



*A Union of Professionals*

## **Home Team Learning Activities**

Home is a child's first school. Already your children have learned a lot at home that will help them in school. But they can do even better if you spend a little time each day on reading, writing and math activities like the ones in this pamphlet.

These activities don't require a lot of time, planning, or materials. You just need to think about how daily activities--cooking, running errands, unclogging drains, even watching television--can be a chance to learn. Once you start to think this way, adding learning to your everyday routine will be easy.

Choose the activities that fit best with your daily schedule and your children's current classwork, and try to set aside time each day to help your children learn. This will depend on your schedule, children's ages and the kind of activity you choose.

Here are three R's that can help make home a place where it is easy and fun for children to learn:

### **RULES**

Set rules that make it clear to children that studying and learning are important to you. Such rules might include having their homework checked by you, setting limits on TV watching and making sure they get to school on time.

### **ROUTINES**

It's easier for children to learn when they have a household routine so they can know what to expect and when. Setting and keeping reasonable meal and bedtime hours and times for homework can help make regular study a good habit for children. Established morning routines help get them off to school promptly and prepared for the day.

Make sure children have a quiet place to study they can call their own. This should be a desk or table in a room with good light and nothing to distract them. Choose a place where your children can spread out their books and papers and store the materials they need--pens, paper and dictionary, for example.

### **REWARDS**

You can help your children enjoy school and learning. Show them that you are interested in their work. Praise them when they do a good job, and encourage them when they make a mistake. This builds their confidence in their ability to succeed. Confident children like to try to learn new things.

Reward your children for work well done or for trying hard, even if they make mistakes. Rewards don't have to cost money. A hug or a smile and some words of praise can do as much as candy or a toy. A special privilege, such as staying up late or watching a movie also can be a good reward. Children should know that the reward is for their good efforts in school.

This kind of involvement in your children's education requires commitment from you, your child and your child's teachers. It's very serious business that can be fun. Think of it as a game of connecting-the-dots of learning. Perhaps you will learn a few things too. Teachers learn something new every day. Involvement in your children's education is real work. But no investment in your children's future is more important--and it's an investment only you can make.

## **How to establish a good home team environment**

You can make your home a place where learning takes place every day. Here are a few tried-and-true tips:

### **Set times to work with your children daily.**

- Read and discuss items from the newspaper at breakfast.
- Put aside 15-30 minutes at night to work together on homework, a challenging game or bedtime reading.
- Watch the nightly news together.

### **Set times to talk with your children.**

- Show an interest in their work and especially their efforts and achievements at school.
- Eat together. Turn the TV off. The dinner table offers a good time to discuss family matters, school lessons or friends. Make sure children participate.
- Talk with them about why school is important--pointing out friends, relatives or heroes who worked hard, did well in school and became successful.

### **Set an example.**

- Try to use proper grammar when speaking or writing.
- Review your children's school work.
- Read a variety of materials like magazines, newspapers and books. Share them with your children. Parents who are readers help turn their children into readers and kids who achieve well in school.
- Do your own homework--write letters or read while schoolwork is being done.
- Help your children understand how you spend each day.

### **Keep good information sources handy and encourage children to use them.**

- **Dictionary:** Give children a word to look up and learn each day. Use the word in conversation as often as you can. Learn the pronunciation symbols.
- **Maps:** Let your children navigate by using maps on trips or even around town.
- **Encyclopedia:** Look up and read about subjects mentioned in the news.
- **Almanac:** Use this resource to collect facts of all kinds.

### **Use television wisely.**

- Monitor the content of television shows and limit the hours of viewing. Too much TV can rob children of precious learning and family time. Encourage children to watch educational programs. If possible, watch with them.
- Read weekly television guides. Select and prepare for the shows you want to watch each week. Public broadcasting stations usually offer good educational programs. If a program on whales is coming up, for example, you might read together about whales or visit an aquarium.
- Discuss what you see on TV. Encourage follow-up readings. Ask discussion questions, not just yes-or-no.

### **Allow your children to make choices.**

- Children grow when they make their own decisions, and they learn first-hand lessons about independence and responsibility. Let them choose one out of every three books they read or give them limited choices of things to wear or eat.

#### **With younger children**

- Keep activities short, 10-15 minutes.
- Make them fun and rewarding. For example, use dried beans or macaroni to practice counting and reward correct answers.
- Don't push too hard. Watch for signs of fatigue. Too much pressure creates stress. Stress is not a positive learning experience!

### **Teamwork: Parents and Teachers**

Helping children learn and achieve is a goal you share with teachers. Meet the people who work with your children at school--teachers, paraprofessionals, counselors and administrators. You are all a part of your children's "team"--helping them to succeed in school and beyond.

- Attend teacher conferences and parents' nights.
- Ask for recommendations for reading and learning activities to do at home.
- Know the teacher's expectations for classroom behavior, homework and parental involvement.
- Ask teachers what they think of your child's work and what you should be doing to help.
- Keep in touch with the schools and let your child's teachers know how you think your child is doing. Tell teachers about any problems that come up when you are helping them at home.

## Reading

Reading is key to your child's success in school. All schoolwork depends on being able to read. Never again will children have as much leisure to read for fun as they have during the first years of reading. It's very important to help your child learn to read well and love reading.

- Read to and with your children early and often. Reading aloud to children promotes the idea that reading is pleasurable. Even 10 or 15 minutes of reading together a day can make a real difference.
- Keep a variety of reading materials around the house. If your child can't find something to read, your child won't be able to read.
- Put "junk mail" to good use. Give any appropriate mail to your children to read as you read your own mail.
- Watch for newspaper and magazine stories and books about your children's favorite cartoon characters, sport stars and entertainers. Some newspapers feature children's pages.
- Use the newspaper. It's fun and informative. Cut out an interesting news story and cut the paragraphs apart. Ask your child to read the paragraphs and arrange them in logical order. For younger children, you can cut up a comic strip.
- Pick out an interesting article from the newspaper. As you are preparing lunch or dinner, ask your child to read the paragraphs and arrange them in logical order. For younger children, you can cut up a comic strip.
- Pick out an interesting article from the newspaper. As you are preparing lunch or dinner, ask your child to read the article to you. Then ask them some questions about what they read.
- Research and read about famous people born on your child's birthday.
- Play word games to strengthen vocabulary.
  - Make up tongue-twisters and rhymes.
  - Do an easy crossword puzzle together.
  - See how many words your children can spell using the letters in their name.
- Ask children to look up phone numbers to practice using alphabetical lists. Let your child alphabetize a list of friends with their addresses and phone numbers.
- Get library cards for your children. Make this a special event, part of growing up.
- With the help of a librarian, show your children how to find books they want to read.
- Use a nature walk to practice parts of speech. Challenge your children to use descriptive language. ("The towering tree," instead of "the tall tree.")

## Math

Working at home with the basics of math can be as easy as following a recipe in the kitchen and as much fun as keeping score while playing a game.

- Be positive about math. If a parent says, "I wasn't good at math, so it's okay if my kids aren't," kids may be afraid of math and not motivated to do well.
- Play family games that use math to teach kids how to count and sort. Ask your children to keep score. Younger children can use markers, such as macaroni; they can move on to numbers.

- Have children do a daily weather report. They will learn new terms, a sense of geography, how to draw maps and charts and a good deal of math. What was today's high temperature? Today's low?
- Children can learn about weights and scales at the local market. Let them weigh a pound of apples. How many apples in one pound? In two? What is the cost of three pounds of apples and one pound of bananas?
- Give children opportunities to tell time. You can use the old question: How much time do you have before you go to bed? That's bound to start a stimulating discussion!
- Estimating is an important math concept. When driving, ask children to guess when you have traveled one mile.
  - Estimate each family member's height or weight. Then check with a yardstick, ruler or scale.
  - Ask, "What do you think the outside temperature is today?" Check with a thermometer or by listening to the weather on radio or TV.
  - Play math "Jeopardy." Give a number and have your child find a question for which the number is the answer.
- When riding in the car there are many opportunities to count: cars, trucks, colors of cars, kinds of signs, etc.

## Writing and Penmanship

Good writers are clear thinkers. They know how to arrange topics and express ideas. Learning to write well requires practice and patience.

- With younger children, work on muscle and eye-hand coordination.
  - Stringing beads, popcorn or macaroni is a good coordination exercise. Create simple color patterns for children to follow.
  - Draw letters, numbers or pictures and have your children trace them.
  - Always make writing materials available, including pens, pencils, crayons and paper.
- Children can create homemade birthday cards by folding a piece of paper, making an attractive cover, and writing a short poem or greeting inside. You may want to show them some other greeting cards first.
- Ask your child to write down telephone messages and then read them aloud to the appropriate family member.
- When children have writing assignments to finish at home, ask them to discuss the topic with you before writing. Ask questions to be sure they understand the topic and know what they want to write.
- Ask children to read their writing aloud, then answer a few questions about what they wrote. What is the main point you want to make? Where do you state that point? Does any part contradict your main point? What do you think is the best part? What part would you like to improve? Reassure them that changes are okay-- editing will strengthen their writing.
- When checking your children's writing, first check the overall content for clear meaning. Then check grammar and spelling. Work with them to correct mistakes.
- Encourage your children to keep a diary. Writing in a journal develops writing skills and creativity.