



Help your kids thrive at school: practical parenting strategies and routines

There's no shortage of problems going to school can bring up, whether it's challenging behaviours, friendship dramas, poor grades or sore tummies in the morning.

Every parent and carer wants their child to enjoy school, reach their potential and make friends, but it's not always as easy as it sounds.

While school is naturally full of ups and downs, as a parent or carer you can help make it an overall positive experience. Whether your child is going back to school or starting school for the first time, these simple and practical strategies can help them succeed in the classroom and beyond.

Create before and after school routines to reduce stress and build confidence

Night-time routines, screen time limits and morning rituals often go out the window during school holidays. And that's okay – everyone needs a break from time to time. While relaxing the rules is perfectly understandable during the holidays, it's a good idea to try and get back into your family's regular routines a few days before school starts again.

Research shows that children thrive with routines¹. Not only do routines provide a foundation of security and stability, but they also foster social and emotional wellbeing, academic skills and better mental and physical health.

Before school routines for kids might include waking up at a regular time, eating breakfast, getting dressed, packing their school bag and playing or relaxing. By creating a morning routine chart, getting children involved in making decisions and giving specific praise along the way, you'll be helping to build their independence and confidence. Kids are also more likely to stick to routines when they have a say in them, so try developing the routine together.

For younger kids, morning routines might include:

- Waking up to the alarm in the morning and turning it off
- Choosing and/or helping to make their breakfast ("Would you like toast or cereal this morning? Well done spreading the butter/pouring the milk/cutting the banana")
- Choosing items and/or helping to pack their lunchbox ("What's the first thing we should put in your lunchbox today? You did it! You got all the lids on")
- Getting dressed and putting some clothes on by themselves ("Let's get out everything you need and put it on the bed. Wow! You put everything on all by yourself")
- Helping to pack their school bag ("Terrific! You fit everything in your bag and zipped it up too")

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For older kids, morning routines might include:

- Waking up to the alarm – and checking it's set before going to bed ("It's great you remembered/ keep remembering to set your alarm")
- Making their own breakfast ("Look at you go, you're really growing up")
- Making and packing their own lunch (and coming up with lunchbox ideas)
- Getting dressed, doing their hair and brushing their teeth independently ("Thanks for being ready on time")
- Packing their own school bag ("You're so organised, nice one")

After school routines may differ day to day depending on your child's energy levels, extra-curricular activities and your own work commitments. On days at home together, they might involve a healthy after school snack followed by some unstructured playtime/ downtime, doing chores and homework, going to the playground or walking the dog and having dinner together. You might like to create an after school routine chart to help them remember what happens next. At night, going to bed at a regular time will also help make sure they get enough sleep to start the school day bright and fresh.

[For more information on how to create routines that stick, check out these five tips.](#)

Foster a positive attitude towards school

Being positive about your child's school and the opportunities it offers to learn, play and socialise goes a long way in helping them have an all-round enjoyable experience.

Whether it's talking about their teachers, their friendships, what they're learning, school events or the school grounds, by focusing on the positives you'll be helping to instil a sense of optimism in your child. It will also give them skills to build positive relationships at school and enhance their sense of belonging.

Think about what your child might be interested in at school in the new year. Is it friends, playgrounds, sports or choir maybe?

Here are some ideas and conversation starters to help your child develop a positive outlook:

1. "Your school is so great. I love the gardens, and the playground looks fun. What do you like most about it?"
2. "What was the funniest thing that happened at school today?"
3. "What are you learning in maths/science/art at the moment?"
4. "What did you and your friends do at lunchtime today?"
5. "I got an email from your teacher about the class excursion – she seems really nice."
6. "There are so many activities at your school. Would you like to sign up to the choir/chess club/ running group this year?"

Choose your timing carefully, as kids may not feel like talking about school straight after being picked up, especially if they're tired or hungry. Notice the moments when your child does feel like talking. It might be during an afternoon walk, while helping to wash up, at bedtime or while driving. You know your child best, so think about what works for them.

Children listen closely to what their parents and carers say about their school, their teachers and their friends, so it helps to be mindful of when little ears may be listening to conversations about more serious matters. Parents are their kids' number one role model. When genuine concerns about school arise, or if you feel your child's needs aren't being met, try working in partnership with your child and/or the school to resolve them. While it's not always easy, it can be a great opportunity to teach your child about problem-solving and conflict resolution to work through issues both now and in the future.

Encourage open and honest communication in your household

If your child is feeling worried or concerned about school, encourage them to talk openly about how they're feeling. While you might be tempted to dismiss their troubles or jump in to offer your advice, what really helps is listening without judgement and validating their feelings so they feel supported emotionally.

"That sounds tough, tell me more."

"I can hear you're upset about your friend leaving you out at lunchtimes. It hurts to feel left out of things."

Next, you might like to ask your child what they think could help and brainstorm ideas together.

"How would you like things to go next time?"

"What's one idea that could help make this better?"

This not only shows your child that you'll be there for them when life gets tough, but also helps develop their confidence to solve problems, resolve conflicts and overcome challenges.

[Read more about how a coaching approach can help kids with friendship challenges.](#)

Open and honest communication is also one of the best ways to strengthen the parent-child relationship, which is one of the most important influences on a child's positive mental health and wellbeing. Combine this with spending regular quality time together – being present, responding when they approach you (even if it's just for a minute or so), talking, laughing and having fun, whether for short bursts or longer stretches – and you'll be setting your child up for success not just in school, but in life.