



# School Survival Skills for Parents

By Rich Bayer, Ph.D.

With the school year just beginning, both parents and children have some adjustments to make.

It's time for children to say so long to the summertime schedule and hello to the school-day schedule—complete with classrooms, teachers, homework, and extracurricular activities. And it's time for parents to help their children to get organized, get motivated, and get good grades.

How can parents make a difference? According to Julie Graham, Licensed Clinical Social Worker at Upper Bay Counseling and mother of two, “There are four key components to helping a child do well in school. They are preparation, routine, involvement with school, and problem solving.”

She offers the following techniques that parents can use to help their children:

## **Routine**

Keep in mind that children do better with structure. It helps to set a routine and stick to it. Set a routine for bedtime, for getting up in the morning, and for homework.

For bedtime, figure out what your child needs to do to get ready for bed and how long it takes. Make sure the TV goes off while your child is getting ready. Also it helps to set a wake-up time and stick to it. Then your child's nighttime schedule tends to adjust.

A routine can help your child in the morning too. Have him do the required activities—such as getting washed, getting dressed, having breakfast, and brushing teeth—in the same order every day. Have him plan the night before what clothing to wear and what breakfast to have. A checklist of things to do, and in what order, can be helpful.

As part of the evening routine, set up a time and place for your child to do homework. It helps to have a desk or table with lots of room to spread out papers and books. Also it can be a big help to your child to have her develop a calendar for scheduled homework assignments so that she doesn't miss anything.

## **Preparation**

Getting ready for each school day can be a challenge. But being organized helps.

Graham recommends setting up as much as possible the night before. Make lunch the night before, have backpacks ready, and homework and permission slips ready to go. Also it helps to designate a place in the house for all items that need to go out the door in the morning.

You need to remain focused too. To keep yourself organized, get up 15 minutes prior to your children. That way, you'll feel less rushed and better prepared for the morning routine.

Make sure children have the supplies they need for school. Keep extra supplies in the same place all the time and make them easy to access.

## **Involvement with School**

“Children benefit from both parents being involved,” Graham says. “For instance, either parent can attend school functions, help with homework, or pack lunches.”

It helps to develop a relationship with personnel at the school. Meet your child’s teacher and establish a working relationship with her. That way, if the teacher knows of an opportunity for your child or if there’s a problem, the teacher can let you know directly. Meet the principal, join the PTO, and volunteer in any way you can at the school. Also read all the paperwork that the school sends home.

Encourage your child to succeed by making positive statements about her and her school. Also, be aware that anything negative you say about a teacher or about the school affects the child and how she behaves in school.

Each day, talk about school with your child. Don’t ask general questions like, “How did it go?” Ask specific questions like, “What did you do in science today?”

Involve your child in school meetings. Ask the teacher about your child’s progress throughout the year, not just at the parent-teacher meetings. Also attend and participate in school events. Your interest in the school helps your child to be involved.

## **Problem Solving**

Sometimes frustrations arise. And sometimes they interfere with the school day. For example, your child might have problems picking out the right clothes to wear to school and still be trying to pick out a shirt when the bus goes by. Instead of fighting over the clothes with him, develop a strategy on how to deal with the problem. Involve him in the planning. Ask him how to improve the situation. You might agree that he’ll pick the clothes the night before. Now you have a solution so start using that method. But also be ready to change it if it stops working.

Sometimes a problem arises at school. For example, your child keeps falling and hurting himself at recess or another child may be picking on yours. In this case, you need to develop a plan with your child, the teacher, the school administrator, and the parent of any other child involved. Let the child know what to do and who to go to if there’s a problem. Get everybody on the same page. “Develop a time to reassess your child’s progress with this plan,” says Graham, “and if problems continue, start looking into other solutions or seeking other resources.”

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