meaningful praise.

Expectations are important – expectations of the school and teachers and those of the parent and student. One of the difficulties faced by students who have been labeled as slow is that many of their teachers and sometimes their parents have lower expectations. The lack of expectations frequently cuts students off from higher math, science and literature. On the other hand, there is a fine line between realistic expectations and being too demanding. Excessive pressure to succeed can lead to high level of stress and other problems.

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