Early absences lead to school problems later

You woke up late and you wonder whether to take your child to school. After all, will one absence matter?

The answer is yes. A large-scale review of research shows that children put their entire school career at risk when they are absent in the early years. The learning they miss is hard to make up.

Still, it can be a challenge to get a family out the door on time. Here’s how:

1. Get ready the night before.
   Lay out what your child will wear. Make sure she has everything that she needs to take to school.

2. Establish routines.
   Create a chart of the things your child needs to do each day. When it’s a routine, she won’t argue about it.

3. Allow extra time.
   Set your alarm clock a few minutes early. Allow yourself an extra five or 10 minutes to get your child to school.


Four ways to help your child make this school year great

It’s the start of a new school year and you want to make it a great one. Researchers at Indiana University found that children did better in school when their parents taught them how to:

1. Be positive about challenges.
   The children who do the best in school are those who approach a new task with a positive attitude. Look for ways to model that behavior at home: “I don’t know how to use this computer program. Shall we figure it out together?”

2. Break down big assignments.
   Reading an entire chapter book may seem overwhelming. But reading one chapter is something your child can do. Teach your child to break down tasks into smaller, achievable steps.

3. Pay attention to instructions. A classroom runs more smoothly when students do what the teacher says. Your child’s score on a state test could be lowered if he doesn’t fill out the answer sheet correctly. So spend time at home learning to follow directions. Cook together and talk about what happens if you don’t follow the recipe exactly.

4. Solve problems on their own. If your child can’t figure out the answer to a math problem, help him think about a way to find the answer. Ask, “Have you worked other problems like this? Does your math book show how to find the right answer?”


Source Issue
Perseverance will help your elementary schooler succeed

School is filled with lots of difficult things, from reading challenging books to learning how to do complicated math problems. Here’s what to say and do when your child says something is too hard:

- **Let your child know** that you believe he can do it.
- **Remind him** of other “hard” things that are now easy for him to do. When he learned to ride a bike, it was hard. But then he figured it out and now it’s easy.
- **Break difficult tasks** into smaller pieces. If reading the whole book seems too hard, try starting with just one or two chapters.
- **Help your child see** the link between effort and success.


Chores can teach important lessons about responsibility

Tom Sawyer figured out a great way to get his chores done. He convinced other people to paint the fence!

But in most families, everyone needs to pitch in and help. While your kids are helping out, they can also learn some important lessons about responsibility.

To make chores effective:

- **Set a time** when everyone can do chores together. Things will get done faster, and you can make it more fun. Some families write chores on slips of paper and then let everyone choose one or two.
- **Be sure your child knows** what a “good job” looks like. Do the chore yourself while he watches. Next time, do it together. Then let him do it. He may not do it perfectly at first, but over time he will improve.
- **Teach your child to do a job** all the way to the end. That means putting all the dishes away or lining the trash can. This skill will carry over to school—a report isn’t finished until it’s neatly written and includes a cover page.
- **Help your child see** how what he does is important to the family. Thank him for taking out the trash so the house smells fresh.


Are you a reading role model for your child?

When you show your child how much you value reading, she’s likely to follow your lead. Are you a reading role model?

Answer yes or no to the questions below to find out:

___1. Do you read something for pleasure every day?
___2. Do you share something that you’ve read with your child each day?
___3. Do you keep a book handy for times you may have to wait?
___4. Do you read food labels at the store and talk about the information with your child?
___5. Do you keep books and magazines around your home—so it’s easy to find something to read?

How well are you doing?

Each yes means you are a role model for helping your child love reading. For each no, try that idea in the quiz.
Involve your child in setting consequences for misbehavior

No matter how carefully you set your rules, some of them will get broken. Your child might play video games before he starts his homework. He may forget to do his chores.

And when your child breaks the rules, there need to be consequences. What would happen if your child helped decide what those consequences should be?

First, you might find that you can avoid disciplining in anger—which is never a good idea. Instead of grounding your child for life (and let’s face it, both you and your child know that’s not going to happen), you might involve him. “James, I’ve really never seen anyone who broke every flower in the garden while running to catch a fly ball. What do you think I should do?”

James will say, “I don’t know.” Kids always start with “I don’t know.” But gradually he’ll figure out that either he names a consequence or you will. So he might offer to clean up the mess and help buy some new flowers by earning extra money.

Another benefit is that James is more likely to follow through. A child who chooses his consequence is less likely to feel it’s unfair and more likely to do what he agreed to do.


Promote your child’s online safety to prevent cyberbullying

Many parents are surprised—and worried—by how much young kids are on the Internet. Elementary schoolers use it for playing games, doing research and even socializing. So it’s no surprise that a Yahoo! survey shows 78% of parents are concerned about kids’ online safety, and the majority work to protect their kids online. But parents need to learn more about cyberbullying. Only 37% say they know what to do about it. Yahoo! recommends that families:

• **Limit what they post.** Remember, even if a site seems “private,” the Internet is a public place. So consider all posts “public.” This means private information should not be posted online. This includes where your child goes to school.

• **Show respect for others.** Live by the Golden Rule: Treat others as you want to be treated. This goes for the real world as well as “cyberspace.” If someone is rude online, Yahoo! suggests using privacy settings to block access to your information and your family.

• **Have self-respect.** Don’t respond to inappropriate messages. Instead, tell a trusted adult. Also report the problem to authorities.

• **Communicate.** Talk about online safety often. Make and review clear and helpful rules. Children need to know they can share any concern with their parents—even something embarrassing.


Q: Last school year, my child was constantly forgetting things. She couldn't remember if she had homework. She would forget to bring home books or supplies she needed to complete assignments. She would even leave her homework at home. How can I help her take responsibility for her assignments this school year?

A: The start of a new school year is the perfect time to establish new routines that will help your daughter have everything she needs to complete her assignments:

• Create a homework box. Fill it with supplies needed for routine homework assignments—pencils, erasers, a ruler, scissors, a glue stick, etc. Tell her she’s responsible for letting you know when supplies are low.

• Give your child a pocket folder just for homework-related papers to keep in her book bag.

• Help your child create and use a daily homework sheet. On it she should write down assignments and the books she needs to bring home to complete them. She should keep this sheet in her homework folder.

• Identify a homework buddy your child can call when she forgets or doesn’t understand an assignment.

• Create a backpack drop spot by your exit door. Have your child put her book bag there with her completed homework in it.

• Praise your child when she completes her homework. But if she forgets it at home, don’t rush it up to the school. Let her experience the consequences of being unprepared.

—Kris Amundson, The Parent Institute
It Matters: The Home-School Team

Explore new ways to be involved at school this year

Parent involvement significantly raises your child's chances of doing well, and it gives you an insider's view of life at school. Many parents enjoy volunteering in classrooms. However, that's not the only place schools need parents' help.

Parents can also support:

- **The library.** You might shelve books, check items in and out, read aloud or help students find materials.
- **The office.** This is one of the busiest places at school so there's usually more than enough work to go around.
- **The music room.** Teachers are usually planning one show or another, so there are plenty of costumes, sets and programs to make.
- **The surroundings.** Parents can spruce up hallways, classrooms, lounges and landscaping.
- **The parent-teacher organization.** Meetings, activities and fund-raisers take lots of planning and work.
- **The teacher.** Check the calendar for special events, including field trips, as early as possible so you'll have the best chance of chaperoning or attending.
- **The cafeteria.** Lunch monitors can observe behavior and help students get what they need during lunch.
- **The student.** Simple at-home tasks, such as reading and helping with homework, make a huge difference!

Instill respect at home to ensure your child is respectful at school

Have you ever marveled at how teachers keep classes under control? They deserve a lot of credit, and so do parents! When parents instill respect at home, it shows at school. To help your child work well with teachers:

- **Practice the basics.** Expect your child to take turns, listen when adults talk, follow instructions, and say please and thank you. Enforce basic class rules at home (such as keeping hands and feet to self), and compliment your child's good behavior, especially in difficult situations.
- **Be a role model.** Children are most respectful when they're shown respect. Picture how you want your child to behave, and then do the adult equivalent. Share, avoid interrupting, speak politely and apologize for mistakes. Show appreciation for rules. (“What if everyone ran stop signs?”) And remember to say positive things about school!

What can you do if the school year doesn’t start off well?

Sometimes new classes don't meet students' expectations. Kids might complain, “I don't like my teacher” or “School is too hard.”

The best approach is to be calm, caring and cooperative. Think of yourself as:

- **An investigator.** Ask questions and read between the lines. If your child says the teacher is “mean,” probe for details. There's a big difference between, “She makes me do all my work” and “She yells at me.”
- **A mediator.** If the problem seems significant, take notes and say something like, “I'm sorry you're going through this. I'll talk with the teacher about it.” Stay neutral. Remember there are always two sides to a story.
- **A partner.** Approach the teacher in a positive and non-critical manner. Work together to understand your child's complaints.
- **A parent.** Occasionally, despite multiple tries with a teacher, a problem can't be solved. In that case, the principal can help. Remember, you and the school share the same goal: your child's academic success. By working together, you can make this school year a great one!

Source: “5 Smart Ways to Handle Teacher Troubles,” Parenting.