

## **Helping A School-Aged Child Learn**

*The University of Pittsburgh  
Office of Child Development*

At an open house, Ellen was rankled by the remarks made by the mother of one of her son's second-grade classmates. It was "ridiculous," the woman said, for the teacher to suggest things parents can do at home to help their children learn. Teaching her child is "the school's job, not mine," she said. "That's why I pay taxes."

Ellen, a former teacher, is familiar with the woman's attitude. She is also familiar with research that shows that children whose learning is supported at home are more likely to thrive in school than children whose parents consider teaching to be somebody else's job.

Support for learning consists of simple things. Start by giving your child your love, attention, and interest. Show your child you value your child's ideas, thinking and even minor accomplishments. Be interested in learning yourself. When watching an interesting program on television, show your involvement and discuss the program with your child.

Support and respect your child's teachers and what they are trying to accomplish. Always agree with them in front of your child. If you disagree, talk to the teacher privately.

For homework, establish a quiet place with good lighting as your child's study area. Make the place distinctive and reserve it for homework only. Provide your child with books. A child's dictionary and a beginner set of encyclopedias are useful. A computer and the ability to connect to the Internet are also important learning tools.

Insist that homework is always done and done correctly. Set a time each night to do homework. No television or other distractions should be allowed during that time. Doing homework together helps underscore its importance. But don't give all the answers. Let your child figure things out.

School-aged children are learning to read and should read at home at least 15 minutes a day. Take the time to have your child read to you. And encourage your child to write. Simple assignments, such as thank-you notes or letters to friends and relatives are good ways to learn.

Never punish for bad performance. Instead, help your child learn from his or her mistakes.

But support for learning does not mean pushing, spending hours doing flash cards, and rigidly demanding performance. Instead, be your child's partner in learning, and make sure you both enjoy it.

Also, partner with your child's teacher. Schedule a conference and, if possible, observe the class for a day. When all three of you are on the same page, your child comes out the winner.

*This column is written by Robert B. McCall, Ph.D., Co-Director of the University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development and Professor of Psychology, and is provided as a public service by the Frank and Theresa Caplan Fund for Early Childhood Development and Parenting Education.*