Believe it or not, it is BACK TO SCHOOL time again. Summer is quickly fleeting away, and the stores are stocked with school supplies and such! If your children are like mine, they are definitely NOT ready to even think about school. But as parents, it is never too early to begin planning and preparing ourselves for a successful school year. Hope you find some tips and ideas in this newsletter to help you along the way.

Here’s to family!

Christy Strickland

Christy S. Strickland
Extension Agent
Family and Consumer Sciences

“In order to succeed, your desire for success should be greater than your fear of failure.”

Actor Bill Cosby

ENCOURAGING SUCCESS IN SCHOOL

How do we as parents help our children to be successful? What do successful students look like? The description of a successful student includes phrases like: motivated learners, accepting responsibility for their own education, paying attention and concentrating, and understanding ideas presented in the classroom and textbooks. How can parents create an environment that accomplishes this awesome task but at the same time not create excessive pressure for the student or the parent? Here are a few ideas:

- Encourage your children to ask questions about the world around them.
- When reading to or with young children, ask them to imagine what will happen in the story.
- Actively listen to your children's conversations, responding seriously and nonjudgmental to the questions they raise.
- When your children express feelings, ask why they feel that way.
- Suggest that your children locate information to support their opinions.
- Use entertainment - a TV program or a movie - as the basis for family discussions.
Use daily activities as occasions for learning. For example, instead of just sending a child to the store with a simple list of items to purchase, talk with the child first about how much items may cost, what the total cost might be, and estimate how much change should be received.

Reward your children for creative activity.

Ask your children what questions their teachers are raising in class. For example, a history class might be discussing how American westward expansion began.

When children are involved in talk about the "why" and the "how" of things, they are more likely to become active thinkers.

Encourage children to listen:

- Again, encourage children to ask questions to clarify understanding. After a discussion, ask children questions about the topic to reinforce learning.
- Teach them to focus on the main ideas presented.
- Urge them to concentrate both on the words and the ideas and feelings expressed by the speaker.

Teach children to follow directions:

- When showing children new skills, demonstrate each step and allow them to participate until they can perform the task alone.
- Give directions one at a time to avoid confusion.
- Motivate children.
- Serve as a role model to show learning is an ongoing and enjoyable experience.
- Show interest in what your children are learning.
- Offer constant encouragement so your children can learn effectively.
- Acknowledge and celebrate your children's efforts to learn.

PARENTS HAVE HOMEWORK, TOO

"No gift is too costly (or too hard to obtain) for a parent to give his child."

No parent would choose to give his or her child an inferior gift or a gift that would be harmful in any way. The gift of a good education is a most valuable one. What can parents do to contribute their part to this gift? The teachers (school) have one very important part. The child has a very important part. Parents have an equally important part. Without the parents' part, the education will not measure up.

In short, parents have homework. The home is where it all begins. Parents are the head of the home. The head of the home provides, teaches, reinforces, and enforces. If the head of the home does not fulfill their obligations, no other agency can fill in the gap. The child carries with him/her everything that is absorbed in the home. First of all, parents must supply the basic needs of the infant, including food, shelter, clothing, love, and security. By the time the child has reached school age, parents have done lots and lots of "homework." However, the assignment is just beginning.

When the child begins school, the parents' role takes on a new dimension, that of enhancing the "formal education." That is, the education that is provided by the school. The parents' role in the education of their child has many dimensions. The parents' "homework" carries with it many responsibilities. These responsibilities include keeping the proper attitude toward education and school, supporting/helping the child, setting healthy priorities, consistency in discipline, rewards and consequences, open communication, helping with work missed during sickness, being active in school matters, and controlling your child's school attendance.

Attitude - It begins with attitude. If you have a positive attitude toward school in general, your child will also have a positive attitude. If you have concerns about the school or the teacher, be very careful how you voice these concerns in front of your child. Your child will pick up on your attitude, adopt it as his or her own, and take it to school. Negative and apathetic attitudes are at the root of a large portion of discipline problems at school.

Support - Your child cannot go it alone. When he/she has a particular assignment that may require special help or supplies, you are the one he/she turns to for help. Be there with all the support and help possible. There may come a time when your child will need extra help on schoolwork. If you cannot
provide this help, speak to your child's teacher about it. There may be some remedial materials or the teacher may be able to help you and your child work through the problem. You may consider outside help, such as a tutor. Arranging the schedule in the home to accommodate quality "homework" time/place is one aspect of support. Your child will need to feel secure in the fact that you will be there helping.

**Priorities** - In order for education to come out on top, it must be given top priority. This must be a true commitment in light of the many interesting and beneficial activities that are available for the youngsters. These include sports, scouts, music/dance lessons, and other activities. Too many activities will bring down the educational level of your child. This should be closely monitored during the school year.

**Consistency** - Whatever your methods of discipline, consequences, and household management, consistency is the key. When you promise a consequence, follow through. Be firm. Try not to be influenced by your child's persuasive tactics. Children consistently test authority. Be prepared to follow through each time. Results, while not always immediate, will be forthcoming. Children are just that - children. Although they are learning to accept some responsibility, they are not yet adults and should not be treated as such. This is their time in life to learn things like consistency and priorities, and it is your "homework" to instill these qualities in your children. Children need to know that their poor choices create consequences.

**Rewards and consequences** - Worthwhile rewards may help reinforce responsible actions. However, rewards do not have to be in the form of costly material gifts. Rewards may be in the form of time spent together, a special word of praise, or a chance to skip a chore. Just let your child know how proud you are of him/her. Consequences should fit the misbehavior as much as possible and should be done immediately when possible. Try not to become emotional when you discipline your child and be sure to let the incident go. "Forgive and forget." If you remain hostile toward your child after disciplining him/her, you are distancing yourself from your child. Make sure you are still "available" to your child.

**Communication with your child** - Talk with your child. Listen to your child. Make casual comments about what he/she is saying to show that you are listening. Do not "put words" in his/her mouth about what went on in class. If your child has an unpleasant story to tell you, do not make it worse for him/her by becoming visibly upset. This will only upset the child even more. Let your child tell the story in his/her own way, in his/her own time. If you resort to an "interrogation," you will likely get the story from a biased point of view. If the problem persists, call or write the teacher.

**Communication with your child's teacher** - Keep the lines of communication open. Check your child's agenda daily. This is the teacher's best method of communicating with you. Always go to the teacher with any problems before going to the principal. You and the teacher are on the same side - the side of your child. The teacher wants your child to succeed. Make a friend of the teacher.

**Missed work** - If your child is absent due to an illness, he/she may need extra attention from you in order to get caught up on assignments missed. Your child most likely has a given number of days to get the work done and turned in. If the illness is prolonged, you may call the school for assignments, but be sure to make every effort to see that the work is actually done. This extra effort on the part of your child's teachers is very time consuming, and the time is taken from their planning or from their classes. This practice is one that is encouraged if you plan to see that your child does the work. If you have an occasion in which your child cannot complete a daily assignment because of a family emergency, write a note to the teacher asking for a one-day extension. It is likely that your child will have consequences at school for missing work. "Homework" for the parents is to instill the importance of school assignments in your children.

**Be involved** - Show your child that you want to be involved in his/her school. Whenever you get notification of a school meeting or a school need, show that you are interested. Participate in various activities at school. If there is a school event, show up with your child.
Child's attendance - You, as the parent, have the power to control your child's attendance, including being on time. Poor attendance and tardiness directly affect a child's school success in numerous ways, emotionally as well as scholastically. Please understand that signing out is the same as being absent. Your child will miss vital instruction. Instruction continues up until dismissal. When you sign your child out unnecessarily, you are telling your child that school doesn't matter. Restrict signouts to sickness of the child or a true family emergency. "Homework" for you as the parent is to keep your child in school.

Yes, parents have "homework." Your homework continues as long as you are responsible for your child. Without your part, your child's school experience will not be all that it can be. Together, let's prepare the "Gift" of education for your child!

Written by Sybil Humphries, a South Carolina middle school teacher (used with permission).

10 Tips for Good Study Skills

One of the main things that kids struggle with during their school years are proper study habits. Developing a habit can take a couple of weeks, so be consistent and implement these 10 tips to help them study better.

1. A consistent time and place is best.
   Establish a "study place" and a regular time to study each day. The place just needs to be available and easily accessed.

2. Studying should begin immediately when your children sit down. Don't let them get involved in other distractions, like playing on the computer or answering E-mails or instant messages. They can reward themselves when they get their studying done!

3. Help your children plan what they need to accomplish. At the beginning of the study session, make a to-do list to help them stay on task.

4. Large tasks should be broken down into smaller ones. Using the to-do list, break the larger assignments into workable parts. Long-term projects should be divided over several days.

5. Keep a "log book" or record of needs to be accomplished in each study section. Your child can look over it later and be impressed with themself!

6. Keep studying supplies in a handy place, like in a shoe box. Have your children organize them, so they can grab what they want quickly, without having to rummage around.

7. Be aware of when your children start to daydream, and stop them right away. Help them concentrate for blocks of time, but be sure to allow them regular breaks to refresh their brain. Have them try studying for 45 minutes then resting for 15 minutes.

8. Getting enough sleep is important for effective studying and remembering. Be sure your child has an established bedtime at a reasonable time each night. Avoid caffeine a few hours before bedtime so sleep is uninterrupted.

9. Eating well gives your body and brain the fuel it needs. Children should eat three good meals a day and should not skip breakfast. Try to have them eat a balanced diet of good healthy foods and not too much junk.

10. Exercise will increase memory and study stamina as well as making you feel generally more confident. Older children should aim for three to four exercise sessions a week, doing 20 or more minutes in each workout session. Always consult your child's physician before beginning any exercise program.

As children grow into young adults, it's important that we, as parents, provide the skills and habits they will need for life. Establishing good study habits now will set them up for success in the future!

Dealing with Morning Madness

Some of you may be entering the world of school for the first time this year. It may be preschool or public school, but some of the morning issues are still the same . . . Chaos! Here are some tips that may help you organize your mornings:

- Lay out clothes the night before to avoid the mad rush of trying to find lost shoes or books in the mornings.
- Have a cubby for your children to gather all of their items for school each day. Put it as close to the door as possible so things will be visible and
not forgotten. This is a great place for lunch money, gloves, books, etc.

Start putting your children to bed earlier a few weeks before school starts. They need some time to get their body adjusted to the routine, and when school starts, they will be easier to deal with in the mornings when there is very little time to spare!

Getting up 15 minutes earlier than usual will go a long way in easing the morning madness that is sure to come. This extra time will allow you to arrive at work on time and the morning to be more relaxed.

Take time for breakfast to start the day off right for everyone in your family. Hungry children cannot learn! Start the night before doing as much as possible to make the morning easier.

If your children take their lunch to school, do as much prep as possible the night before, and then use the time you are in the kitchen fixing breakfast to also finish the lunch box. Be sure to put it in the cubby next to the door.

If your youngsters are especially slow movers in the mornings, try a “Rise and Shine Morning Chart.” Make a list of all the things expected in the mornings, such as wash face, feed pets, and eat breakfast. Use stickers or checks to help them see what is left to do. They may be motivated by the process, and before they know it, the jobs are done and hopefully in record time! Don’t forget to reward them with a small treat for a full week of successful mornings.

FOR SCHOOL SUCCESS, DON'T Coddle Your Kids

Parents want their children to succeed in school. However, sometimes their best intentions are misguided. Attempts to provide children with a wonderful life can, in fact, increase the stress of the entire family.

"Just getting children to school well rested and well fed can be challenging," says Fran Santoro Hamilton, author of Hands-On English. "One of parents' most common mistakes," Hamilton says, "is to want to make everything easy for their children. It's painful for parents to see their children struggle.

If children never do anything difficult, however, they never learn that they can successfully meet a challenge."

Here are a few of Hamilton's tips for ways parents can promote their children's success in school:

- Make school attendance a family priority. Try to schedule doctors' appointments and family vacations when school is not in session. Have your children arrive at school in time to organize for the day.
- Show your children that you consider school to be important. Attend parent meetings and conferences. Talk with your children about school. Don't overemphasize grades.
- Either rule out or treat physical difficulties that may impede learning.
- Encourage healthy sleep patterns. Remember, adolescents actually require more sleep than younger children.
- Purchase school supplies before school opens. Try to purchase the exact items teachers specify. Do not send your children to school with supplies that are not on the list.
- Make dinner a family activity, complete with conversation on a wide range of topics.
- Don't allow TV or video games in the morning before school. Limit total time for these activities to 10 hours per week.
- Don't give your children everything they want. Doing so will teach them that desires can be satisfied without work.
- Be sure your children have household chores to complete without reminders.
- Make homework your children's responsibility. This lets your children know that you recognize them as capable people.
- Have realistic expectations for your children. If their abilities are slightly above average, do not expect them to be at the top of their class.
- Recognize that your children's teachers are striving for the academic, social, and emotional development of many children besides yours.
- Recognize that there will be times when your children will be frustrated by a difficult task. Resist the temptation to solve the problem yourself. Your children will learn and grow from this experience and will emerge with confidence to face the next challenge.
A successful school year depends on the cooperative efforts of parents and teachers and, of course, on the students themselves. Each member of the team must fulfill his or her own responsibilities and allow the other members to fulfill theirs.

Hamilton's advice extends well beyond these basics. More of her suggestions and information about her book, which provides tips for efficient study as well as quick access to English fundamentals, are available at: http://www.GrammarAndMore.com.

Bits and Pieces

Color Me Healthy Training for Child Care Providers: Saturday, September 16, 9 a.m. - 12 noon -- Child care provider training developed to reach children ages 4 and 5. Training will be conducted by the Robeson County Center of the North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service located in the O. P. Owens Agriculture Center, Highway 72 West, Lumberton. Call 671-3276 to register.

Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Support Group: Wednesday, September 20, 10 a.m. -- Are you a Grandparent Raising Your Grandchild? Are you looking for a place to get support, encouragement, resources, or to interact with others who are experiencing the same issues? Do you know a grandparent raising their grandchildren? Then join us for a meeting. The kick-off meeting for the 2006-2007 year will be held at the O. P. Owens Agriculture Center, Highway 72 West, Lumberton. There will be a light lunch following the meeting for those who attend. The support group will continue meeting on a monthly basis on the 3rd Wednesday of each month at the same location. Please consider participating, offering your support, and most of all, sharing with others who are able to understand the issues you may be facing. For more information, please contact me at the Cooperative Extension Service at 671-3276.

Fire Safety Training for Child Care Providers: Saturday, October 7, 9 a.m. - 12 noon -- Get ready for Fire Safety Month! This training will offer fun and interactive ideas to help teach preschoolers about fire safety. Come ready to learn some new ideas in the ever-popular “Make and Take” session. Training will be conducted by the Robeson County Center of the North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service located in the O. P. Owens Agriculture Center, Highway 72 West, Lumberton. Call 671-3276 to register.

Individuals with disabilities and/or special needs interested in these meetings should call 671-3276 so proper arrangements can be made.

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http://robeson.ces.ncsu.edu