

Make This the Best School Year Ever for Your Kids

By Julie Wilson

Now that school is back in full swing, it's a great time to groom your kids for good study habits that will help them sail successfully through the 2008-2009 school year. Studies have shown that parental involvement can make a big difference in your child's performance at school and overall education.

According to the National Association of School Psychologists, teachers and parents must work together to help children learn good study skills, keeping in mind that preferred learning styles vary from child to child. Parents of elementary students usually help their children more than parents of adolescents. However, older students also need parental support and encouragement through high school. Did you know that two-thirds (66 percent) of parents polled by the National Education Association (NEA) say that their middle school students seek their help with homework? So it's always a good idea to stay involved in your kids' education, from preschool to high school.

Here are some great tips from the NEA to guide parents in helping their children establish good study habits:

- **Assume your child will have studying to do every night, and be prepared to help.**

Establish and maintain regular homework time. If students do not have homework on a particular night, suggest that they study for tests, do research for long-term assignments, review notes from class or read.

- **Set up a comfortable location for doing homework.**

Students need a distraction-free place to do homework. The kitchen table, provided there is proper lighting, a clean work surface, and a supportive chair, can be ideal. Or, setting up a desk in your child's room may be the answer. You and your child can pick out lighting, a seat cushion, and other accessories together.

- **Make sure your child has the necessary supplies.**

Many teachers require specific tools for assignments, such as red pens and highlighters. They may also expect students to have access to a computer and the Internet, which most school and public libraries make available for everyone's use.

- **Work with your child's outside activity schedule when setting up a regular homework time.**

Many students have outside activities that may leave them few opportunities for doing homework. Make it easier by establishing a routine homework time. Some children have a better attention span in the afternoon or evening and can order their priorities based on family schedules.

➤ **Help your child get organized.**

It is a good idea—and often a teacher's requirement—for your child to keep a schedule planner. Encourage your child to write down all assignments daily and even use the planner to maintain a longer-term "to-do" list. Students may enjoy checking off assignments as they are completed, allowing them to see their progress.

➤ **Make yourself available during homework time.**

While you've probably had a long day like your child and may want to watch TV or run errands, it can benefit you both if you are nearby while he/she does homework. Consider using this time to read, pay bills, or do paperwork that you can easily set aside if your child needs assistance.

➤ **Stop by and check in while your child does homework, offering support and advice.**

Teachers believe parents are the best source of motivation for students. You may serve as a sounding board as your child works through interesting ideas or challenging problems.

➤ **Show interest in your child's schoolwork and discuss what your child is learning.**

Though they may not admit it, even older students like to know that their parents are interested in what they do. Ask questions about their day, new homework assignments, or what your child likes or doesn't like about a particular class or subject.

➤ **Watch for signs of failure or frustration.**

If your child is getting frustrated or discouraged, try to provide guidance without necessarily providing answers. Sometimes suggesting that your child take a short break can be the best advice you can give. Offer to talk through the problem following the break. Your positive attitude about working through frustrations can be part of the learning process. You'll be helping your child to develop a healthy ability to stick with problems until they can be solved.

➤ **Identify other resources**

Don't hesitate to line up extra support if needed. If your child is having problems completing homework, it may be time to schedule a conference with the teacher. A teacher may offer suggestions for tutors or small-group study sessions.

Get to know the guidance counselors and other school employees. Education support professionals generally know all of the students, and their relationship with your child will continue as they advance from one grade to the next.

Encourage your child to find homework buddies. It is always a good idea for children to identify a homework buddy in each class, someone they can call with questions.

Consider providing technology aids to boost homework help. You may want to take advantage of the technology-based tools now available. Parents can choose from a variety of educational software programs, an array of online resources, and even new technology.

Make this the best school year ever for your kids, show them you care about their studies and always be involved!