

Back-to-School DAYS

Homework help: Creating a helpful homework atmosphere for your children

Classrooms conducive to learning may go a long way toward helping students understand the subjects they study in school, but the environment kids encounter at home also plays a big role in how well kids do in their studies. A homework-friendly atmosphere at home can facilitate learning, and there are many ways parents can create such an environment for their school-aged children.

- Designate a homework zone in a distraction-free area of your home. Some youngsters are easily distracted, and those distractions come in many forms. A living room where the television is blaring, a noisy kitchen where dinner is being prepared and a room where pets can roam free are not ideal homework areas, as each can take kids' attention away from their assignments. Designate a room in your home that is quiet and well lit so kids can do their homework free from distraction.

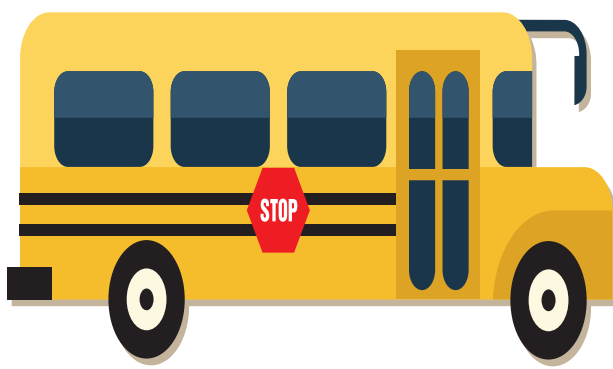
- Choose the right location for the homework room. When choosing an area of your home where kids will do their homework, avoid rooms adjacent to the kitchen and living room, as these rooms tend to be popular and subject to heavy foot traffic. But don't choose a room that's too far away from the hustle and bustle, such as the basement, as that may make kids feel as though they are being punished. In addition, you want to be able to periodically check in on kids to see if they need help and make sure they aren't spending their homework time surfing the Internet or procrastinating.

- Keep the homework room clean. A cluttered homework room may be less appealing to children, and such disorganization also can distract kids from the tasks at hand. Encourage kids to keep their homework rooms clean, and help them clean up if need be. Supplies and other items kids need should be easily accessible in the homework room so kids are not wasting time looking for items they need to complete their homework.

- Let kids rest or relax before starting their homework. Another element of a good homework atmosphere is letting kids unwind between getting home from school and cracking open the books. A break between school and homework time can help kids focus better on their studies. In the interim between arriving home from school and starting on their homework, give kids a healthy snack that can provide an extra jolt of energy they can use once they start their homework.

- Evaluate how the homework zone is working. Once an ample amount of time has passed, examine how kids are performing on their homework assignments. If they are doing well, then there is no reason to break up the current routine. If they are struggling, ask them if there is anything about the current setup they dislike and address those issues accordingly.

Kids rarely look forward to doing their homework. But the right atmosphere can make homework seem like less of a chore and more of an opportunity for kids to apply themselves.



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Sportsmanship an important lesson for young athletes

Children who play sports often walk away with important lessons in teamwork and sportsmanship. Sportsmanship can be defined as playing fair, following the rules of the game, respecting the rulings of referees, and treating opponents with respect. During the heat of competition, it can be challenging to be a good sport, particularly when the goal is to win. However, sportsmanship is something that should be a priority for players, parents and coaches. Here are some of the ways to be fine sportsmen.

- * Abide by the rules of the game. Rules are there for a reason, to promote fairness and to keep play organized and in check. Many sports are a team effort, and the team cannot work effectively if players have their own agendas.



Winning is important, but being a good sportsman is important for athletes of all ages.

- * Practice anger management. Anger can take over when an official makes a questionable call or a teammate makes an error. But arguing with officials or teammates can get in the way of camaraderie and

good performance.

- * Be a team player. Players have different skill levels and abilities. There will always be the players that excel and those who may not be the MVP. Players should not "hog" the ball or make

attempts to exclude others from the game. Enabling everyone to have their chance to shine is a good way to be a good teammate and friend.

- * Offer words of encouragement. Even the star player can have a bad game once in awhile. A true sportsman will not tease others when they are down. Teammates should always be encouraging of one another.

- * React well to a loss. There will be winners and losers in competition. Bursting into tears or jeering at the winning team reflects badly on you and your teammates. It may not feel good to lose, but be able to share in the joy of the other team and congratulate them on their success. Use a loss as a learning experience that shows you what you and your teammates need to work on going forward.

How to help kids transition back to the classroom

The dawn of a new school year is an exciting time. Kids may not want to say goodbye to days spent lounging by the pool, but such disappointment is often tempered by the prospect of returning to school with friends.

For parents, getting kids ready for a new school year is about more than updating their wardrobe or organizing carpools with fellow parents. Reacclimating kids to the routine of school after a relaxing summer is a significant undertaking, and the following are a handful of ways for parents to get a head start as the school year draws closer.

- * Establish a routine over the last few weeks of summer. Summer vacations typically lack the structure of the school year, and that lack of structure can help kids unwind and make the most of the freedom that summer vacation provides. But as summer starts to wind down, parents can begin to reintroduce some structure into their kids' lives to make the transition back to school go more smoothly. Plan morning activities so kids can readjust to waking up early each day. In addition, serve breakfast, lunch and dinner at the same time you typically serve it during the school year so kids' bodies can begin to readjust as well.

- * Take kids along when shopping for school supplies. If you plan to buy your child a new computer or other supplies for the upcoming school year, take him or her along on your shopping trips. Kids who get to choose their supplies might be more excited about returning to school than those youngsters who are given what they need without offering their input.

- * Monitor or assign summer reading. Many students are given summer reading lists to keep their minds

sharp over the summer and prepare them for upcoming coursework. Parents should monitor kids' progress on such reading lists and even discuss the books with their kids when possible. Read the books along with them if you think it will help engage them. If kids were not assigned summer reading lists at the end of the school year, assign your own books, rewarding kids when they finish a new book. Kids who read throughout the summer may be more likely to start the school year off on the right foot than those who don't crack a book all summer.

- * Encourage kids to sign up for extracurricular activities. Many school-aged athletes get a head start on the new school year by trying out for

sports teams. Such tryouts often commence a week or two before a school year is scheduled to begin, and this can help kids ease their way back into the school year. But even nonathletes can begin pursuing extracurricular activities before the first school bell of the year rings. Theater programs may begin auditions or encourage interested youngsters to attend orientation meetings before the dawn of the school year, and such sessions can be a great and pressure-free way for kids to ready themselves for a new school year.

The arrival of a new school year can be both exciting and daunting. But parents can help their youngsters readjust to school in various ways after a relaxing summer.

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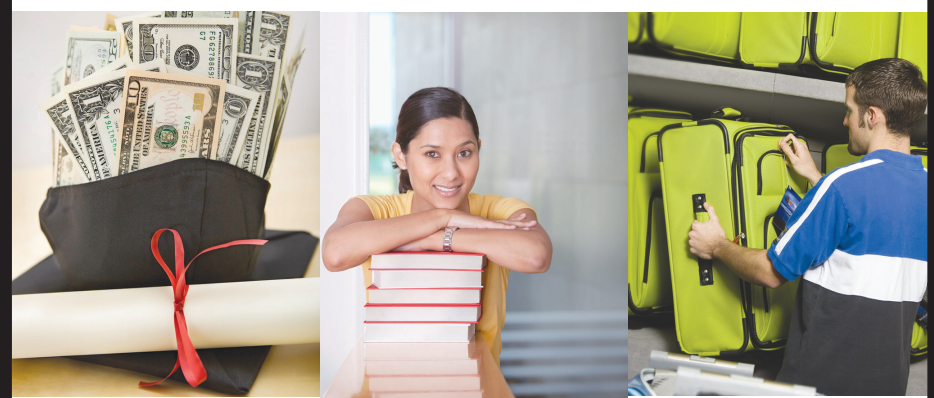
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