

SCOIL SEANÁIN NAOFA CLUAINLÁRACH

General School Tips for Parents

How you can improve your child's chances at school

Learning just doesn't happen. Good education takes three partners: pupil, teacher, parent. What though is the parent's role? What can a mother or father do "to help my child do better".

Here is advice from experienced teachers.

Start Right

Meet your child's teacher at the beginning of the term and go to the school opening evening. Know what's being taught and what's expected. What books will be read. How much homework? Send your child to school everyday. Teachers are worried about the many parents who make other plans for their children. Sometimes it's a dentist's appointment, sometimes a family holiday. The child misses school and gets a parental message: School isn't that important. Be positive. Children learn best when they feel good about themselves. A golden rule: "Every child should experience some success each day" Pay attention to what your child does well: notice improvements and be generous with praise. Never use humiliation or ridicule.

Show interest. If you ask, "What did you do at school today? And your child answers "nothing", ask more specific questions based on what you know is being taught. Even if you don't get much information, you're telling her that you care about school.

Work with Teachers

Children learn best from someone they respect. So avoid putting down the teacher in front of the child. Don't say that teacher is "too strict" or "too fussy" or "doesn't know what she is talking about". If you have a criticism, take it to the teacher. If that doesn't clear it up, discuss it with the Principal. Show interest in long term progress rather than in marks out of ten. What is the child learning? Is he showing improvement? Question your child about good marks as well as poor ones. Is nine out of ten a mark of achievement? Or was the work too easy? Ask how you and the teacher can work together to enrich your child's learning at school and at home. Share information that can help teachers understand your child. Does he work better on his own or in groups? Is something happening at home- illness, divorce, a new job – that may affect the child at school? If you think there is a problem, don't wait for the next opening evening: get in touch with the teacher and make an appointment. Bright pupils may start to have headaches because they get bored, poorer pupils may invent excuses because they feel unable to do the work. In either case consult the teacher.

Use clues from school reports, discussions with teachers and class tests to become familiar with your child's strengths and weaknesses and to see where you can help Is the child lacking in some skill? Can you get special tutoring for that? Is there a physical problem – eyesight, hearing or some learning disability.

Encourage responsibility

Train your child to wash up the dishes, help to care for the family pet and make his/her own bed. Teachers say that they can spot pupils that have chores: they do better work at school. Set goals that your child can achieve. Lots of small goals, which a child can reach one by one, work better than one large one. They establish the expectation of success, which can be what educators call “a self-fulfilling prophecy”.

Support activity, not passivity. That means reading instead of television, microscopes and building models in preference to ready-made toys.

Use rewards instead of punishments. Achievement may be its own reward, But special privileges add a spur. If you take your youngster out for a treat after an athletic achievement, for example, why not after an academic achievement?

Reinforce learning

Watch for moments when you can help teach. At the supermarket, ask “How much change will I get?” If you are planning a journey, let your child help map the route. “How many miles is it ?, when will we get there ?”.

Children do as their parents do, not as they say.

If a parent gets excited about new books and new ideas, a child will too. If a parent acts as if anything worth doing is worth doing well, that’s how a child will do school work.

Teach concentration. “Paying attention” is an important key to learning and it is a skill your child can acquire. You might start by showing your child how athletes concentrate at a football match or tennis tournament. “Keep your eye on the ball” they tell themselves. “Concentrate” In the classroom, your child can practice such positive self-talk. “I can do it” she might say. Or “listen to the teacher”.

Teach your child to ask questions as he reads.

What made this explorer so successful? Who risked his life for his country and why? What caused the famine? Encourage him to draw conclusions, If he studying an invention such as the telephone, for example, ask him to imagine what life would be without it.

Set Homework rules

Be flexible, but remember that children thrive on order and routine.

A good rule might be “if you don’t get your work done, you can’t go out”. Your child may not always like your rules. He may tell you about friends who are allowed to stay up later, watch more television, spend less time on homework. There’s a simple answer: “They haven’t got me for a parent”.

Every child needs a quiet study area, safe from interruption and equipped with a good light. Agree on a regular time for studying there.

During study time there should be no television or record-playing, no constant interruptions. Discourage lengthy telephone calls. They can be made later. Remember that each child is different. Some do best completing all their studying and homework in a single session. Others do better if they study for 20 minutes, take a break and then come back to it.

Study at home needs your support. But remember: It’s the child’s homework not yours. If she doesn’t know how to spell a word, the right answer should come from the dictionary, not you. Look at the homework, point out the mistakes but expect your child to find the right answers herself.

If there’s a point in the homework that the child doesn’t understand, don’t jump in a long explanation. First say, “Tell me what you understand about this”. Listen carefully for what the problem is. Sometimes, a small confusion clears up if you read the material out loud and discuss it briefly.

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