

# Helping Children Learn®

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

La Mesa - Spring Valley School District  
Extended School Services Program



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## Encourage reading by modeling the many reasons to read

It's a fundamental truth of parenting: Children learn by example. Whether you want your child to tell the truth or eat her vegetables, modeling the behavior is the best way to get her to follow suit.

This is also the case with reading. To help your child form helpful reading habits, show her how *you* read often to:



- **Learn things.** Say, "I'm trying to learn about a new strategy we might use at work. This article explains how other businesses use it."
- **Find information.** Do you need to fix an appliance at home? Show your child how you read a manual to learn how. When you want to find a new recipe, show her how you search online or in a cookbook index.
- **Have a good time.** When your child sees you reading for pleasure or to relax, she will realize that reading isn't just for school or work.
- **Pass time when waiting.** Bring something to read everywhere you go. Ignore TV screens in waiting rooms and pull out a book. Play audiobooks in the car on long drives.
- **Connect with others.** When you read something interesting, read a little out loud. Print or cut out an article you think your child would enjoy and leave it on her bed. Show her that reading is something fun to share.



## Help your child be an active learner

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought many changes to learning in 2020, and it is likely that will continue. But one thing has not changed. Students who take active responsibility for their own learning get more out of it. To foster this responsibility in your elementary schooler, encourage him to:

- **Get ready to learn.** That means getting enough sleep, eating a healthy breakfast and being prepared with necessities like pencils, paper and a positive attitude.
- **Discuss what he's learning.** Asking questions, offering opinions and exchanging ideas with others strengthens your child's understanding of the material.
- **Stay organized.** Help your child create a system for organizing assignments, returned work and other materials.
- **Keep trying.** Support your child as he faces challenges with learning, assignments and tests. Tell him that persistence pays off, and help him think of different strategies he can try to tackle problems.

## Take a balanced approach

Parents have taken on more teaching this year than ever before, and your support of your child's learning is essential. Turning *everything* you do with your child into a lesson, however, can backfire.



Kids love to do activities with their parents, but not if they feel like they're always in class. So do some things together just for fun. Let your child try out her own ideas and learn from the results. Enjoying your time together is also an important way to support your child.

## Relieve stress about school

This year's unprecedented events may have your child feeling anxious about school. To ease his mind:

- **Reassure him** that he is up to the challenge of new situations and new work.
- **Put grades in perspective.** Is he doing his best? Is he learning? Let him know that's what counts.

## Find time for family fitness

A recent study shows that as early as age seven, children's physical activity levels start to decline. This is a problem. Not only does exercise reduce stress and risks of serious health problems, research shows it also aids learning. Compared to inactive peers, children who get regular exercise:

- **Are better listeners.**
- **Have better handwriting.**
- **Have better hand-eye** coordination.

To keep your child fit and learning well for years to come, help her set—and stick with—a healthy exercise routine now.



Source: "Decline in physical activity often starts as early as age 7," ScienceDaily, [niswc.com/stayactive](https://www.sciencedaily.com/stayactive).



## How can I be involved if I can't help during the day?

**Q:** I work during school hours, and I can't just take time off to participate in a school activity. What else can I do to stay involved and support my child's education?

**A:** Research shows that parent involvement improves children's educational outcomes. But taking part in a school class or activity is only one of many ways to make a difference. Many things you can do at home can have a big impact on your child's learning.

First and most importantly, let your child know that school is a top priority. You can do that several ways:

- **Set high expectations.** Tell your child that you know he can do well in school, and you expect him to work hard. Offer praise when he does.
- **Talk about school subjects** with your child. Ask him to tell you about what he's learning. Offering positive comments, like "That sounds really interesting, I hope you'll tell me more," can motivate him.
- **Review your child's work,** and schedule enough time each day for him to do assignments. Stay nearby, if possible, while he works.
- **Work with other school parents.** Join the parent-teacher organization. You'll learn about what's going on and what families can do to help.



## Are you shifting into school routines?

Establishing routines at home can ease your child's adjustment from a more relaxed summer schedule to the busier school year. Are you creating patterns that help your child make the shift? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

1. **Have you set** a bedtime for your child that lets her get nine to 12 hours of sleep?
2. **Have you set aside** at least 20 minutes a day for family reading time?
3. **Have you made** evening checklists of the preparations your child should make for the next morning?
4. **Have you designated** a spot where your child should keep supplies and items needed for school so there is no time wasted looking for them?

5. **Have you posted** a family calendar where she can record assignments and activities?

### How well are you doing?

More *yes* answers mean you are establishing a structure to smooth the return to school. For each *no*, try that idea.

"Write it on your heart  
that every day is the  
best day in the year."  
—Ralph Waldo Emerson

## Focus on study skills

Helping your child develop his study skills is a key way to make sure he has a productive school year. For a start:

- **Set a regular study time** and place. Choose a time when your child is alert, and a spot that is comfortable and free of distractions.
- **Teach your child** to make a daily to-do list. As he crosses completed assignments off, he'll feel a sense of accomplishment.
- **Encourage him** to restate the main idea of assignments in his own words.

## Brains need downtime

Studies show that even when kids' brains are in a "resting" state they are still active. What's more, a little mental downtime can help consolidate learning. To give your child's brain a chance to recharge:

- **Have her take** a short break after every 15 to 20 minutes of homework or study.
- **Let her be bored** sometimes. Challenge her to figure out how to fill her time without relying on screens.

Source: L. Waters, Ph.D., "How Goofing Off Helps Kids Learn," The Atlantic, [niswc.com/elem\\_goof](https://www.niswc.com/elem_goof).

## Set the stage for teamwork

You and your child's teacher are partners. By staying in touch and working together, you can keep small issues from becoming big problems. Make it a point to:

1. **Share information** about your child and about changes at home.
2. **Read all notes** that come from school. Fill out and return forms and questionnaires promptly.
3. **Ask questions!** If you are confused about anything school-related, ask the teacher to explain.



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