

Creating a Home Environment that Promotes School Success

Most school-age kids are facing reality this week: summer is behind us and the demands of school and homework are upon us! Of course, parents face those demands too and play a crucial role in making sure children are physically and emotionally ready for optimal learning. Here are tips on how to create and maintain a home environment that supports school success from pre-K to college:

I. Underlying issues

- Home environment is one of the most powerful predictors of school success.
- Home environment encompasses: an organized physical environment; a manageable schedule of activities; a relatively calm, positive emotional tone; frequent planning, coaching and monitoring of school progress and child's well-being.

II. What parents can do

- 1) Together, organize your home to keep track of school items and ensure quiet spaces for study
This should include a set place and clear system for tracking homework, school projects and forms that need to be signed and returned to school. It also is good to develop a plan for maintaining this organization over time.
- 2) Create a realistic family schedule, with sleep and sit-down meals as priorities
Prioritize children's extracurricular activities, keep social activities to a minimum during the school week and commit to a regular bedtime and wake-up time.
- 3) Plan in advance to avoid stressful transitions (especially morning send-off and bedtime routines)
Organize backpacks, jackets, etc., the night before to avoid the frantic, "I can't find my..." morning rush. Get up early enough to allow for a calm, quiet breakfast. Keep your own voice calm and quiet at bedtime and in the morning, focusing on positive things in your conversation. Save emotionally intense discussion (with partner or kids) for another time.
- 4) Have a weekly family meeting to review how things are going, what can be improved
Sunday evenings are often a good time for this. Sit down together over a casual meal or snack. Check in to see how everyone is feeling and where things stand with longterm school projects. Look at the calendar for the coming week to make sure everyone is clear on responsibilities (driving to activities, having necessary equipment or uniforms ready, managing homework so activities don't interfere). Have each family member say what he or she needs from others in order to have a good week. Consider having family members take turns leading the meeting, which helps everyone feel involved.