

The Parent and Family Engagement Connection

Home & School

"Together We Can Make a Difference"

The first block and spike at a volleyball contest - the sound of the marching band - the roar of the crowd at a football game - all reminders that the new school year has begun. And everyone is hoping for a successful school year, on the playing field and in the classroom. Due to the coronavirus, 2020-21 was memorable for many of the wrong reasons.

When watching a 100 meter dash - "Runners take your mark - Get set - Bang!" We watch a 10-15 second race and immediately know the outcome. But, we do not see the training and preparations by athletes and coaches to make that race successful.

Even now, in advance of the school year, volleyball squads, marching bands, and football teams are practicing once and twice a day. They are preparing not just for the first event but for an entire season of challenges, setbacks, and victories. For weeks coaches and music directors have been creating strategies for optimal performance. Winning begins in the sweaty dog-days of early August.

Guess what? Principals, counselors, and teachers have been planning throughout the summer in advance of your child's return to school. They gleaned insights from 2020-21 and know what areas need improvement. They will be equipped with new tools and winning ideas for your child to be a successful reader and problem solver. Their lesson plans for the first few weeks are already mapped out and will be adjusted as needs arise.

Your child's success begins not with the completion of STARR tests or at the conclusion of the first semester or even the end of the first six weeks. Success begins before your child boards the bus for the first day of school. In advance of the first school bell:

- Be sure to return to the daily routine for the school day;
- Begin to read books or digital news or sports or stories with your child;
- Review the basics of add, subtract, multiply, and divide with the elementary-aged and fractions and percentages with the secondary-aged;
- Check with your school about needed school supplies - don't wait until the day before school begins;
- If your child is attending a new school, arrange, if possible, to tour the school with your child before the school year begins.

Your child's success begins NOW, and they rely upon your steady encouragement. When educators, parents, and students each do their part, 2021-22 can be a highly successful year.

Article submitted and written by Victor "Skip" Forsyth, 2021

Back to School

Twis the night before school started,

When all through the town,

The parents were cheering.

It was a riotous sound!

By eight o'clock, kids were washed

And tucked snuggly to bed...

When memories of homework filled them with
dread!

New pencils, new folders, new notebooks, too!

New teacher, new friend...their anxiety grew!

The parents just giggled when they learned of this
fright

And shouted up loudly...

GO TO BED-IT'S A SCHOOL NIGHT!



COUNTDOWN TO SCHOOL SUCCESS

- ⇒ **Reach out to your kid's teachers.** Attend meet-the teacher night, orientation, or other welcome events, but don't stop there. Make a point of introducing yourself and learning about class activities and expectations for the year. Find out how each teacher prefers to communicate.

Many use e-mail as the main form of contact, but phone calls and conferences (make an appointment first) are usually welcome, too.

- ⇒ **Get in the groove.** Establish healthy at-home routines for school days, such as consistent waking times and getting-ready patterns. Decide on a regular homework time, and create a comfortable, quiet work space. Set bedtimes that allow elementary-age kids to get 10 to 12 hours of sleep; teens should get 8½ to 9½ hours.

- ⇒ **Time things right.** Stay on top of everyone's school, activity, and work schedules with a free online calendar or a smartphone app.

- ⇒ **Pack smart.** Make sure your child's backpack never weighs more than 10 to 20 percent of his body weight; heavy packs can strain developing muscles and joints. Encourage your child to use both straps, and tighten them so the pack hangs close to the body, about two inches above your child's waist.

- ⇒ **Commit to volunteering.** With help from parents like you, your school can offer many more programs and services for your kids. Join your school's PTA and ask about volunteer opportunities in the school community and your children's classrooms. National PTA's "Three for Me" campaign encourages parents to pledge to volunteer at least three hours during the school year.

<https://www.ed.gov/parents/countdown-success>

SOLUTIONS FOR MORNING MADNESS

Have a productive p.m. "Do as much as you can the night before," says Sissy Biggers, a time-management expert in Fairfield, Connecticut. Pack your child's lunch and her backpack, and have her pick out her clothes.

Forgo 15 minutes of sleep. By waking up earlier than the rest of the family, you'll have a sliver of quiet time to soak in the bathtub or savor a cup of coffee. No doubt, you'll feel less rushed and better prepared to handle the day.

Let routines rule. Have your child do the required activities, such as brushing teeth and getting dressed in the same order every morning, so he knows what comes next. Help him create a morning to-do list so he can check off each job without being reminded.

Don't hesitate to delegate. Avoid arguments over who does what by assigning your kids regular morning chores, such as feeding the pet or clearing the table.

Prepare for breakfast. At night, lay out cereal boxes, bowls, and spoons on the table. Make enough pancake batter on Sunday evenings for several days.

Keep the TV off. This may cause grumbling, but watching cartoons or videos definitely distracts from the tasks at hand, says Lawrence Cohen, Ph.D., a child psychologist and author of *Playful Parenting*.

Taken from the August issue of *Parents* magazine.

Mark Your Calendar
December 9-10, 2021
8:30AM-4:00PM

Virtual
Statewide Parental
Involvement Conference

NO travel costs + LOWER registration fee
= MORE staff & parents can attend

www.StatewideParents.com

5 Ways to Bully-Proof Your Kids

Did you know that 25% of public schools report that bullying among kids occurs on a daily or weekly basis? And that 1 in 5 high school students report being bullied in the past year?

The good news is that because bullying has made national headlines, schools and communities (and even celebrities) are taking a strong anti-bullying stance.

You can do your part at home, too. Here are five smart strategies to keep kids from becoming targets and stop bullying that has already started:

- ✓ **Talk about it.** Talk about bullying with your kids and have other family members share their experiences. If one of your kids opens up about being bullied, praise him or her for being brave enough to discuss it and offer unconditional support. Consult with the school to learn its policies and find out how staff and teachers can address the situation.
- ✓ **Remove the bait.** If it's lunch money or gadgets that the school bully is after, you can help neutralize the situation by encouraging your child to pack a lunch or go to school gadget-free.
- ✓ **Buddy up for safety.** Two or more friends standing at their lockers are less likely to be picked on than a child who is all alone. Remind your child to use the buddy system when on the school bus, in the bathroom, or wherever bullies may lurk.
- ✓ **Keep calm and carry on.** If a bully strikes, a kid's best defense may be to remain calm, ignore hurtful remarks, tell the bully to stop, and simply walk away. Bullies thrive on hurting others. A child who isn't easily ruffled has a better chance of staying off a bully's radar.
- ✓ **Don't try to fight the battle yourself.** Sometimes talking to a bully's parents can be constructive, but it's generally best to do so in a setting where a school official, such as a counselor, can mediate.

<http://kidshealth.org>

10 Questions to Ask Your Child About His Day at School

1. Get a sense of your child's life at school by asking questions that elicit more than a one-word response.
2. Tell me about the best part of your day.
3. What was the hardest thing you had to do today?
4. Did any of your classmates do anything funny?
5. Tell me about what you read in class.
6. Who did you play with today? What did you play?
7. Do you think math [or any subject] is too easy or too hard?
8. What's the biggest difference between this year and last year?
9. What rules are different at school than our rules at home? Do you think they're fair?
10. Who did you sit with at lunch?
11. Can you show me something you learned (or did) today?



Praise your Children

and they will BLOSSOM!!

Teaching Your Kid to Make Good Decisions

Blue or red? Vanilla or strawberry? Movie or book? Help your kid be confident in her decisions.

Learning to make their own choices helps children be more independent, responsible, and confident, so decision-making is a good skill to emphasize. While your child won't become decisive overnight, there's plenty you can do to help him work through the "yes, no, maybes."

Put on a Show

If you're trying to figure out what to get Grandpa for his birthday, you might talk about the prices of gifts, Grandpa's favorite hobbies, and which present he'll be able to use the most. Allowing your child to see how you arrive at your conclusions will help him understand the effort that's required and give him a road map to follow when making decisions of his own.

Limit the Options

Hand your daughter a brochure of gorgeous cakes, tell her to pick one for her birthday, and watch how quickly she gets lost in deliberation. "Research shows that if we have too many choices, we get overwhelmed because we don't want to reject too many things. Narrow down the choices to a few and then let your child pick. Kids need experience becoming good decision makers, so practice helps.

Size It Up

Children often get stuck trying to decide something because they think every decision is a huge deal. Helping your child learn the different levels of decisions can ease his worry—and save you both a lot of time. Explain that small decisions, like what snack to take to school, can be made quickly; medium decisions, such as which book to get from the library, require a little more thought; and larger, more important ones, like choosing a sport to participate in, call for more time and consideration.

Play the "What If" Game

Help your child by giving her scenarios that require choices and fundamental problem solving. Asking how she would handle it if two classmates invited her to super-cool birthday parties at the same time on the same day or what she would buy if she won \$10 in the school raffle are interesting ways to engage her critical-thinking skills and sharpen her decision-making abilities.

Allow Poor Decisions

Of course, you know what could happen if your kindergartner takes his entire allowance to school. But if he still insists after you warn him that he could lose the money, let him carry it to school. As long as it isn't a matter of health or safety, it's important for children to make some bad decisions because it helps them learn to consider consequences. When your son comes home crying because he dropped a dollar in the playground at recess, you can bet that he won't fight you about leaving most of his money at home next time.

Taken in part from an article by Tamekja Reece in Parents magazine.



Important things kids miss out on when they're engaging with screens

1. **Reading Books.** The best way to encourage kids to read and nurture a love of books is to read to them and with them, and setting an example by picking up some books you love and getting into them yourself. Make reading an integral part of your child's bedtime routine and be sure your child spends as much time with a book as she does with a screen. If your child is on a screen instead of in a book, that's a big learning loss.
2. **Connecting With Parents and Siblings.** Designating times and places in your home that are screen-free by banning tech devices from the family dinner table and talking to each other about your day and current events, for instance, is an important way to reconnect and really be with one another.
3. **Socializing With Friends.** Technology use means that free/play, fully-engaged social interaction, and non-electronic games like board games, outdoor games, or just tossing a ball around outside, will tend to take a back seat.
4. **Playing Outside.** Physical activity is important for kids' health, and even if your child's school has an excellent physical education program, it's beneficial for kids' mental, emotional, and physical health to go outside and run around and play.

Reasons Why You Should Unplug Your Kids From Technology

By Katherine Lee

One of the biggest challenges facing parents today is how—and how much—to reduce the amount of time their children spend on electronic devices such as cell phones, tablets, video games, TV, and computers. It's an issue not just with older kids, many of whom are practically attached to a cell phone, but with younger children as well. It's not uncommon to see babies and toddlers staring at screens given to them by parents who are trying to find something that'll distract or calm a child, and often, that early tech use transitions right into constant screen time as kids get older. It's such a prominent problem that the AAP (American Academy of Pediatrics) issued new recommendations for kids' media use in November 2016. Here's what they advise:

- Babies younger than 18 months: no screen with the exception of video-chats.
- Kids 18 to 24 months: high-quality programming if parents want to introduce digital media; parents should watch with kids.
- Kids 2 to 5 years: limited screen time to one hour a day of high-quality programs; parents should view with kids.
- Kids 6 and older: consistent limits on screen time; limits on types of media; and making sure screen use does not interfere with kids getting enough exercise and sleep.
- The AAP also recommends that parents establish screen-free times (such as during dinner) and no-screen areas in the home (such as in bedrooms). And in a nod to the dangers of cyberbullying and online safety, the AAP also suggests that parents talk to kids about online safety and being respectful to others online.

Excerpt from the article, Reasons Why You Should Unplug Your Kids From Technology.



HOW TO NURTURE YOUR PARENT-CHILD BOND

Like any relationship, the bond between a parent and child can be made stronger with some habits that can be easily incorporated into your everyday routines.



Eating Together

An impressive body of research has shown a link between regular meals with kids and an increased likelihood of positive developmental benefits such as better

health and eating habits; strong mental, emotional, and social skills; improved behavior; and better academic performance. Even if you can't find time to have dinner together every night, schedule family meals whenever you can, as much as you can. If your weeknights are packed with late hours at the office or extracurricular activities, you can still find solutions, such as having breakfast or snacks together. The key is to make family meals fun, talk about the day, and stay connected with your kids.

Talking About Your Day

You can ask your children questions that will prompt them to answer in detail, like "What was the best part of your day today?" or "What was the funniest thing that happened today?"

Then be sure to talk about your day and share details like what you were most proud of achieving that day or what problem you may have and how you plan to solve it. By sharing something about yourself, you are showing your child that you value her as a person and feel close to her to confide in her, and you strengthen your bond and show her that she is important to you.

Letting the Kids Help



Kids naturally love to be helpful, and when you give them chores and responsibilities, you boost their self-confidence and make them feel valued. Tell them how great a job they're doing, and

how much you appreciate their help. Not only will it bring you closer together, but it'll help your kids grow into confident and kind people who love helping others.

Showing Your Child Love Daily

Doing little things every day to show your child how much you love him can make a big difference in the quality of your relationship with your child. Some examples include tucking a hand-written note in his lunchbox, planning fun weekend activities, or giving him your full attention when he is talking.

Excerpts from an article in *Very Well Family*.



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The Parent and Family Engagement Connection is posted on our website four times a year for parents and educators of Texas. This newsletter is available in Spanish, Vietnamese, German, Tagalog and Korean.



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