



Speaking for Children

What's best for our youngest children is best for everyone!

School success begins at home

When parents support learning *at home*, their children do better in school. How can you support your child's preschool or kindergarten success at home? To celebrate the new school year, First 5 Sonoma County offers the following suggestions:

Routines provide the environment for learning

There are many things parents can do to help their children do well in school, but the most important first step is to set up routines, daily activities that you and your child do at about the same time every day. Routines help children stay focused and organized.

- Morning routines are essential in getting your child off to a good start. Have a regular time for your child to wake up. Be sure to serve a healthy breakfast every day. It provides fuel for the body and mind. Don't forget tooth brushing!
- Afternoon routines may need to be juggled around your family's busy schedule, but just a few minutes together help you and your child reconnect, especially after a long day apart. Even ten minutes of your undivided attention lets your child know you care and are interested in his learning.
- Include a time to talk with your child about her school day. It doesn't matter where these conversations take place—at the dinner table or in the car. Rather than asking, "How was school?" try something different like "Tell me two good things that happened at preschool today" or "What story did your teacher read today?"
- To ensure that children are well-rested and

ready for preschool each day, they must have a specific bedtime. Bedtime routines can include preparing their backpack and school supplies, putting their clothes out, or packing their lunch or snack for the following day. And, of course, tooth brushing!



- Finally, make reading part of your routine every single day, whether in the afternoon or evening or right before bed. Over and over, studies indicate that children who read and are read to on a regular basis perform better in school.

Your support and guidance are essential

Succeeding in school and maintaining friendships are difficult for many youngsters. As parents, we can help by providing ongoing support and guidance. Here are some ways to help.

- Motivate your child. Ask your children to help with jobs that they can do. Praise them for their effort. Help your child understand and feel the satisfaction of having worked hard and accomplished a project or task.
- Talk to your children about their hopes and dreams and about your life experiences. Tell them how education can help them accomplish their dreams. Help them understand how education plays a vital part in everything they do in life.
- Make reading a habit in your household. By modeling

good reading habits yourself, you encourage your child to enjoy and learn from reading. Talk to your child about what you are reading, why you are reading it, and why you like it.

- If you can't read yourself, you can still help your child get ready to learn to read by looking at books together and talking about the pictures. Use the pictures to tell your child about your own childhood.
- Provide your child with learning opportunities at home. This may include something as simple as counting beans or measuring flour as they help you with cooking.
- Attend community events that provide your child with new experiences and information. For example, visit a museum or go to an event at the local library.

You are your child's best advocate

One of the main roles we play in our children's education is that of advocate. We know them best, we love them the most, and we spend the most time with them. That means that we are in the best position to make sure that they are learning and making good progress in school. Here are some ways parents can be sure their children get the most out of school.

- Check your child's backpack daily and read everything the teacher sends home. By being informed, you will be in a better position to ask for help if your child needs it. You'll also be able to support the learning that is going on in the classroom.
- Know your child's academic strengths and weaknesses. For example, if your child learns better with visual aids—pictures or models, for example—let the teacher know so that she or he can support this learning style.
- When your child goes to kindergarten, find out what services and support systems are in place at school, such as the National School Lunch Program or English learner support. If you feel that your children might benefit from any of these programs, let the teacher know. Follow through, make sure your child is enrolled, and check in with your child and the teacher so you know if the program is working.

By becoming a "partner in your children's education," you can make a big difference in your children's school success.

Your help is needed at school

Parent participation *at school* is also essential to a school's functioning well and the success all children experience there. Parents can contribute at school and in the classroom in many ways. No matter what your background is, you can be involved.

Ideas for parent participation

- **Attend special school events**, including class field trips, parent meetings, open houses, or student performances. These are great opportunities for parents who may not feel comfortable in a school setting.
- **Volunteer in the classroom.** Once a week, once a month, or once a year—help is always welcome in your child's classroom.
- **Contribute to the classroom in other ways.** If you can't volunteer during school hours or you don't feel comfortable being a class volunteer, let the teacher know about your special talents or hobbies—gardening, sewing, or woodwork. Teachers are always looking for people to make things that can be used for classroom activities.
- **Volunteer in the office, school library, or copy center.** If you are bilingual, your help is especially valuable.
- **Contribute to class parties or other special events.** Respond to the call for fruit or yogurt or volunteer to set up, serve, or clean up.
- **Join the parent group at your child's preschool or kindergarten.** Through these organizations, you can make a big difference in the school environment and student learning.

Parent involvement adds to the school culture and helps to create a connection between school and home. Children tend to feel safer and more comfortable in a familiar environment. When parents are at school, it helps build students' confidence and contributes to their overall ability to learn, especially among those children who see their own parents actively involved.

Source: Excerpts from articles written by Reina Salgado, Parent Education Specialist, at Sonoma County Office of Education.

About First 5 Sonoma County

First 5 Sonoma County funds children's health insurance and programs that improve childcare quality, help children succeed in school, and help parents provide safe and nurturing environments for their children. For more information on *First 5 Sonoma County* and its programs, please call 565-6626 or visit www.first5sonomacounty.org