

BACK TO SCHOOL HELPFUL TIPS

28 years ago, when my first child hit the terrible twos, I thought that life would be easier once he started school. He'd return home from a day full of fun, learning, and adventures. I'd share a healthy snack (or cookies). He would show me a pile of A+ papers, and we would all be happy 😊

At that time, It didn't cross my mind that the reality of my child's' schooling would make the terrible twos seem like a "piece of cake". Maybe I should have remember the large amount of relatively sane moms and dads transformed into neurotic disasters over the course of a 10-minute "parent-teacher" conversation about their child's report card. **I just didn't think it would happen to me!**

After many years in the field of education, after my oldest completed his Masters' Degree, and now that the young one is completing high school, I've learned what types of situations can make — or break — the school year. Based on my experience, and the hundreds of teachers I have talked to about this topic, I offer to you what I call a "road map for success". Follow these steps, so you and your child can have a much better chance for a smooth academic year. Disclaimer: I don't guarantee that you won't grow another gray hair and a wrinkle in the process. It is not an easy task, but it is an "act of love", after all.

Tip #1: Setting School Goals

Tip # 2: Team Up with the Teacher

Tip # 3: Learn About Your Child's Learning Style

Tip # 4: Set-up a Productive Homework Space

Tip #5: Follow up and persist, no matter what happens during the school year; remember that it is "an act of love" and your child's future depends on it

SETTING SCHOOL YEAR GOALS FOR KIDS

Yes, the teacher will tell the whole class what she expects for the year, but you also need to sit down with your child and ask him to set up his own goals for this year. **Why?** Because it puts him in charge of how he spends his time (with your help, of course). He needs to be engaged and vested in his own learning process, not someone else's plan.

Be specific and realistic. Your kid's idea of achievement may be less lofty than your own — but that's okay. Remember, little steps for little feet: If the goal is to get better at math, be more specific about the concepts that need to be mastered and schedule 15-20 min each day until he/she masters that concept. If the issue is reading comprehension, then set up a short-term objective of finishing one new book in a specific amount of time and discussing his/her reading understanding every other night.

Don't setup more than 1-2 goals per subject matter. Do periodic check-ins to see if you need to modify or change the tasks for meeting the goals. Finally, setup some kind of chart for the child to track progress. This chart will vary according to the child's age.

Adjust your mindset. This was really difficult for me because I always have high expectations and wanted for my kids to make big progress steps. It's natural for parents to want big things for their child, but while we have the best intentions, the pressure can feel overwhelming for both, parent and child.

Embrace today. Sure, a house full of academic little prodigies would be nice; but so would a bunch of happy little learners who work hard and show steady academic growth month after month. To be honest with you, I still struggle with this concept. My young one and I are in the college and scholarship search process, and sometimes we both feel that time is slipping our hands; however we also need to remember that Senior year is supposed to be fun and a significant transitional time for both of us. I can tell you with all honesty that when I adjust my mindset and tweak my thinking, the stress level in our house goes down noticeably.

COMMUNICATION WITH THE TEACHERS

Putting your child's concrete goals in action is a lot easier (and more effective!) when you've got a great bond with the teacher. After all, she may spend more waking hours with your child than you do — and see behaviors that you might miss. Follow these do's and don'ts in order to forge a strong connection with teachers:

Do lay the groundwork for a friendly partnership by telling the teacher how excited your child is about the new academic year in his/her class, and share the goals you set with your kid. She'll appreciate your proactive approach.

Don't dictate your expectations. Let the teacher assess your child's needs and set up an appointment or phone time to discuss them together so you can provide your suggestions with all pertinent information at hand.

Do stay on top of class events by reading her notes, the website posts, and the school bulletin.

Don't call the teacher at home unless it's an emergency. E-mail or phone the school to set up a time. And don't hit her up at open house or school assemblies with personal questions about your kid.

Do send thank-you notes, or emails, once in a while — 1-2 times per semester is enough for high school students. Even high school teachers love knowing they matter in a child's life.

Don't bad-mouth the teacher within earshot of your child. Even if you think she's the Wicked Witch of the West, you need to present a united front, or your child will lose interest in her teacher, and possibly learning.

Do make sure your child gets a good night's sleep (it's the number one request from most teachers!). Tired children have a harder time focusing and may become overly silly or emotional in class. This also applies to high school students.

Don't talk to the principal about your classroom concerns before you've addressed them with the teacher first.

Do be understanding. Teachers face a difficult job: Balancing the academic, social, and emotional well-being of a roomful of kids, plus keeping parents happy, isn't easy!

YOUR CHILD'S LEARNING STYLE

Most kids have a natural way of learning; they learn best either by listening (auditory learner), looking (visual learner), or doing (hands-on learner). Once you know your child's learning personality-style, you can unfold his/her academic potential.

Take the quiz below to reveal how your kid's brain works best, and then play to his strengths to maximize his school potential. (Source: Scholastic Magazine; 2015)

1. You let your child pick out one toy at the dollar store. Which is he most likely to choose?

- a) Paint-by-number set
- b) Play microphone
- c) Hula hoop or football

2. If your child could only pick one after-school activity, which would he choose?

- a) Art lessons
- b) Music lessons
- c) Sports or drama lessons

3. You're out to dinner and there's a 10-minute wait. How does your child occupy himself?

- a) Doodling
- b) Talking your ear off
- c) Digging in your purse while bouncing in place

4. When your child picks the family activity, which is he most likely to choose?

- a) A movie
- b) A concert
- c) Mini golf

5. When your child reads a book to himself, he:

- a) Sits quietly, immersed in its contents
- b) Mouths the words aloud or asks you to read it to him
- c) Fidgets frequently

6. Which of these iPad activities is your child most drawn to?

- a) Looking at photos
- b) Listening to music
- c) Playing Angry Birds or another video game

If the answers are mostly A's: Your child learns by looking

Your kid responds best when new material is in lists, charts, graphs, and diagrams. A little color goes a long way: He can write spelling words or state capitals in different colors so they're easier to memorize. Abstract math homework goes faster when you give your visual kid objects to help him think through the problem. (If I had 12 M&M's and Mom ate 7, how many are left?)

If the answers are mostly B's: Your child learns listening

If your child is one of the 10 percent of kids who are auditory learners, she does well with verbal instructions and shines in discussions. She'll learn faster if she has a voice recorder: Saying things aloud can help her retain info, and re-playing the recording boosts comprehension even more. If she turns a book's dialogue into a puppet show, she'll remember the story.

If the answers are mostly C's: Your child learns by doing

Like the majority of children, your kid absorbs info best when she's physically engaged on some level. Many kinesthetic learners have trouble sitting still for long stretches. So turn homework into a sporting event: Let her shoot a foam basketball into a laundry basket every time she answers a question correctly or give her a squishy ball to squeeze and manipulate.

CREATE A PRODUCTIVE SPACE FOR HOMEWORK

Make sure to include these items in your child's homework and study space to make it productive and comfortable.

Most kids do homework in all kinds of places, including on the sidelines at soccer practice, in the car, or in front of the TV; however, the right atmosphere can make all the difference in how much information your child retains. Use the following tips to transform any corner of your house into a smarter learning environment.

Calendar

Pencil in tests and block out study times. Break down projects into manageable chunks and highlight due dates.

Bulletin Board

Select work pieces that make your child proud. Add encouraging notes to remind him of all he can do.

Window

Studies show that daylight can boost work habits. Set up the desk near a window and opt for full-spectrum bulbs.

Clock

Segment all assignments with a time limit. Remember to build in a 10-minute break between assignments to keep kids from exhaustion.

Fidget Toys

Have squeeze balls close by so your child can use them while he works.

Seating

Some kids work best in an upright chair, but others get antsy. If yours likes sprawling out on a rug, get him a mobile writing surface.

Water

According to the research, cognitive function can drop 10 percent when kids are dehydrated. Keep a no-spill water bottle close to his/her study space.

Organizer

Kids do better when their work space is organized and they can find everything easily. Use plastic containers or a caddy to help your child with an organization system he/she can remember.

CD Player

Background music can boost productivity. But these perks only apply with classical or instrumental music — According to the research, pop tunes distract.

Snacks

Remember that a good mix of protein, fat, and carbs will provide the energy kids need to be focused. Consult your child's pediatrician for more specifics about the right kind of snacks and daily diet for your child.