

# Helping Children Learn<sup>®</sup>

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School



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La Mesa-Spring Valley School District  
Extended School Services Program

## Family meetings encourage communication and connection

A secure family connection supports your child as he takes on new challenges at school. Holding family meetings is an effective way to build that connection—and help him develop important school and life skills at the same time. With planning, these meetings are a great way to teach your child about communication, negotiation and cooperation.



To get the most out of meetings:

- **Choose a regular meeting date**—once every week or two. Also allow family members to request a meeting if they have something to discuss.
- **Set an agenda.** Before a meeting, ask family members what they would like to discuss. Topics might include problems, purchases, goals, etc. Allow time to talk about each topic, but try to keep the meeting under an hour.
- **Appoint a leader.** The chairperson must stick to the agenda and make sure everyone gets a fair, uninterrupted say. At first, the leader should be an adult. After a few meetings, let your child give it a try.
- **Take turns.** After one person explains an idea or problem, give everyone else an opportunity to say what they think about it. Brainstorm solutions, then choose an idea to try, with parents having the final say.
- **Keep a record.** Take notes on decisions. Plan to revisit solutions at future meetings to discuss whether or not they are working.



## Make it easier for your child to focus

Everybody's mind wanders now and then. But if your child regularly "zones out" at school, it can affect her ability to learn and retain information.

Studies demonstrate that younger students who can't focus tend to become older students who can't focus. Strengthening attention skills at home can help your child be more attentive at school. Here's how:

- **Remove distractions.** TVs and other devices should be off while your child does homework.
- **Allow short breaks.** A five-minute breather can help your child clear her head and refocus.

- **Turn big assignments** into small tasks. If she has to write a report, say, "First, think about what you want to say. Next, make an outline. Then start writing."
- **Encourage games** and activities that sustain interest, such as Concentration and puzzles.

Source: A.J. Lundervold and others, "Parent Rated Symptoms of Inattention in Childhood Predict High School Academic Achievement Across Two Culturally and Diagnostically Diverse Samples," *Frontiers in Psychology*, Frontiers Communications.

## Grow some science skills

To practice scientific thinking, give your child a potted plant. Ask him to:

- **Describe it.** Have him write down its size, color, bloom shape, leaf structure, etc.
- **Learn its name.** Help him use the plant's common name to look up its scientific name. What can the name tell him about the plant?



## Help your student get in shape for test success

Studying is not the only thing that can help your child succeed on tests. Research shows that students who are physically fit recall information better—and score higher on tests—than classmates who don't exercise.

To boost your child's test-taking fitness on test day, make sure she also:

- **Eats** a healthy, low-sugar breakfast.
- **Arrives** at school well-rested.
- **Relaxes.** Stretching and deep breathing are good ways to do this.
- **Drinks** plenty of water.

Source: S. Dalton, "Youth Fitness: Exercise Helps Children Excel in School," Healthline, [niswc.com/shapeup](https://www.healthline.com/shapeup).

## Promote literacy at home

Sharpening literacy skills at home fosters academic success. Try these ideas to encourage reading and writing:

- **Read often—at all times of day.** Visit the library and keep interesting books where your child can get to them.
- **Keep a family journal.** Each week, have everyone jot down a few sentences about the week.
- **Play word games.** Your child may not realize he's learning if he's having fun.





## Do I have to tell the school about my child's asthma?

**Q:** The doctor says my daughter has asthma. But my child doesn't want me to tell anyone at school—she's afraid she won't be able to play with friends at recess. How should I handle this?

**A:** Asthma is the most common chronic childhood illness, and it can have a negative impact on school attendance and achievement. So you can't agree to stay silent about it. Instead, work with the school to create plans to protect your child's health and safety. Here's how:

- **Ask the school nurse** or office staff about rules for medicine at school, and fill out any necessary forms. Make sure your child knows how to take her medication.
- **Meet with your child's teacher.** Discuss things that can trigger an attack, such as overexertion and exposure to animals, pollen, mold and dust. Teach your child to self-monitor and avoid trigger situations. Agree on a plan of action so everyone knows what to do if she has an attack.
- **Continue to work with the doctor** to make sure your daughter's asthma is well-controlled.



Asthma shouldn't prevent your child from enjoying recess. But she will have to learn to respect her limits so she can stay healthy.

Source: American College of Allergy, Asthma, and Immunology, "Academic performance of urban children with asthma worse than peers without asthma," ScienceDaily, [nswc.com/asthma](http://nswc.com/asthma).



## Are you building decision-making skills?

Your child will face many choices in school. Will he say *no* to peer pressure and *yes* to positive challenges? Your guidance can help him choose wisely. Are you teaching your child to make good decisions? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

1. **Do you make** it clear to your child that every choice has consequences? a choice? "Will an adult be there?" "What do members of the recycling squad do?"
2. **Do you provide** lots of opportunities for your child to make choices—and live with their outcomes?
3. **Do you include** your child in discussions about family decisions?
4. **Do you think** out loud and talk through how you make choices?
5. **Do you teach** your child to ask questions before making

### How well are you doing?

More *yes* answers mean you are encouraging your child to think decisions through. For each *no*, try that idea.

"You cannot make progress without making decisions."  
—Jim Rohn

## Children learn from chores

As your child goes through school, she'll be expected to take increasing responsibility for her schoolwork. Doing chores at home helps her practice aspects of that responsibility—such as following directions and being reliable. Chores also help your child:

- **Feel invested.** A child who has swept the floor is less likely to walk across it in muddy shoes.
- **Take pride in her work.** Remembering the satisfying feeling of a job well done can help her persevere with schoolwork.
- **Learn basic life skills.** Tasks like caring for clothes and taking out the trash prepare your child for a responsible, independent future.

## When imposing discipline, describe, don't criticize

When your child misbehaves, it's more effective to correct him than to criticize him. So instead of saying something like "You are so maddening!" describe his error. "It was your sister's turn to use the computer and you wouldn't quit playing your game." Then remind him of your rule—"When your 20 minutes is up, your turn is over"—and calmly impose the consequence for breaking it.

## Encourage prompt action

It's natural for kids to enjoy some subjects more than others. But when dislike for a subject or assignment causes your child to put off tackling it, it's a problem. To prevent procrastination, remind your child that:

- **Everyone has to do** things they don't like. Mention duties you don't relish.
- **Putting tasks off** makes them seem worse.
- **Getting tough** tasks out of the way feels great!



Source: R. Emmett, *The Procrastinating Child*, Walker Books.

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