

One of my teachers once said, “**I think schools should teach kids how to learn and parents should teach them how to work**”. I took that seriously and have tried to put it into practice in my own home. Getting the kids to perform well in school is not always about studying longer but studying more efficiently. It helps to get to know your child as a learner. Does he learn best through visual means, such as pictures, graphs, charts, diagrams or is he an auditory learner that needs to hear the instructions and information as well as read it himself? Does he need a hands on approach where he can explore and manipulate the material to understand the concept?. One approach is not better than the other, and it’s certainly not related to your child’s intelligence. Each child is wired differently. It helps to know so you can encourage the right practice and reinforcement for your child’s learning. Check out more of our learning strategies.

Is your child indecisive? Is your child messy and disorganized?

Disorganized children tend to be indecisive. They have messy desks, backpacks, binders and notebooks because they cannot decide what to keep and what to throw away. They often stare at the homework but don’t do the work because they cannot decide where to start and what to do next. You have to serve as their “coach” and guide them to take control over their **time, procedures and materials**. Begin by giving them choices appropriate for their age. This helps them feel safe about making a decision because you provide the alternatives that they have to choose from. Gently coach by your questions rather than tell them the answers to every question. Raise their awareness of making decision through modeling out loud how you are deciding on something so they can see your inner language script. For example, ”That choice means you will be able to do X”. “If I do this then X will happen”, “If do that then Y will happen”. Show them how to develop a list of pros and cons and help them prioritize and narrow down their choices. Have them do the easier assignments first. Disorganized children also are use to having things done for them because adults cannot wait for them to get the job done. When they don’t have to think and do for themselves they become less mindful about what they left behind or failed to do. It’s better to reinforce thinking behaviors by using words that guide self-direction like “you remembered to put your homework in your backpack, you realized your library book was due today”, “you noticed you didn’t put your name on your homework”. It’s easy to want to rescue them and do it for them but you will be undermining their self-confidence and road to independence.

Teach your child to maintain an uncluttered workplace to complete school assignments. Work with him and show him how to organize his space, and then take a picture of what the space should look like and post it near his workspace. Next time you say clean your desk and he says, “I did”. You can then say, “Does the desk look like the picture”? If it doesn’t you let him know he’s not done.

Have your child study (spelling words, vocabulary words, review study guides) while he is engaged in some type of motion such as a stationary bike. This accommodation will keep him more actively engaged in what he's suppose to be studying and will help with memorization and learning of the material.

For homework assignments that require memory it helps when you combine seeing it, saying it, writing it and doing it. The visual, auditory and kinesthetic, are all different paths to the brain. Some kids learn better visually while others need more "hands on" or may need to hear the information as well as read about it themselves. Most books textbooks today come in a CD form. If your child is not a strong reader buy the CD version as well and have him listen to the story or the chapter while he follows the text in the book and then have him read it as well.

To get your child to complete his homework set a specific goal one subject at a time and have your child monitor his time (Time Times is a good one). He should actively attend to his work for 20 minutes and then take a 10 minute "brain break", before he continues to work again for 20 minutes. You can also guide him to start with the easiest assignments first and how he can break the assignments into smaller chunks that he completes daily, and then help him record them in his daily planner. That will make the project much more manageable.

Before beginning to read a new chapter, have your child read the questions in the back of the chapter first. This will help guide his attention and ability to select essential from non-essential detail. Furthermore, before introducing a new concept try to help him make it relevant to something he already knows, making it more relevant to everyday life. He is more likely to remember and be able to apply the information.