Simple tips get your family back into the school “groove”

The start of a fresh school year brings new routines, schedules and priorities. Here are some practical ideas to help you and your family gear up for a great school year:

- **Make a plan** for after-school activities. Schedule adequate time for homework, play, sports, clubs and family time.
- **Scale back screen time.** Set a weekly maximum for time spent watching television, playing electronic games and surfing the Internet. Maintain a firm rule that homework and chores come first.
- **Establish a family reading time.**
- **Reestablish bedtimes** for school nights.
- **Keep a family calendar.** Mark each family member’s activities in a different color.
- **Start a change jar** so you’ll have spare lunch money on hand.
- **Collect important phone** numbers, such as numbers for the school office, after-school program and a neighbor. Update work, doctor and other emergency contact numbers.
- **Have a backup plan.** Find another parent who will exchange school pickup favors—in case you get sick or delayed by work or traffic.
- **Spruce up a study space** for your children. Provide paper, pencils, a dictionary and other needed supplies.
- **Set up a file for school papers.** Place all school notices in it so you don’t misplace them.

Set the Stage for Success by Promoting Respect at School

Respectful behavior is just as important at school as it is at home. Encourage your children to show respect at school. They can do this by:

- **Being courteous.** They should say *please* and *thank you* to their teachers and classmates.
- **Doing what’s expected.** Everyone in school has a job to do. If the teacher doesn’t plan lessons, no one can learn anything. If students don’t do their jobs—homework, listening to the teacher—it makes it more difficult to learn.
- **Raising their hand.** Imagine having 30 students in a class, each of whom wants attention right now. When your children raise their hands and wait for their teachers to call on them, they demonstrate self-control and respect for others.
- **Addressing the teacher by name.** Just saying, “Good morning, Mrs. Jones” is an easy way to show respect.
- **Listening to the teacher’s comments.** Teachers want students to learn. That means they have to point out mistakes. Your children will do much better in school if they can recognize and accept constructive feedback.
Overprotection Hinders Essential School Skills

When children are born, they really are helpless. And it’s the job of parents to protect them in every way they can. Once they reach elementary school, they become more capable and are able to do lots of things for themselves.

Unfortunately, many parents still try to protect their elementary schoolers from everything. And all of that well-intended “protection” actually smothers their children’s budding independence.

Overprotective parenting makes it difficult for children to learn essential skills for success in school and life, such as communication, negotiation, perseverance, responsibility, and decision making.

Five Ways Parents Can Improve Their Children’s Listening Skills

Now that summer is over and school has started, it’s time to help your children get back into the swing of things.

One way to do this is to help your children work on their listening skills. Research shows that the ability to listen is one of the most important skills children need in order to be successful in school.

To help your children strengthen their listening skills:

- **Be a good model.** When your children are telling you something, stop what you’re doing. Look at them and give your full attention. Some parents find it easier to sit down so that their child’s eyes are at their own eye-level.

- **Have family members** take turns telling about their day. Then have each person draw a name and repeat something that happened to the person whose name they drew.

- **Play Simon Says.** This will teach your children to listen very carefully and to follow directions exactly.

- **Practice reflective listening.** When you say something, ask your children to paraphrase what you said. When your children ask a question, repeat their question and then respond.

- **Stop and ask questions** during story time. When you get to an exciting part of the book, ask, “What do you think will happen next?”

Q & A

**Q: School has just begun and homework is already a hassle—for me! First my fourth grader and I argue about when to start. Then my child says, “I did reading homework at school.” Next, it’s, “I don’t understand my math.” What can I do to reduce both my child’s frustration and mine?**

**A:** Homework hassles can affect the entire family. You can easily eliminate them using these four simple steps:

- **Establish a homework time.** Don’t fight about when your child does homework. Kids benefit from a routine. Some children work well right after school. Others do better if they work right before or after dinner. Give your child some choice in the matter—but once your child picks a time, that’s it. Homework is as routine as brushing teeth.

- **Insist that homework time** happen every day. This will solve the problem of “I did that at school.” What if your child truly has nothing to do? Some ideas might be reading ahead or doing extra math problems for practice.

- **Ask questions** when your child doesn’t understand something. For example, instead of explaining the math, ask, “How did you solve that last math problem? Could you do that here, too?”

- **Don’t ever do your child’s work.** One way the teacher sees how much your child is actually learning is by checking homework. If you do the work, your child’s teacher may not know if she needs to reteach something.

To avoid the many pitfalls of overprotective parenting:

- **Don’t do everything** for your children. Let them do things for themselves. Will they make mistakes? Probably. But they will learn from those mistakes.

- **Don’t be so quick** to rescue your children when they forget things. If they leave homework or gym shoes at home, let them face the consequences.

- **Don’t try to negotiate** better grades for your children. If you or any of your children are confused about a grade, let your children talk to their teachers about it first.

- **Don’t call the parent** of a child your child is complaining about in school. Give your children a chance to work it out. If it’s a serious problem, call the school.