

Handy Hints for Improving Learning

The following handy hints for improving learning are available for schools to use in newsletters. They are extracted from Andrew Fuller's book " Help Your Child Succeed At School"

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No. 1 Most Learning Doesn't Happen At School!

Children spend only 15% of their time at school. They spend more time asleep (33 %) than they do at school. Most of their time (52 %) is at home, awake, mucking around, playing, and learning about life and it's what they do with that time that is important.

Most of their future learning also won't occur in school, It is estimated that 70% of the jobs that will exist in the year 2020 do not exist now. We know that knowledge is doubling every three years. It is estimated that 50 years ago a high school graduate left school knowing about 75% of what they would need to know in their working life - today's high school graduate will leave knowing about 2%!

This series of handy hints to improve learning are designed to help us work together to ensure that we prepare your children for success.

From " Help Your Child Succeed at School" by Andrew Fuller
www.andrewfuller.com.au

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No.2 Organising a Learning Space for Your Child

As your child grows and develops, there will need to be somewhere set up for them to study and do projects. Some kids just can't get themselves organised and may need a parent to take care of the practical aspects of setting up a home study area. The parent may also need to be responsible for keeping it neat. It's ok for parents to *assist* by thinking of ways to better organise notes as well.

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No.3 Organising a Learning Space for Your Child - Lighting

Natural or indirect lighting such as a desk lamp is best for learning. It is best for your child not to study under fluorescent lighting as it is related to raised cortisol levels in the blood stream (an indicator of anxiety and agitation). Cortisol also suppresses language functions. If you are purchasing a desk lamp try to avoid fluorescent lights.

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No. 4 How much Television viewing should I allow my child to watch if I want them to succeed at school?

There is growing evidence to suggest that any TV viewing for children under the age of two impairs their ability to concentrate, As children develop, a small amount of television viewing is positively associated with academic achievement. A nine year old shouldn't watch more than one and a half hours per day. A thirteen year old shouldn't watch more than one hour a day. Bad news for those of you with older children! At 17 years of age the optimal amount of TV viewing is half an hour per day.

While there is no real evidence on the amount of time spent playing computer games, it is a good idea to keep televisions and computer out of children's bedrooms.

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No. 5 How much sleep does my child need to succeed at school?

A good nights sleep (at least 8 hours) is essential for optimal brain functioning at school. Memory consolidation occurs during sleep especially during dream (or REM) sleep. During the normal 8-9 hours of sleep, five dream (REM) cycles occur. Adolescents getting only 5-6 hours of sleep lose out on the last two REM cycles and thereby reduce the amount of time the brain has to consolidate information.

Teenagers need as much sleep as children, partly because their brains are doing so much development.

Always remember there is no such thing as a sleep bank. So just because you slept 10 hours one night doesn't mean you can get away with only sleeping six hours the next night.

Students who don't get enough sleep have to work much harder to do well at school.

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No. 6 Know Your Child's "Down" time

Everyone has a down time when they learn new information less well. As a rough guide, think of the time they go to sleep, then think of the time they usually wake up, calculate the midpoint of their sleep, add twelve hours and around that time is their "down time".

For example, if your child sleeps from 9.30 pm to 7 am, the midpoint of their sleep is 2.00 am. Adding twelve hours takes us to 2.00 pm which is the time your child is likely to learn least well. It is important for teachers and parents to know students likely down times so they can schedule in active, hand on learning at these times.

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No. 6 Eat a good breakfast

If your Mum ever said have fish or eggs for breakfast because it's brain food, she was right! As long as it's medically safe to do so, a breakfast that is high in protein (think cheese, milk, bacon, eggs) and lower in carbohydrates (think cereal, orange juice and toast) promotes concentration and learning. Also encourage your child to drink lots of water- the brain runs on it!

Students who don't eat breakfast are not only more likely to gain weight; they will also have to work harder than others to do well at school.

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No. 7 Use Music

There is a growing evidence to suggest that playing instrumental music softly in the background enhances learning. Pachabel's Canon, Mozart and Baroque music seem to be particularly effective though you might like to use a range of music.

It is always good to have students study for some time without music. Exam rooms don't have music playing in them.

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No. 8 Use aromas

Most people have had the experience of smelling a particular aroma and having a series of memories flood back. Partly this is because your olfactory nerve is directly linked to the hippocampus, which is the part of your brain where memories are integrated.

The aromas most often associated with improvements in concentration and memory are lemon, basil and rosemary.

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No. 9 Monitor their use of video and computer games

Video games are incredibly popular and give a sense of great mastery, challenge and involvement. Boys particularly use video games in a social way. It is important to realise that the use of video and computer games is not completely passive.

Too much playing of these games can be negative. These games can be so compelling they become addictive. While some games require quite intricate problem solving, the skills learned on these games do not appear to readily transfer into other arenas of life. Very few of the games require creative problem solving or an opportunity to be an active participant in determining a story line.

Some exposure to computer games is good. Too much, though, can be toxic. Sadly, there is no research that tells us what the right amount of time spent of computer games should be so you'll need to think about the balance of your child's life and their range of activities and interests.

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No. 10. Help them to build the essentials skills for success.

Three of the skills needed for success at school (and in most areas of life) are concentration, memory and sequencing or getting things in the right order. The games that parents play with their children such as Snap, Uno, Concentration, Battleships, Monopoly, Chess, Jigsaw puzzles all play an incredibly important role in developing these skills of success.

Computer versions of these games are not as effective in helping children develop these skills. To really help your child to succeed at school every so often switch off the TV, unplug the computer and pull out a game.

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No. 11. Limit the amount of part-time work

Senior secondary students should not work more than ten hours a week at a part-time job. If they do so, there is clear evidence that their marks will suffer.

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