

16 TIPS FROM A TEACHER

The following was published in the Globe and Mail and is intended for parents as information to assist with the success of their children this year at school.

Author: . Freda Lewkowicz teaches Grades 7 and 8 at Rosemere High School in Rosemere, Queb. She has 35 years of experience in the classroom.

Back-to-school is not just about supplies. Parents' planning is a key part of students' success. Getting ready for a new school year requires the same effort and commitment as a wedding planner. Are you doing enough to welcome 2009-2010?

The following strategies will help you guide your child toward academic excellence.

1. **Be a hands-on parent.** Buy a large calendar to keep track of school events, tests and school projects. Check your child's agenda book daily. If the school doesn't provide an agenda book, add this necessity to your shopping list. Reinforce the importance of writing down homework and test dates. Make sure that you set a good example by keeping your own agenda book and, no, your electronic agenda won't do for teaching this life skill. **Helpful hint:** Ignore the naysayers who scoff at your management efforts and who have a more informal, driveby parenting style. Too often, lackadaisical parents relinquish their parenting duties under the guise of teaching their children self-responsibility.
2. **Get a routine going for after-school and weekends and stick to it like glue.** Healthy snacks and relaxation for an hour after school and then time to tackle homework? Whatever you decide, remain faithful to the formula.
3. **Home sweet home and homework: Clear the clutter and set a permanent scene.** Your child needs a comfortable place to complete homework so offer her the best seat in the house. While some kids prefer to work at a table for one or at the kitchen table, others prefer the floor or even a bed. Allow your child some freedom in selecting the modus operandi of homework.
4. **Don't refer to homework as Homework Hell, no matter how stressful, family-unfriendly and time-consuming it is.** Children are always listening, and the homework debate should not rage within the home.
5. **To listen or not to listen?** While you might not understand it, some kids like to complete homework and even study with music. Let it be. This may be one battle you don't need to engage in just yet.

6. Get your child's teachers' school e-mail addresses. This is the best way to contact many teachers, as phone messages are rarely delivered promptly to teachers' mailboxes. If there's a need, e-mail questions and concerns often. (But remember, etiquette really counts here!)
7. If your child has academic problems, you cannot ever relax. Inform the school. Request testing. Be prepared for triage with a long list of recommended tutors and learning centres. Unfortunately, there's no Tide to Go to magically erase academic problems. Doing nothing is not an option. Be an advocate for your child.
8. What can you do to help your child with reading and writing? Encourage your child to read daily. **Helpful hint:** Get award winning and honour books by either buying them or taking them out of the library. - John Newbery Medal and Honour books - children's literature, ages 8-14 - Michael L. Printz Award for Excellence in Young Adult's Literature - high school students - Marilyn Baillie Picture Book Awards - children's literature - Coretta Scott King Awards - written by an African-American author for ages from pre-school to grade 12
9. Never miss Curriculum Night at school, which takes place during the school year. This night prepares you for the entire year and it's an opportunity to ask general questions about objectives and expectations. (Don't be the parent who asks personal questions and inquires about her child's progress. This is not a parent-teacher interview.)
10. Check the school board and school websites frequently to know what's going on. Stay informed.
11. Does your child's school have a monthly newsletter? Urge your child to bring this important notice, and all notices, home or make sure to read them online.
12. Are there any upheavals taking place in your child's life? Let the school know.
13. **Family meals:** The benefits of family meals stretch from academic superiority to healthy eating and good communication skills.
14. At times, your child might face failure and disappointment in school. Follow Scotland's lead with their program called Bounce Back and teach your child how to bounce back and deal with disappointment. Teach coping skills and problem-solving when failure is an uninvited guest.
15. Read the school discipline code or code of conduct and make sure your child has read it, too. Don't bend those rules like Beckham.
16. Only a laissez-faire parent would allow a child access to his cellphone and computer when completing homework (unless, of course, research is involved). It's a given that kids are texting and chatting when they should be focused on homework. Remove temptations.

These strategies and techniques will lead your child toward excellence. It's a sad fact that too many children have parents who have prematurely walked out of their childhood and, as a result, throwaway children populate our classrooms. Be there for your child. Do your homework (not your child's) for the new school year.