

5. Helping Children Learn at Home

At a Glance . . .



It takes more than good teachers and well-funded schools to help children do their best in school. Parents are the most important persons in their children's lives, especially when children are young.

Children want to make their parents proud. Parents can encourage their children to do their best by providing a learning environment at home.

Time



45 minutes

Core Concepts



- Encouragement is specific, focuses on what was done right, and is sincere.
- Parents can help their children to make the most of their study time at home.
- Parents can do things at home that will make it easier for children to study there.

Objective



Participants will list at least two ways in which they will improve the learning environment in their homes for their children.

Materials



- Flip chart and markers or chalkboard and chalk
- Index cards
- Pencils
- "Helping Your Child Make the Most of School" handout (B-5-a)

Lesson Overview



1. Ice Breaker: "Encouragement Cards"
2. Directed Discussion: "What Can Parents Do to Encourage Their Children In School?"
3. Handout: "Helping Your Child Make the Most of School"
4. Homework: "I Will Do ..."

Ice Breaker



Encouragement Cards

Give each participant a sheet of paper. Have them write the names of each class member on the sheet. Ask them to write one positive statement or sincere compliment about each class member next to his or her name. Examples include "She has a nice smile" or "He is very considerate of others." Collect the lists from participants.

After class, make an index card for each class member. Write a class member's name at the top of a card. Underneath write each of the statements from the other class members. At the next class meeting, give class members their own cards. Tell them these are their "encouragement cards".

Facilitator's Script



This exercise uses "directed discussion", the method that was taught in the follow-up training in the fall of 2000. The central question is "What can parents do to encourage their children in school?" If you have only one or two participants, you can do the activity with them, but you probably will not generate as many ideas or have as much discussion as you will with a larger group.

What can you do to encourage your children in school? One way is to think about what encourages **you** to do **your** best. Think of a time when someone said or did something that made you want to do more or try even harder ... a time when someone encouraged you.

Give participants a few minutes to think and write about the situation on a piece of paper. Have them answer these questions:

- Who was there?
- What was the setting?
- What was said?
- Describe what happened.

An example might be when the dentist, in examining your teeth, tells you that you are doing a great job flossing, which leads you to want to floss every day.

Then ask each person, in turn, to tell the group about the situation. Ask participants these questions:

- How did you feel at the time?
- How did you respond?
- What was it about that situation that encouraged you?

We all know what it feels like when someone encourages us. Our children like to feel encouraged as well. What did this exercise tell you about how you might encourage your children to do their best and stay in school?

List ideas that are shared on a flip chart or chalkboard. Ask participants if there are ideas on this list that they haven't tried yet and what they might do differently in order to encourage their children in school. Possible ideas on the value of encouragement include:

- It recognizes what I do right or well.
- It is specific.
- It comes from someone I respect.
- It is real (sincere).
- It is unsolicited (I didn't ask for it).

Parents can be coaches for their children, helping them do their best in school. Giving children encouragement can help them to be excited about learning and to develop positive attitudes about learning.

- **What are some of the positive attitudes that can help children do well in school?**

List responses on the flip chart or chalkboard. Here are a few ideas:

- Self-confidence: I can do it.
- Curiosity: How? Why?
- Self-starting: Let's try it this way.
- Goals: I will finish this tonight.
- Persistence: Keeps on going, even when things are difficult.

- **How can parents help children develop a positive attitude toward learning?**

List their responses on the flip chart or chalkboard. Some ideas might include the following:

- Give them opportunities to feel successful.
- Praise them.
- Answer their questions.
- Show them how to do things.
- Help them break big jobs down into small jobs.
- Give them time to try on their own. Don't do the work for them.
- Help them when asked.
- Talk **with** them rather than **at** them (Say, "What do you think might work?" instead of "Here is how you do this.")
- Help them to practice the skills they have learned through activities and play.

One of the great challenges most parents face is getting their children to do their **homework**. Some parents have rules, such as "Do your homework as soon as you get home from school." Others may not have homework rules.

Some parents have rules for where and when homework should be done in their homes. Others don't. What are some ways parents can help children get their homework done each day?

List their ideas on the flip chart or chalkboard. Some possible responses include:

- Set a regular time for doing homework.
- Have a central place where supplies for schoolwork can be found (scissors, glue, pencils, pens, paper, reference books, etc.).
- Check the child's homework when it is finished.
- Be available to help with homework if needed.
- Go over their assignments and help them to decide what is most important and in what order they should do their work.
- During homework time, turn off the TV or other things that might make it hard to concentrate (however, some children learn best when other things are happening, such as having the radio on).
- "Study" at the same time that your children are studying. For example, parents could read the newspaper or a book, or do homework from classes they are taking.
- Let children take a homework break. A few minutes doing something else can help to clear the mind and make studying easier.
- Let them have a snack if children come home from school hungry, or relax or play outside for a few minutes before they begin their homework. Often children feel "brain dead" after a day of school and need some time to relax or play before they begin doing homework.
- Give children a treat such as going for ice cream, having a family game night, or renting a movie on Friday if homework was completed on time all week.
- Help children to put their homework where they can find it to turn it in the next day at school.

Some parents use punishment -- such as grounding their children -- to try to get their children's grades up after they have brought home a bad report card. However, this may be discouraging to children and not give them a positive attitude about school.

Let's take a look at the handout "Helping Your Child Make the Most of School." It is a good summary of some positive ways parents can help their children improve their grades.

Distribute the handout "Helping Your Child Make the Most of School " (B-5-a). Go over each of the points on the paper.

Then ask participants for other ideas. Ideas might include:

- Talk to the teacher to see if he or she has any suggestions.
- Arrange for tutoring help, if possible.
- Make sure your child does his or her homework every day.
- Notice the things your child does well and comment on them.
- Think about your child's learning style. Are there ways to work with the learning styles to make learning hard subjects easier?
- Make goals reachable. (Try to move from a D to a C in a 6 weeks period -- don't expect to go all the way to an A.)
- Recognize small improvements. ("You got two more correct on your test this week than you did on your last test.")
- Learn from mistakes. Look at problems missed or words misspelled. Try to help your child figure out what is confusing him or her about those problems.

Final Thoughts

Take a look at all the lists we've created in today's class. Identify two things from these lists that you would like to try that you are not doing now.

Give each participant an index card. Have them write "I will do ... " and list the two items they have identified. Have them sign the card and put it on their refrigerator or some other place at home where they will see it and be reminded to do it. Ask them to share with their children what they plan to do and to share with the class next time how their children responded to the ideas.

Helping Your Child Make the Most of School

If you think teachers are the most important persons for helping your child to learn, think again. Parents are the first and most important teachers of their children. Even after children start to school, parents play a big role in how well children adjust to the classroom. Here are some things you can do to help your children make the most of this school year.

- Show that learning is fun and important to you. You can do this by keeping plenty of books around the house, by reading, by looking up words in the dictionary, or looking up topics in the encyclopedia and sharing it with the family. You can watch educational television programs together and discuss what you learned.
- Encourage your child to think for himself or herself. If you give all the answers to the math homework or do the science project for your child, you are teaching him always to depend on others for answers -- not to think for himself.
- Encourage your child. Focus on what your child has done well or focus on good behavior, not on mistakes or bad behavior.
- Don't expect your child's work or behavior to be perfect. Your child is learning and cannot be expected to do something perfectly the first time, or sometimes even the tenth time. Let her know that mistakes are for learning.
- Don't compare your child to other children. Focus on improvements your child has made and the hard work he has done.

Get to know your child's teachers and her friends and their parents. Children whose parents know their friends and whose parents participate in school activities make better grades than those whose parents are not involved.

Source: Popkin, M. H., Youngs, B. B., & Healy, J. M., (1995). *Parent Involvement: Tips for Helping Your Child Succeed in School*. Active Parenting Publishers.