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**South Brunswick Public Schools
Monmouth Junction, NJ**



**Give Your Child the Edge:
Teachers' Top 10
Learning Secrets
That Parents Can Use**

One of a series of Parent Guides from



Parent Guide

Give Your Child the Edge:

Teachers' Top 10 Learning Secrets

Parents Can Use

The Parent Institute

P.O. Box 7474

Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474

1-800-756-5525

www.parent-institute.com

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Introduction

The support and guidance you provide at home can make all the difference in how successful your child is in school. This Parent Guide shares 10 of the very best learning secrets that teachers suggest you can use at home.

1

Establish Routines

Teachers know that students want—and need—routines. And studies show that successful students follow well-established routines at home as well as in school.

The repetition involved in routines helps students learn to organize their lives. It gives them a foundation that will help them cope throughout their lives. You can provide this foundation at home:

- Assign daily chores.
- Schedule regular time for play, clubs and sports.
- Establish a regular mealtime and bedtime.
- Set a regular time and place for your child to study.

Then, make sure she* sticks to the routine. Eventually, she'll follow the routine without even having to think about it.

“Routine is to a child what walls are to a house; it gives boundaries and dimensions to his life. Routine gives a feeling of security.”
—Rudolf Dreikurs

Help Your Child Organize for Learning

2

Children can spend up to a third of their study time looking for misplaced items rather than learning. Make sure that your child is organized and that he has a special place—a desk or table—where he can work. Having a regular place and time to do homework conditions a child to concentrate and get down to work quickly.

Wherever your child studies, establish enough room to spread out papers and books. Put pens, pencils, a dictionary and other needed supplies within reach. If your child works at the kitchen table, have a box where he can keep his supplies. Discourage distractions—don't let him keep anything on the desk or in the box that doesn't help with school assignments.

When he has completed his work for the day, have him straighten up his workspace and get organized for the next day. You'll be helping him develop positive work habits he'll use for the rest of his life.

**Each child is unique, so this publication alternates using masculine and feminine pronouns.*

3

Place a Priority on Homework

There's no such thing as "no homework." During those times when there really is no assignment from school due the next day, your child can review her most difficult subjects or do extra reading.

Many experts agree on the following suggestions for how much homework children of different age levels should do:

- Grades 1-3 10 to 30 minutes per day
- Grades 4-6 30 to 60 minutes per day
- Grades 7-9 50 minutes to 2 hours per day
- Grades 10-12 1½ to 3 hours per day

When to Study

When should your child study? Any time is okay, as long as it's not late at night. The ideal time is when she is usually most alert. For her, this might be after school, after dinner or early in the morning. As you are setting the schedule, allow for plenty of breaks. For example, have your child work for 15 or 20 minutes and then take a five-minute break.

How to Study

There's no one best way to study. Some children need absolute peace and quiet so they can concentrate. Others can work with music playing in the background. Researchers have found that, for some students, soft music can actually help concentration and memory. Music with no words, at about 60 beats per minute, seems to promote the best learning. Let your child experiment to find out what works best for her.

There is one thing on which all researchers agree: *No one can study effectively with the TV on.* Eyes need to focus on what they're reading. Brains need to be paying attention to what's on the page—not what's on the screen. So when it's time for studying, turn off the TV.

Here are a few more things you can do:

- **Protect your child's study time.** That means, in addition to no TV, no phone calls, no visits from friends and no interruptions from you.
- **Work on your own projects** nearby as your child does her homework. You can pay bills, write letters or read a book. You'll send a message to your child that you think homework time is important.
- **Offer advice** if your child needs help, but resist the impulse to do her home work for her. It won't help her learn the material and it won't help her teacher understand where she is having trouble.
- **Challenge your child** to a game of "Beat the Clock" if she dawdles while doing homework. If she's taking an hour to complete an assignment her teacher says should only take 15 minutes, set the timer for 20 minutes. Challenge your child to finish before the timer goes off.

Look at Learning Styles

4

As a parent, you know many of the characteristics that make your child unique. Whether it's a talent for music or a great sense of humor, each child has something that makes him special. What you may not know is that people also learn in different ways. Although all children use many different methods of learning, most children *prefer* one of these three learning styles: visual, auditory or kinesthetic.

Visual learners

Visual learners learn best when they look at graphics. They prefer charts, tables, maps, etc., and they may even make their own graphics when they study. Here are some strategies you can suggest to help your visual learner:

- **Make a map** that has the important information highlighted.
- **Draw pictures** to illustrate math problems.
- **Create flash cards** to study vocabulary words or history facts.

Kinesthetic learners

Kinesthetic learners have difficulty sitting still—when they do, their brains seem to go to sleep. Kinesthetic learners can use these learning tips:

- **Move around** while studying. Rather than sitting, read while standing up.
- **Act out** an important lesson from history.
- **Use the index finger** to focus the eyes while reading a textbook.

Auditory learners

Auditory learners learn mainly through their ears. These approaches can help an auditory learner:

- **Before beginning** a reading assignment, ask your child to talk it out: what does he expect to learn? Then, when he is finished, have him summarize what he just read out loud.
- **Read** important lessons out loud.
- **Make up poems**, rhymes or other verbal memory cues.
- **Practice spelling words** out loud.

Find your child's learning preference

No one style of learning is appropriate for all children. As a parent, you can help your child develop a personal style that is suited to the way he learns best. To start, try this experiment over the course of three days:

Get a dictionary and find 15 words that are new to your child. Make three lists, each with five of the words and their definitions. On the first day, give your child one list and tell him to learn the words with his eyes. He can study them and copy them over as much as he likes. On the second day, give him the second list and tell him to learn the words with his ears. He could record the words and definitions out loud and listen carefully as he plays them back. On the third day, give him the third list and tell him to learn the words with his hands and body. He might want to act them out or move to music in a way that makes him think of each word's meaning.

Review each list using the appropriate style. Then, quiz your child to see which set of words he understands best. Whichever list that is, probably represents his best learning style. Encourage him to use this style when doing homework and studying.

5

Help Your Child Get the Most Out of What She Reads

Does your child have trouble remembering what she reads when she's working on her homework assignments? If so, show her how to use the "SQ3R" formula to help identify—and learn—the important points. The formula stands for a proven five-step process—Survey, Question, Read, Restate and Review—that makes study time more efficient and effective. It's the system that many teachers prefer, because it ensures that the reader is actively involved in what she is reading.

Here's how it works:

- **Survey.** Have your child take a few minutes to get an idea of what the assignment is about before starting. Read section headings. Look at the photos and graphs. Read the words that are written in bold type and the beginning and ending paragraphs.
- **Question.** What are the important questions that the assignment might answer? (Check to see if there are questions provided at the end of the chapter.) Who is the main character? What is the key idea? Where does this story take place?
- **Read.** Now have your child read the assignment. As she reads, have her look for the answers to the questions she has already formulated.
- **Restate.** After each section, ask your child to restate what she just read in her own words. Ask her to tell you about the key ideas that were covered. If she can't do that, have her read the section again.
- **Review.** Finally, have your child review the material to help set it in her mind. Quiz her on what she has read. Have her review it again for several days, until she's sure she knows it.

Taking notes while reading can help, too

For many children, just reading the material isn't enough. Note-taking can help them find and remember the main ideas. These tips can help your child learn to take notes while reading:

- **Write down just the important points.** These are often found in the introduction, headings, words in boldface and the summary.
- **Include key ideas.** Jot down the most important details the author gives to support her arguments.
- **Make flash cards.** As your child reads, have her write a question or key word on the front of each card and then write the answer or definition on the back.

Reading is a skill. The more your child reads, the better she will become at it. Encourage her to read for pleasure—15 to 20 minutes a day is a good goal to set. She can read anything that interests her—the sports section of the newspaper or a magazine or book about a special interest, for example.

Use Strategies That Help With Memorization

6

Whether it's memorizing vocabulary words or remembering important facts for science class, your child needs to learn how to memorize and recall information. Here are some techniques that teachers say work well:

- **Learn from the general to the specific.** It's easier to remember the little things if you've already learned the big things. Teach your child to start by looking at the big picture. For example, if your child is learning about the United States government, have him learn the big picture—The U.S. Government has three branches—then have him fill in the specifics: the legislative, the executive and the judicial.
- **Make it meaningful.** All of us remember things that matter to us. Show your child how to make a connection between what he's studying and something he already knows. The U.S. Government could be compared to a tricycle, with the three wheels as the three branches. The tricycle can't go anywhere if one of the wheels isn't working, just like each government branch has a way to check each of the others.



- **Use mental pictures.** To remember that the capital of Oregon is Salem, have him picture sailors (Sail-em) using oars (Oar-egon). You can also have your child actually draw a picture, for example the parts of a plant. Have him explain his drawing to you. Then have him recall his picture when he has a test on the parts of the plant.



- **Use short lists.** They're easier to memorize than long lists. If he's learning the states and their capitals, it will take less time to memorize five lists of 10 than one list of 50.

- **Start in a different place each time** when memorizing a list. Otherwise, your child will tend to remember the beginning and the end of the list better than the items in the middle.
- **Use mnemonics**—short verbal devices that can be a big help in remembering things. Mnemonics take different forms. Some are rhymes, such as the famous calendar rhyme that begins, "Thirty days hath September, April, June and November" Others are acronyms, such as HOMES—the standard for remembering the names of the five Great Lakes (Huron, Ontario, Michigan, Erie, Superior). Another mnemonic involves creating a sentence in which the first letter of each word is the first letter of one of the things you have to remember. For example, to remember the nine planets in order, your child might memorize this sentence: My Very Earnest Mother Just Served Us Nine Pickles (Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune, Pluto).

The memory skills your child learns now will make it easier for him to remember things in school and throughout life.

7

Help Your Child Develop Good Listening Skills

Although schools generally don't offer formal classes in listening, teachers know that listening skills are important. They know there's a direct link between good listening skills and success in school. After all, studies show that children spend between 50 and 75 percent of their class time listening. That means children who listen well are much more likely to learn well.

Good teachers model—and reinforce—good listening skills in class. As a parent, you can help your child succeed by doing the same thing at home. Perhaps the best way to do that is to have real conversations with your child. Show that you are interested in what he has to say. Turn off the TV and put down the newspaper. When he sees how you pay attention to him, he can learn to pay attention to you and to others.

Here are a few more things you can do to help your child build good listening skills:

- **Model patient listening.** Even adults think faster than they speak. Children can take even longer to find just the right words. Listen as though you have plenty of time.
- **Let him know it's okay to ask for clarification.** Teach your child to say, "I don't understand," when he's not clear on something.
- **Use family conversations** to teach your child to express his ideas and to listen to others'. The family dinner table is a great place to get started. Put everyone's name on a slip of paper in a bowl. Then, choose a topic every one in the family can talk about. Set a time limit of one minute. After each person speaks, draw a name from the bowl. Ask that person to summarize what the person who just spoke said.
- **Ask your child to repeat instructions.** For example, you may say to your child, "I want you to pick up your room. Then I want you to walk the dog, and after that I want you to take out the trash." Ask your child to tell you the three chores you have just assigned him.
- **Play games that build listening skills:**
 - ♦ **Play "Number Stumbler."** Say a few numbers to your child and have him repeat them in order. Start with two numbers and add more as he is ready.
 - ♦ **Play "I'm going on a trip."** You start by saying, "I'm going on a trip and I'm taking an apple." Then your child says, "I'm going on a trip and I'm taking an apple and a banana." Each player repeats the list and adds a new item. To make it more difficult, don't use alphabetical order.
 - ♦ **Play "Repeat the Beat."** You beat out a rhythm while your child listens. Then your child has to beat out the same rhythm. Take turns beating out the rhythm.



Help Your Child Develop Classroom Note-Taking Skills

8

Studying the textbook is never enough. There is no substitute for taking good notes in class. In fact, some teachers test more on what they say during class than on what is in the textbook.

To take good notes, your child needs to be a good observer. There are ways to communicate that information is very important. Whatever a teacher writes on the board while talking is probably something your child should write down, too. She also needs to listen carefully for certain words and phrases: "The main idea," "An important point," "Something to keep in mind." These words probably mean that this information is key and might appear on tests. Sometimes a teacher will say something several times. This is another way to communicate that the information is very important. These are the things your child should write in her notes.

Be sure to tell your child that no one will catch everything a teacher says. If she isn't sure what was said, encourage her to raise her hand and ask. Or she can ask her question after class, or possibly even e-mail the teacher.

Here are some more tips to share with your child:

=	Equal
b/4	Before
Govt.	Government
Pt.	Point
e.g.	For Example
+	And
@	At
#	Number
≠	Does not equal
Imp.	Important
→	Leads to, results in
*	Teacher wrote this on the board
w/	With
w/o	Without

- **Abbreviate common words** (for example, use *w/o* instead of writing *without*.) Figure out abbreviations for the key words in each class. Help your child make a dictionary of the abbreviations she uses. The chart on this page shows some common abbreviations for note-taking.

- **Leave lots of space in the margins.** Your child should take notes on only about two-thirds of the page. When reviewing, she can write questions or key ideas in the space that remains.

If your child is having difficulty taking notes, create sheets of paper with note-taking prompts on them. For example, put "today's topic" at the top of the paper, and then put five to seven bullet points down the side, leaving space to

write after each one. Your child can write a key point her teacher makes next to each bullet. At the bottom of the sheet, write the word "Summary." At the end of the lesson, she can use this space to summarize what the teacher said.

9

Help Your Child Build Thinking Skills

Teachers understand that helping children become effective thinkers is one of their most important jobs. They integrate practice and instruction to develop critical thinking skills throughout the curriculum.

There are many things you can do at home to help your child develop these important thinking skills. For example:

- **Ask questions.** Say things like, "I wonder why that happened." Encourage your children to ask the same kinds of questions.
- **Encourage your child** to find facts that back up her opinions. Explain the difference to her and let her identify both opinions and supporting facts in a newspaper editorial. When next she expresses her own opinion on something, ask her to back it up with some supporting facts.
- **Ask questions about schoolwork.** After your child reads a lesson, ask her to tell you about the most important things she read.
- **Think out loud** so your child can learn how you solve problems. The next time you face a decision, share your thoughts. Talk about each step you consider. Your child will see what it takes to think a problem through.
- **Ask your child to compare** several objects or concepts and come up with ways in which they are alike. Now ask her to think of ways in which they're different. For example, both a raincoat and an umbrella are used when it's raining (a mitten is not), but an umbrella is carried, while the raincoat and mitten are worn.
- **Have your child role-play** your side of a controversial topic in your home (maybe bedtime, smoking or the importance of sticking to morning routines). Ask her questions about the rules. She'll have to argue a side she usually doesn't support, and she may even find that when she thinks about it from your position, she understands better why you have a particular rule. (She may even follow it more.)

Encourage Your Child to Set Goals

10

People who achieve great things in life don't succeed by accident. They know what they want to do, determine what it will take to do it and create a plan that will allow them to succeed. In other words, they set goals.

It's the same when it comes to success in school. Youngsters who set clear, measurable and achievable goals for themselves are more likely to experience success than youngsters who do not.

Here are a few things you can do to help your child set—and meet—his goals:

- **Make sure his goals are specific.** It's not enough to say, "I'd like to do better in math." Instead, say, "I'd like to raise my math average to a 90 this quarter."
- **Reinforce.** Have your child write each goal on a piece of paper and post it where he can see it. This is one of the most important steps in turning a goal from a dream into reality.
- **Help your child** break each goal into a series of smaller, more achievable goals. Show him that goals are reached one step at a time. Don't let him focus only on the final result. Praise him for his progress each step of the way.
- **Point out adult role models** who have achieved similar goals—people who exhibit traits that your child can imitate.
- **Provide support** when the going gets rough. Children who set high goals for themselves are bound to encounter some obstacles. That's when they need a parent to say, "Keep your eyes on your goal. Making the math team is worth it."

For More Information

"Encouraging Good Homework Habits"

by Ted Villaire
National PTA
www.pta.org/parentinvolvement/helpchild/oc_encouraging.asp

"How Can Parents Model Good Listening Skills?"

by Carl Smith
ACCESS ERIC in association with the ERIC Clearinghouse on Information & Technology with funding from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, accessed at KidSource.Com
www.kidsource.com/kidsource/content2/How_Can_Parents_Model.html

"Learning Tip #13: Planning Homework and Reading Routines to Support Student Learning"

by Joyce Melton Pagés, Ed.D.
www.kidbibs.com/learningtips/lt13.htm

"Mnemonics (Memory-Aiding Devices)"

University of Victoria Learning Skills Program
www.coun.uvic.ca/learn/program/hndouts/mnemon.html

"Setting Goals Effectively"

Mind Tools™
www.psychwww.com/mtsite/pggoalef.html

"Smart Goals"

University of Victoria Learning Skills Program
www.Coun.uvic.ca/learn/program/hndouts/smartgoals.html

"taking good notes in lecture"

University of Nevada, Reno
www.unr.edu/acssv/ASC/skills/notes/notes.html

"Teaching Thinking Skills"

by Kathleen Cotton
Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory
www.nwrel.org/scpd/sirs/6/cu11.html

"The Art of Note Taking"

by Mary Konya Weishaar and Joseph R. Boyle
<http://familyeducation.com/article/0,1120,1-9399,00.html>

"Tips for Effective Studying"

Counseling and Student Development Center,
George Mason University
www.gmu.edu/gmu/personal/study.html

"What Are Mnemonics?"

The Wordplay Web Site
www.fun-with-words.com/mnem_explain.html

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Common Discipline Problems of Middle School Children and How to Solve Them

Making a Smooth Transition to Middle School

*For more information about these and other materials for
parents to encourage learning in their children:*

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