

NEWSLETTER

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REACH FOR SCHOOL SUCCESS

School days! School days!

Depending on where you live school has just started or is about to start. Although they may protest otherwise, most kids can't wait for the structured school year to start again.

Today's busy parents struggle with how involved they should be. Some parents don't pay much attention at all while others hover over every homework paper until perfection is achieved.

And there are very varied opinions among those of us giving parenting advice. Some feel that school is the child's job and the child must be responsible for school work. ("sink-or-swim) Others stress the importance of the parents in school success.

The first parenting newspaper column I wrote 12 years ago dealt with parental involvement in their children's school and home work. I have always felt that parents must be involved in their child's school experiences. Why? Because school is the most important thing in our children's lives from kindergarten through high school graduation and beyond. A hands-off, let 'em sink or swim attitude gives only one message to a child: my parents don't care. This morphs into another counterproductive message: my parents don't think school is important.

In that column I used the acronym REACH to outline what all parents should do to ensure their child's success at school.

"R" stands for READ: read to the child, read with the child, let the child read to you, and be sure your child sees you reading.

I have come to realize that there are lots of parents out there who diligently read to their children, take them to story hour at the library, and buy them many books. But these parents are so busy with their work and computers that the kids never see Mommy and Daddy pick up a book. These parents often complain that their child can read but doesn't.

Parents: don't just get books for the children, get some for yourselves. I advocate a family reading hour at least three times a week. (If you are like me you have to put it on the calendar so nothing else fills the

time.) Let the children pick whatever they want to read (or look at if they are not yet able to read) while you're reading your own book. Then read aloud to the children. For older children pick books that interest them so much they can hardly wait for the next chapter. Books like The Little Prince or the Harry Potter books all work.

"E" stands for EXPECTATIONS. Children live up to the loving, high expectations of their parents. Expect your child to learn at school and succeed at this "job". Education should be the number one priority in your child's life. Expect your child to do well at school and to take pride in so doing just as you take pride in your job.

Expect your child to understand that learning doesn't end at 3 o'clock. Involve children in problem-solving at home (cooking uses fractions), at the market (counting change), and in the car (directions, time/distance problems). This reinforces the learning that has taken place in school and also points out that arithmetic is a necessary life skill you will use all your life, not just when you're at school. Don't just think your expectations, SAY THEM so the children know that you have an interest in their "job" and in their future.

"A" is for ACTIVITY as opposed to passivity. Learning is an active process. Whether your child is learning how to catch a ball or do long division, he or she must be actively involved in the process. Expose your child to all kinds of age appropriate activities: sports, crafts, hobbies, etc. rather than the passivity of TV. There are lots of reasons to curtail TV (violence, sex, consumerism) but the most important reason is to counteract passivity. Every hour spent passively is an hour not spent in an activity.

"C" stands for COMMUNICATION. Talk to your child about school. Ask your child about school using questions that require an answer not a monosyllable ("What was the best thing that happened at school today?" not "Did you have a good day at school?")

Communicate with your child's teacher. Respond to notes and requests and look at the papers your child brings home. The teacher's comments point out your child's strengths and weaknesses so you can reinforce the strengths and help with any weaknesses. Pay attention to the teacher's assessment of your child because the teacher understands both child development and the dynamics of learning. If the teacher notices a problem, follow through on the suggestions.

"H" stands for HELP. Although one school of thought holds that parents should not help their children with school work because it dilutes the child's responsibility, I don't buy into this.

When it comes to homework, parents should: 1) Provide the proper environment (a quiet place and all the necessary equipment like pencils, paper and dictionary). 2) Set up household homework rules. In many homes the rule is snack, homework, and then play although some parents say play until supper then homework. 3) Help out if a child is stuck. It's silly to let a child stare at a piece of paper not knowing what to do. By all means offer help but do it the right way. Help the child RECALL by asking "What did your teacher tell you to do?" Give the child an EASIER EXAMPLE to boost his or her confidence. Show the child how to BREAK DOWN THE PROBLEM into do-able parts. CHECK THE ANSWERS to see if most of them are correct. Don't ever DO the child's homework, rather encourage your child to come to you for help when needed.

So REACH with your child for school success!