

Parents Make the Difference!

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A new calendar year is a time to review, make adjustments

It's the start of a new year--and nearly the halfway point in this school year. So it's a good time to take stock and make any needed adjustments.

Spend some time talking with your child about how the school year is going. If the two of you set learning goals at the start of the year, review those goals now. Is she making progress? How can she make the rest of the school year even better?

Then make some learning resolutions. Here are a few to consider:

- Reduce screen time. Talk about the time your child spends in front of a screen. How much time does she watch TV? Play computer games? Chat and IM with friends? If she's an average seven- to 18-year-old, she's spending seven-and-a-half hours on these activities a day. Yikes! Set a goal of reducing her total screen time to no more than two hours a day.
- Spend time reading. There is no skill that will help your child more in school. And reading, like other skills, gets better with practice. Encourage your child to read, and don't worry about what she reads. Let her read about sports, her favorite TV star or a hobby.
- Go back to beginning-of-school routines. Has your child's bedtime begun to slip later and later? Does that mean mornings are feeling more rushed? Is your family's regular study time now not quite so regular? Routines like these make life easier--and help kids do better in school.

Use a calculator to improve 'mental math'

In a time when calculators are never far away, do children still need to learn basic math skills?

Absolutely, say the experts.

Knowing how to do calculations in your head is a good way to stimulate thinking. It makes it easier to tackle higher math. It's hard to think about an algebra problem if you can't quickly add $7 + 15$.

Here's how to use a calculator to strengthen your child's mental math:

Call out a three-digit number. Have your child do the same. Now give him five seconds to estimate what the two numbers will add up to. Then check with a calculator.

Or use this same trick as a subtraction challenge. Have him estimate the answer. Then check the answer.

As he gets faster, you can make the challenge greater. While he does the math in his head, you use the calculator. Is he faster than the machine?

Build your child's respect for people and belongings

Respect and obedience aren't the same thing. Respect is a feeling--not just a behavior. To build your child's respect for people and belongings:

- Be a role model. Kids imitate what parents do. If you treat yourself and others with respect, your child is likely to do the same.
- Follow the rules. Remember to discuss why a rule is important. Ask yourselves, "What if everyone broke this rule?" This will help your child respect it.
- Look for examples. Where do you notice respect and disrespect? In books? On TV? In real life? What do you and your child think of what you see?
- Take care of things. Make it a priority to treat books, toys and other items with respect. Choose special places for belongings, and put them away after each use.
- Be positive. Make sure your child feels cared for and trusted. This builds self-respect. Help her see herself as lovable and capable.

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