

How To Become a Better Student

By Curt Hagedorn

With cutbacks in education budgets increasing, more and more pressure is being put upon students and parents to pick up the slack, primarily through a nationally recognized increase in homework from the primary grades on up. Kids who used to play when they got home from school and head back outdoors after dinner are now hitting the books until late at night, and parents are more and more concerned about their children's ability not only to get the work done, but to excel and prepare themselves for higher grades, college and beyond. Though by any standards, this is a pretty big burden to put on a twelve year old head, there are things you can do to help your child become a better student.

- 1) Start young. Promote skills like reading, problem solving and concentration at an early age. This means more focus on reading to your child, playing games that promote those abilities that will serve them later in their educational careers and, in general, limiting, monitoring and sharing things like television time and video games – both of which can either be enriching parts of their lives or the junk food which destroys their educational health before they even hit the classroom.
- 2) Don't forget their bodies. Everyone knows about the obesity epidemic in the United States, but its toll on kids starts with what they learn from you. Though encouraging and even requiring sports, exercise and other physical activity is difficult, let your kids help you turn over a new leaf – they're naturally energetic, it's their circumstances that turn them into couch potatoes. If you teach your child to balance their physical health and well being with what's required of them, it's a lesson that will benefit them later in life when they'll know that just sitting in front of a computer for hours at a time isn't good for them. And if a child is healthy, happy, and active, his mind is going to be firing on all cylinders as well.
- 3) Once your child is in school, promote good study habits. Even if your child doesn't have homework, try spending some time right after school talking about her or his day, going over what they did and what they learned, and perhaps even asking them to draw pictures or, if they can, write a story or otherwise extend their days learning into the evening at home. This may prepare them a bit for that time when they're going to have to bring work home from school.

- 4) Work with them. Though it may be difficult to find the time, remember that what help your child with now may help them to help you later in terms of both achievement and behavior, so start early in letting them know you're there to go over their homework with them, to help explain things and find answers that they perhaps cannot find and in general extend the role of a teacher and mentor into the evening hours. This doesn't mean doing things for them, but it means encouraging and challenging them, without criticism, to do their best and teaching them that that matters to you but, most importantly to them.

- 5) Provide structure. Set aside both regular time and a place to learn in your home. Make it clear that homework is a priority and though they may need to unwind a bit when they get home, it's easier to hit the books soon after school is over while the information is still fresh in their minds. Go over their assignments so you know what they have to complete and can help them manage their time, and even if they don't require your constant help, pop in occasionally to make sure that internet research hasn't turned into a Doom or instant messaging session.

- 6) Be involved in school. The most important message you can communicate to both your child and their school is that you are there and you care. Keep lines of communications open with teachers and administrators and try to help and be involved – don't just descend when there are problems. The more you know the better your child's experience will be and the better student they'll become.