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make the difference!

Review your child's activities and avoid overscheduling

Some parents try to schedule every minute of their children's free time in an effort to prepare them for success in later life. But studies suggest that kids benefit from having free time.

When days are packed with lessons, sports and other structured activities, children can become overwhelmed and stressed out. As a result, they don't do as well in school and are more likely to get sick.

To determine if your child might be overscheduled, ask yourself these four questions:

1. **Does my child** have time to play with friends? Practices that are planned and run by adults don't count. Kids need time to relax and just "hang out" with other kids.
2. **When does my child** do homework? Does she work on math while traveling from one activity to the next? Schoolwork takes concentration, and that takes time.
3. **Why is my child** in these activities? Sometimes, parents are the ones who want their child to take a class or participate in a sport.
4. **Does my child** get enough sleep? Children 6 to 12 years old need between nine and 12 hours of sleep each day. Without that sleep, kids' brains don't function as well.

School is your child's most important job. If too many activities are getting in the way, ask your child to choose only one or two she truly enjoys. She'll be happier and healthier—and she'll do better in school.

Source: B.B. Gray, "Over-scheduling kids may be detrimental to their development," HealthDay, niswc.com/elem_schedule.

November is a great month for learning

November is a month full of opportunities to learn. Here are just a few:

- **Nov. 4**—King Tut Day. With your child, check out a book or go online to learn more about the discovery of King Tutankhamen's tomb.
- **Nov. 8**—Election Day. Talk to your child about rights, responsibilities and why it is important to vote.
- **Nov. 13-19**— American Education Week. Try to visit your child's school one day this week to show your support for education.
- **Nov. 16**—International Day of Tolerance. Talk with your child about the importance of being respectful to people who have beliefs that are different from yours.
- **Nov. 20-26**—National Family Week. Spend extra time as a family this week. Play games, cook meals and read together!
- **Nov. 24**—American Thanksgiving. Have family members make a list of all the people and things they are thankful for.

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Help your child develop intrinsic motivation for success in school

At one time or another, most parents use rewards to motivate their kids. And there's no question that reward systems work.

But when the rewards stop, the motivation sometimes stops, too. That's important to remember when it comes to school. Researchers have found that students who are motivated *only* by the desire to get a good grade rarely do more than the minimum they need to get by.

However, when students are motivated by an inner reward, they are more likely to stick with a task. Students with *intrinsic motivation* learn because they're curious. They retain what they have learned longer, and they earn higher grades.

Here's how to help your child develop intrinsic motivation:

- **Start with his interests.** Before he works on a project, have him think about what he wants to learn.
- **Help him see progress** as he works on a big task.
- **Help your child share** what he's learning.
- **Give positive feedback** and also encourage him to praise himself for a job well done.

Source: "Research Summary: Building Self-Motivation," Education Scotland, niswc.com/elem_motivation.

"I'd rather attempt to do something great and fail than to attempt to do nothing and succeed."

—Robert H. Schuller

Improve behavior at school by promoting discipline at home

The staff at your child's school works to teach students discipline, but educators can't do the job alone. Parents can help promote good discipline, too.

Here's what you can do:

- **Change misbehavior** by setting positive goals. Concentrate on what you want your child to do, not what you want him to avoid.
- **Say what you mean** and mean what you say. Be sure you clearly communicate your expectations and limits. If you make a rule, enforce it every time.
- **Involve your child** in solving problems. Family meetings are great for developing cooperation with rules. Kids who have helped solve a problem are usually more committed to the solution.
- **Keep corrections simple.** Try the "broken record" approach. When correcting your child, move closer to him. Say his name and then repeat the same phrase ("Homework now") over and over if necessary.
- **Impose logical consequences** for misbehavior.
- **Give choices**—but make sure you can live with them. Limited choices work best, especially for younger children.
- **Show your love.** Firm and kind discipline is an act of love, not a substitute for it. Your child needs to know you love him no matter what he does.

Are you building a team with your child's school?

Research shows that when families and schools form a strong team, kids are the real winners. They learn more and do better in school.

School has been underway for a few months, so it's time to make sure you are doing all you can to build a home-school team. Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

___**1. Have you met** with your child's teacher at least once this year?

___**2. Do you talk** with your child about school each day and review all of the information she brings home?

___**3. Do you monitor** your child's homework? If she struggles with an assignment, do you ask the teacher how you can help at home?

___**4. Do you make sure** your child gets to school on time each day?

___**5. Have you reviewed** the school handbook with your child? Do you expect her to follow all school rules?

How well are you doing?

If most of your answers were *yes*, you are building a strong home-school team. For each *no* answer, try that idea from the quiz.

Elementary School Parents make the difference!

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Three simple strategies can boost reading comprehension

As your child gets older, he will be expected to read and understand more complex text. He will transition from *learning to read* to *reading to learn.*

You can help by sharing these three reading comprehension strategies with your child:

1. **See the big picture.** Before starting to read an assignment, have your child think about what he will be reading. What is the title of the chapter or assignment? Does it offer any clues about the reading? Look for other clues, such as subheadings, words in boldface or italics, pictures or graphs.
2. **Take notes.** Most good students take notes on what they read. Taking notes while reading will make it easier for your child to comprehend and remember information. It will also make reading active and engaging. Your child should write down the most important ideas in the reading assignment. He should also write down any words he doesn't know so he can look them up later.
3. **Make connections.** The best way to remember new information is by relating it to something you have already learned. When your child finishes a reading assignment, have him answer questions such as: *How is this topic similar to something else I have learned? What key ideas did I already know? What new information did I learn?*

Research shows regular exercise has academic benefits for kids

Research shows that physical fitness provides many benefits for kids. Regular physical activity is linked to higher self-esteem and attentiveness in school. It also lowers the chance of health problems such as type 2 diabetes.

To motivate your child to get—and stay—active:

- **Limit recreational screen time.** When your child watches TV or plays video games, encourage her to take active breaks.
- **Offer suggestions.** When your child has a friend over, suggest they play games that involve movement, such as tag, soccer and jumping rope. Indoors, try games such as Simon Says and Red Light, Green Light.
- **Plan family outings.** Pick activities your family enjoys and create some new healthy traditions. You might go for a walk after dinner or head to a park every Sunday afternoon.
- **Be creative.** You can find lots of ways to sneak in exercise. During chore time, play music or race to finish a job. While doing errands, park away from a store and walk. Or make a stop at a playground on the way home.
- **Set an example.** If your child sees you staying fit (stretching, biking, walking with a neighbor, etc.), she may be more likely to get active herself.

Source: A. Singh, Ph.D. and others, "Physical Activity and Performance at School," *JAMA Pediatrics,* niswc.com/elem_physical.

Q: My third grader has suddenly decided he doesn't want to go to school. At first, I couldn't figure out why. Then he told me that he has no friends at school. Should I be worried? What can I do?

Questions & Answers

A: All children spend some time feeling left out. Like your son, these children often don't want to go to school.

However, you are right to be concerned. The skills children need to get along with others in school are the same skills they'll need to get along in life. Kids who have no friends may turn to negative or dangerous behaviors as a way of fitting in. Their grades may begin to drop, too.

What should you do?

- **Take your son's comments** seriously. Many kids don't want to tell their parents what's going on in school. They are embarrassed to let Mom and Dad know that they don't have anyone to play with.
- **Assure your son** that you will work with him to solve the problem. Be as gentle as you can. Kids who are being rejected at school often feel it's their fault.
- **Talk with the teacher.** There may be recent changes in the class. Perhaps a new student has become best friends with your son's former pal. Perhaps there is an outbreak of verbal taunting in school. Enlist the teacher's help to solve the problem.
- **Find ways for your son** to meet other children. Sign him up for an after-school activity, such as scouts. As he feels better about himself, he will find it easier to relate to other children.

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It Matters: Homework

Help your child make the most of homework time

There's no question that students today have more homework than students did in the past. And it can be a challenge to fit homework into busy family schedules.

But homework is a fact of life. Here are ways you can help your child make the most of the time she spends on homework:

- **Offer help**, but don't do the homework for her. Doing homework helps your child learn to be independent. If you do the work, your child won't learn that lesson.
- **Stay in touch** with the teacher. Be sure to let her teacher know if your child struggles with homework every day. Ask what you can do at home to help your child.
- **Help your child** manage her time. Set a regular time for homework each day. Don't let homework be the last thing your child does before going to bed.
- **Help your child** decide which homework to complete first. Some kids prefer to do the easier work first, while others like to get the toughest work out of the way first. Experiment to see which works best for your child.
- **Have your child** read aloud to you every night. As you are reading together, stop and ask questions.
- **Remain positive.** Your attitude will affect your child.

Source: "Homework Tips for Parents," U.S. Department of Education.

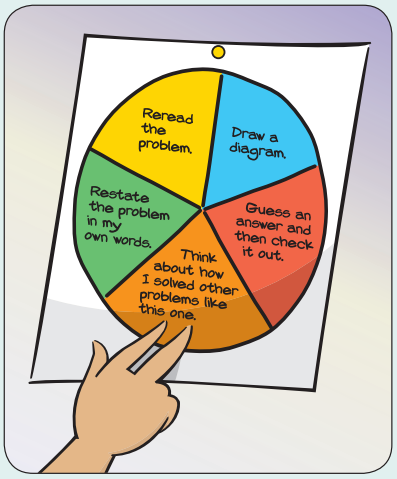
Create a strategy wheel to help your child with math homework

When your child gets stuck on a math problem, he might not remember how to get himself back on track.

That's where a strategy wheel can help. To make one, ask your child to list all the different things he can do to find the answer to a math problem. His list could include:

- **Reread the problem.**
- **Draw a diagram.**
- **Restate the problem** in my own words.
- **Guess an answer** and then check it out.
- **Think about how** I solved other problems like this one.

Then have your child create a pie chart with his strategies listed. Have him post the chart where he does his math homework. The next time he's stuck, all he needs to do is glance at the wheel and then try one or more of the strategies.



Source: D. Ronis, *Brain-Compatible Mathematics*, Skyhorse Publishing.

Do you know the hidden value of your child's homework?

Homework gives your child an opportunity to practice the skills she is learning in school. But did you know that it also teaches important life lessons?

When your child completes homework on her own, she learns:

- **Responsibility.** Your child learns the importance of fulfilling her obligations. She also learns to hold herself accountable for her mistakes and successes.
- **Initiative.** Homework can help your child learn how to be self-motivated. When she chooses to complete writing assignments a few days before they are due, she is showing initiative.
- **Perseverance.** Most parents want to protect their children from frustration. However, making your child's life easier now may make it harder in the future. When your child sticks with a tough assignment and refuses to give up, she is showing perseverance.
- **Time management.** The ability to manage her time in order to get her homework finished is one of the most valuable skills your child can learn.