

SECTION



THE Organization ADVANTAGE

helping
children
become
more
successful
learners
at
home
and
school

First things first: students who have difficulty learning often have problems getting (and staying) organized. Students need to be ready to learn at school. There are many ways that you can help your child get organized for learning — both physically and emotionally.

Use Self-talk to Create a Positive Attitude

Self-talk is an important thinking tool.¹ It can help students think and talk positively about themselves and their abilities.

Statements such as "I can't do it!," or "It's too hard!," are self-defeating. Instead, help your child find and use positive statements, such as, "I can do it if I try!," "I am a hard worker!," or "I can use my strategies."

Self-talk can also help students work through tasks step-by-step. Students gain control by breaking tasks into manageable and meaningful parts. For instance, when completing a math problem, a student using self-talk might say, "I've read it over. Now I have to figure out what the question is asking. "



¹ From *Smart learning* (p. 4), by D. Antaya-Moore & C. M. Walker, 1996, Edmonton, AB: Smart Learning. Adapted and reprinted with permission.

² Picture from *What's the difference?* (p. 95), by E. Barnes et al., 1978, Syracuse, NY: Human Policy Press. This work is in the public domain as of December 1985.

Organize Materials

Help your child get organized for the classroom:

- – colour code duotangs — for example, orange for math, green for science — so they are easy to locate
- – look for duo tangs and binders with inside storage pockets
- – label all supplies
- – use clear plastic pencil cases so children can see what supplies they have
- – make sure your child has extra supplies at school so class time isn't wasted searching for paper or pencils
- – provide erasable ball point pens, stick-on notes and highlighter pens, as they are valuable organization tools
- – encourage your child to clean his or her desk regularly (at least once a week) and take home anything not needed at school.

Locker Logic

To keep lockers organized, students can put textbooks for morning classes on the bottom shelf and store textbooks for afternoon classes on the top shelf.

SMART Goals

The best goals are SMART. They are:

Specific
Measurable
Achievable
Realistic
Time-based.

For example:

I will read one novel by April 28th.

I will keyboard 20 wpm by March 4th.

I will be on time for every class this month.

Set Goals for School Success

Setting regular goals to improve work habits helps children become more successful students. Work with your child to develop a list of positive learning behaviours to choose from when setting goals. Your child's list could include the following.

In Class³

- Listen carefully to the teacher.
- Avoid talking to friends during class instructions.
- Practise taking better notes.
- Finish all assignments and make sure they are handed in.
- Participate actively in class discussions.
- Ask the teacher questions when I don't understand.

At Home³

- Organize myself each night for the next day (file papers, check schedule, calendar and weekly goals).

Time Management³

- Use a calendar for recording due dates and tests.
- Break larger assignments into smaller parts and set deadlines for finishing each part.

Study Environment³

- Study in a quiet distraction-free place.
- Organize my desk, drawers and papers.

Put goals in writing and include a way (such as a chart) to keep track of progress.

Goal	My goal is to...
Rationale	I chose this goal because...
Action Plan	To reach this goal I will...
Measurement	How will I know if I am successful?
Evaluation	Did I make my goal? What would I do differently in the future?

See Appendix 1, page 52 for a goal planning sheet.

³ From *The Study skills handbook: more than 75 strategies for better learning* (p. 38), by J. Dodge, 1994, New York, NY: Scholastic Inc. Reprinted by permission.

Taking Notes

By Grade 4 or 5, students need to be able to take organized notes. Often, they don't understand the purpose for writing down information from class lectures and discussion. Share these convincing reasons with your child:⁴

- Your teacher probably covers information in class that isn't in the textbook. If you don't write it down, you won't have it when you need it.
- Class notes are your best record of what happens during class, and your best source of material for test reviews.
- Writing things down reinforces what you hear and helps you remember.
- Taking notes makes you a more active listener.

Other notetaking hints include:

- Write down a date and title for each lesson. (If the teacher doesn't provide a title, make one up.)
- You don't need to write down everything the teacher says, but do write down everything the teacher writes on the board and any questions the teachers asks.
- Underline, circle or star anything the teacher repeats or emphasizes.
- Write one idea per line and skip lines. Leave wide margins so extra ideas can be added later.
- Put question marks by any points you didn't understand — discuss them later with the teacher.

	Snowy Owl	November 2, 1999
	appearance: black and white	
	yellow eyes	
	food: rodents	
	enemies: polar bears	
	? terns	
	habitat: on ground nests	
	tree tops	
	* adaptations: light bone structure	
	(silent flier)	
	feathers	
	sharp talons	
	large eyes – sharp vision	
	head moves 360°	

⁴ Excerpted from *School power: strategies for succeeding in school* (p. 17), by Jeanne Shay Schumm, Ph.D. and Marguerite Radencich, Ph.D., ©1992. Used with permission from Free Spirit Publishing, Minneapolis, MN: 1-800-735-7323. All rights reserved.

Class notes become study guides for upcoming tests. Encourage your child to build regular note review into the homework routine. Follow the 3 Rs for reviewing class notes — reread, rewrite and reinforce.⁵

- ①—*Reread* the notes aloud. Repeating the information helps students remember it better so they can use it to answer questions.
- ②—*Rewrite* notes neatly and clearly when there is a scribbled word or an unclear or confusing piece of information.
- ③—*Reinforce* notes. To "reinforce" means to strengthen by adding something. Strengthen class notes by adding important, relevant information from the textbook or handouts. Use a highlighter to spotlight important information. Make sure each section of notes has a title that clearly tells the main idea.

⁵ From *How to study and take tests* (p. 29), by L. Canter, 1989, *Homework Without Tears -Study Skills Series*, Santa Monica, CA: Lee Canter & Associates. Adapted and reprinted with permission.

Study Buddies

Students who have difficulty getting organized may benefit by having a study buddy who can be a point of reference. A study buddy should be a successful, friendly student who is willing to let another student compare class notes (not copy them) and is willing to repeat or clarify assignment instructions. Study buddies can also collect extra copies of assignments and handouts for each other if one is absent.

The Homework Advantage

Time Manager

During homework time, children can use a kitchen timer to signal the beginning and end of homework sessions and breaks.

This makes children responsible for monitoring their own breaks.

Establish a Homework Drop-off Spot⁶

Choose a spot at home to put school books and homework assignments each night. The spot should be free of clutter and easy to spot on the way out the door in the morning. Children can make colourful signs to mark their official homework drop-off spot. Develop the habit of always putting school work in the same place each night —this makes it easier to remember to bring it back to school each day.

Schedule a Regular Homework Time

Write down all your family routines and scheduled activities, and then choose a regular homework time that works for your family: Stick to it!

⁶ From *Smart Learning* (p. 48), by D. Antaya-Moore & C. M. Walker, 1996, Edmonton, AB: Smart Learning. Adapted and reprinted with permission.

Homework Survival Kit⁷

A homework survival kit, containing the supplies required for homework, saves time. Gather up the needed supplies and stash them in a basket or box near the study area:

pencils	scissors	dictionary
eraser	glue	coloured pencils
lined paper	sharpener	scotch tape
stick-on pad	erasable pen	stapler
unlined paper	highlighter pen	

Make a Contract

Some students need the structure and limits of a homework contract outlining what they need to do and the consequences for completing (or not completing) their homework. For example:

Homework Contract

The homework rule in our family is:

Paired reading finished before 8:00 p.m.

If Everett successfully completes homework
(student's name)

each day then, for the whole month he earns a trip to the bookstore and one new book — his choice!

If homework is NOT completed then, no television before bedtime.

To make sure Everett is successful (he)she will
(student's name)

set his alarm and start reading at 7:00 p.m. sharp.

Mom will support this homework
(parent's name)

contract by participating in paired reading with Everett or ensuring that he has a partner.

(student's signature) Everett

(parent's signature) Mom

(date) February 1, 1998

See Appendix 2, page 53 for a homework contract.

⁷ From *Smart Learning* (p. 53), by D. Antayá-Moore & C. M. Walker, 1996, Edmonton, AB: Smart Learning. Adapted and reprinted with permission.