

How Parents can Help their Children to be Healthy and Ready to Learn

A child's best chance to be successful at school starts the night before at home. Children need to be at their best health, alert, and ready to take on the busy school day each and every morning. What parents establish as a routine for their children each night and morning before school can play a critical role in their learning.

Importance of Sleep

Children's minds and bodies still need the same amount of sleep they did 20 years ago, when there were fewer distractions. Today, there is more going on to interfere with that sleep, including caffeine drinks, computers, TV's, and phones in kid's rooms, video games, and larger study loads.

Sleep has been called "food for the brain". The brain needs it in the right amount to process what was learned that day and to prepare for learning and to be alert the following day. A lack of sleep in children has been linked to inattentiveness, aggressive behavior, eating too much junk food, illness, and poor grades. A study by the National Institute of Mental Health showed that reducing the amount of sleep kids get at night has a direct impact on their performance at school the next day. Inadequate sleep can also result in depression, worsening acne, weight gain, and more car crashes for teen drivers. The National Sleep Foundation suggests establishing bedtime routines for children that are the same each night and are conducted in a quiet, peaceful setting.

Morning Routine

A good morning routine also starts the night before. Nighttime should include the chore of getting clothes ready for school the next day. Lay out everything needed to get dressed the next morning including shoes and socks. Don't save homework for the morning. Have everything ready so mornings can be easy and not so stressful.

A good nutritious breakfast, one that does not include a lot of sugar, is very important to a successful morning. Refined carbohydrates, like sugar, spike the blood sugar at first, but then it bottoms out pretty quickly. When kid's blood sugar is low, they often appear tired, lethargic, and can not learn as well. Giving your child whole grains along with a little protein for breakfast will help them to maintain a steady blood sugar, taking them through the morning, and helping them to think and learn.

If you pack your child's lunch, leave the junk food out. You want to consider packing a lunch that will get them through the rest of the school day without loading them up on sugar. A good old fashioned PB & J sandwich on whole wheat bread, sandwiches with turkey or ham, will give you a powerful protein/carbohydrate combination. String cheese, fruit, and cut up vegetables are great choices and pack up easily. Dessert is alright now and then, but maybe just a cookie. As far as drinks go, milk at meals and water in between is best. Remember, the brain is 70% water and needs constant hydration to work effectively.

One last suggestion for parents, if possible, is to set their schedules so kids won't have to rush in the morning. You want your child to enter school at ease, and not stressed out already.