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# things teachers want you to know

## Read to your children

About four in 10 children experience literacy problems, according to the National Research Council in Washington, D.C. Such difficulties, however, can be prevented. "A key factor associated with success in school is whether a child has been read aloud to at home," says Kathy G. Short, Ph.D., professor of education at the University of Arizona at Tucson. Don't stop reading to your child just because she's old enough to read to herself. "Choose a book you enjoyed when you were your child's age," suggests Racquel Cassidy, a second-grade teacher at Santa Rita Elementary School, in Los Altos, Calif. Other materials to read together include magazine articles and sports-page statistics.

## Share family news with your child's teacher

"To educate a child, a teacher needs to know what's going on at home," says Kris Sieckert, Ed.S., a school psychologist in the Oconomowoc, Wis., public-school system. Finding out that a child's pet has died or that his grandmother is ill can help a teacher understand why he's suddenly short-tempered or unable to focus. "Without a heads-up, a teacher might discipline a child rather than support him," says Sieckert. As a follow-up measure, the teacher might have the child meet with a school counselor to talk about his feelings.

Keep in mind that it's important to share your news without disrupting the school-day routine. Because drop-off and pick-up periods can be hectic, teachers appreciate parents who ask when a good time would be for them to talk.

## Give your children chores to do at home

Responsibilities help kids develop a feeling of competence and a positive attitude about being helpful that benefit the classroom, says



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Robert Brooks, Ph.D., an assistant clinical professor of psychology at Harvard Medical School who researched this topic for his book, *Raising Resilient Children*, co-authored by Sam Goldstein (Contemporary Books, 2001). Kids who have successfully completed age-appropriate chores at home come to class ready to pitch in—a boon in this era of large class sizes. “These kids take responsibility in the classroom because they feel good about themselves and their capabilities,” says Lenore Kaufman, a kindergarten teacher at Rutgers Preparatory School, in Somerset, N.J. Just don’t call them chores, says Brooks. Ask your child to help you with a project instead.

## Share organizing ideas with your child

“When the backpack is a mess, it’s no wonder that homework is lost, books are misplaced, and projects are never completed,” says Douglas Reeves, Ph.D., author of *The Twenty Minute Learning Connection* (Simon and Schuster, 2001). Reeves talked with hundreds of teachers and heard many pleas for parents to help get their kids organized. Lots of kids need to be reminded to log the date of a big test on the calendar and to begin studying sooner than the night before, for instance. But once you share organizing ideas with your child, “Don’t do for him what he is capable of doing for himself,” says Kaufman. You might need to remind your child to pack away his books and papers after he finishes his homework assignments, but let him do it on his own.

## Follow up on teachers’ recommendations

When a child starts slipping academically, teachers often meet with parents to discuss the need for additional work and remedial help. The problem is many parents don’t make sure the extra work actually gets done, according to a 1999 study by Public Agenda, a New York City-based public-policy research group. That’s unfortunate because “Kids need to get the message that an education is worth working for,” says Diana B. Herrera, who teaches gifted students at Henry B. Gonzalez Elementary School, in San Antonio.

To help your child make the best possible comeback, the National Education Association, in Washington, D.C., suggests the following: Review the remedial plan with your child’s teacher to make sure you understand it; discuss the plan with your child and decide how he or she will get the work done; check your child’s work; and keep the teacher informed about how the remedial work is going. Finally, praise your child if he or she shows progress. If your child doesn’t make an effort to improve, establish consequences, such as limited TV time.



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