

Growing Concerns
A question and answer column with Dr. Marti Erickson
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As school resumes it's time for all of us parents to remember how important we are to our children's success and happiness in school. Whatever your child's experience last year — and whatever your past involvement in your child's learning -- the new school year offers the possibility of a fresh start, for parents and children. So here are five basic steps for making sure that your child's school experience is the best it can be:

- **BE SURE YOUR CHILD IS PHYSICALLY READY FOR LEARNING EACH DAY.** This means having enough sleep on school nights and beginning the morning with a healthful breakfast. And it also means living in a home environment in which family members treat each other with kindness and respect. High conflict at home creates stress for all members, and can seriously undermine a child's readiness to learn.

- **SHOW GENUINE INTEREST IN YOUR CHILD'S SCHOOL EXPERIENCE, EACH AND EVERY DAY.** Ask your child to tell you about the school day. What topics did they discuss, what stories did they read, what fun things did they do at lunch or recess? Ask to see school work, encourage your child to read aloud for you, or have your child teach you something new from science or math class. When you show that school is interesting to you, it will seem more interesting to your child.

- **WORK WITH YOUR CHILD TO ESTABLISH A DAILY HOMEWORK ROUTINE.** Make sure your child has a quiet, comfortable place to work. Figure out with your child a schedule that works, knowing that some students do best if they do their homework immediately after school, while others benefit from some play time before they focus on their assignments. It often helps to set aside family reading time when everyone does quiet reading or homework, without TV or radio to distract. This can be followed by a family snack and a game or favorite TV show.

- **COMMUNICATE REGULARLY WITH YOUR CHILD'S TEACHER.** Don't wait until there's a problem, but let the teacher know that you are invested in your child's learning. Exchange notes or call the teacher occasionally to find out how your child is doing and what, if anything, the teacher needs from you to support and encourage your child's school success. And when you hear good reports from the teacher, tell your child you are proud.
- **VISIT THE SCHOOL.** Attend conferences, open house, student performances and other special events. If possible, volunteer to chaperone a field trip, read to children in your child's classroom, or offer to teach a class about your career or hobby. Whether your children are 6 or 16, showing up at school tells them how much you value their education. And it sends a strong message to your children's teachers that you are their partner in providing the education they deserve.

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