

Texas Agricultural Extension Service

People Helping People

SCHOOL WORK AND HOME WORK

Parents' Guide to Responsible After-School Self Care for Children

Parents working outside the home tend to feel that their work may somehow influence their child's school performance. However, research studies show no significant differences between school performance by children of employed mothers and by children whose mothers do not work outside the home.

All parents can take some basic steps to enhance children's school performance and to provide an environment conducive to learning.

- Encourage your child to eat a nutritious breakfast each morning. Teachers link a poor breakfast with poor school performance. While some families eat together, in others family members eat at different times, and sometimes children eat breakfast at school. Plan together the when, what and where of breakfast.
- Check school opening and closing times to determine proper times for arrival and departure. Children arriving early for school and staying after school should be involved in organized school activities. In some areas, before-school activities are planned for children of employed parents.
- Participate in parent activities or organizations related to the school. Join support groups such as the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA), band boosters, choir parents and parents for sports. Even if you cannot attend every meeting, you can make some contribution. Organizations affiliated with the school are a means for parents to interact with school personnel and parents of their children's friends. Attend open houses sponsored by the school.
- Maintain a class schedule listing at your workplace. This listing shows class, time, teacher and location. Note teacher conference periods. Also list name and telephone number of school secretary, nurse and counselor as well as school principal.

- Keep family members' complaints about school in perspective. As an adult, avoid criticism about the school in the presence of the child. Where intercession or parental involvement is necessary, obtain facts, determine the appropriate person with whom to confer and schedule a meeting time with a stated purpose.
- Work through a school counselor or secretary if appointments are needed with more than one teacher beyond the hours of the regular school day.

As more and more parents of school-age children are involved in the labor force, schools are taking steps to adjust. Share needs with school administrators and become involved in cooperative and supportive ways that lead to a good educational environment for children.

Homework

Teachers and parents differ in their attitudes regarding homework. Some think it should be a regular part of the school program. Others feel all work should be done during the school day. Basically, homework has four purposes:

1. To practice and master skills taught in school
2. To encourage independence, creativity and reading
3. To provide preparation for classwork
4. To complete classwork not finished during the school day

Some educators believe parents can do more harm by giving too much help than too little. Most agree the child benefits when the parent shows a consistent interest in the child's work and helps the child clarify his assignments and locate his resources. Some steps working parents might consider are:

- Provide a suitable place for child to study.
- Encourage the child to list assignments and due dates in an assignment book. List major tests, projects or reports on the family calendar.
- Provide resources in the home.

- Plan together a regular schedule for study time.
- Show interest in the results of the child's work.

Motivation and concentration are needed for learning.

Study Areas and Lighting

Encourage good study skills by providing an area conducive to study. Ideally, a study area is away from other family activities and includes a sizable work surface, a comfortable chair and a good study lamp or lighting. A study area needs a good source of light near the writing surface and general lighting in the room.

A study area may be a built-in or homemade desk, a remodeled piece of furniture or short file cabinets with an added top between them to serve as a work surface. Even an old flat surface door placed on sawhorses can become a work area for school and other projects. Standard desk height is 30 inches with a work surface of at least 36 inches.

Provide storage containers for school supplies. Try creative ideas for home storage. Some items to include are:

- pencils
- pens
- clear tape
- paste/glue
- scissors
- bookmarks
- rulers
- erasers
- colored pencils
- paper
- folders
- dictionary
- reference books
- paper clips
- pencil sharpener

Chores

Most parents agree that homework comes before housework in the list of after-school activities. But tasks help to structure time and involve youngsters in some of the activities that maintain the household management system. One or two specific, short-term tasks may be quite reasonable and perhaps even enjoyable for the child. If more than one child is involved, each should have a specific task and be held responsible only to the parent for completing it.

One way to make chores more interesting is to involve the child in something worthwhile. Parents and children can compile a list to post and check off over a period. Involvement in household tasks

helps the child feel a sense of contribution to the family. When the child is complimented he or she will feel appreciated and self-confident. Some household tasks that might be considered for after school include:

- Sort and fold laundry
- Set the table
- Feed the pet
- Sweep the floor

Pet Care and Responsibility

The family pet requires care that can teach your child responsibility for property and life. Teach your child a routine for the care of a pet and give him/her the responsibility for that care after school.

Provide a place for feeding the pet away from main traffic areas in the house and away from the food preparation center. Teach your child how to prepare pet food and maintain the water bowl.

If the pet is housebound, then set guidelines for exercise and elimination. If the yard is not fenced, teach your child ways to control the pet while out of doors. Provide a leash or teach your child verbal commands so the pet doesn't stray from your property.

Pet accidents sometimes happen. Teach your child how to clean up after a pet to eliminate pet accident odors. The following procedures are easy to follow. Have a place for pet clean up supplies and show your child what to do in case of a pet accident.

- Clean up accident immediately.
- Scrape up solids and blot liquids.
- Sponge with warm, soapy water.
- Sprinkle dry baking soda or a commercial carpet-odor powder on area.
- Leave for several hours, then vacuum up.

Household and Weather Emergencies

Children on their own after school need advance preparation for emergencies. While storms and blizzards do not strike every day, they could occur. Some families prepare a severe weather kit and keep it in a special place in the house. This kit should include a portable radio, flashlight and extra batteries. Practice with children precautions and measures to take in the event of thunderstorms, lightning, tornadoes, hailstorms and even heavy rains. Go over steps to take when the electricity goes off. Remember, children should use flashlights, not candles.

Risks are reduced when children are properly prepared.

National Weather Service Storm Alerts

Watch: Conditions are right for severe weather.
Warning: Severe weather is imminent. Take emergency action.

Fire Safety

With your child, practice a plan for evacuation should there be a fire. Teach the child the stop, drop and roll technique if his/her clothing should catch on fire when at home alone. Consider the purchase of a smoke detector and fire extinguisher to put in the home. If the detector sounds, children should know to call the fire department and go to a designated place outside the home. They should also have instructions on when and how to use the fire extinguisher.

Gas Leaks

A child should be taught what to do if there is an odor of gas in the house or apartment. Provide the child with an emergency number to call. Remind him/her to open a window and not to light a match or turn on the oven or stove.

Most children do not know how to handle home emergencies. Learning about major emergencies (fire and gas leaks) and minor ones (lights out, electricity off, water leaks) prepares them for adult living on their own.

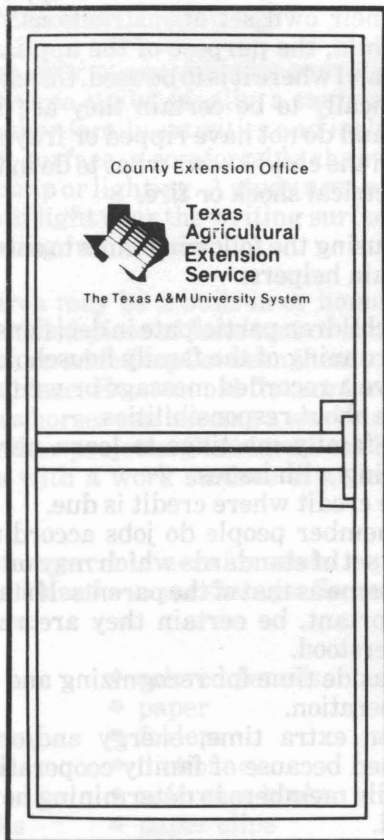
Appliance Use

If your child is permitted or requested to use appliances for preparing snacks or doing chores, the child needs information and skills for proper appliance use. Dishwashers, vacuum cleaners, toasters, stereos, irons and other appliances come with their own set of instructions. Explain to each child, the purpose of the appliance, how it works and where it is to be used. Check appliances periodically to be certain they are in working order and do not have ripped or frayed cords. Be certain the child knows what to do in the event of an electrical shock or fire.

Try using the following hints to encourage and maintain helpers:

- Let children participate in decisions regarding the running of the family household.
- Leave a recorded message or written instructions about responsibilities.
- Use family meetings to learn new skills for dealing with issues.
- Give credit where credit is due.
- Remember people do jobs according to their own set of standards which may or may not be the same as that of the parents. If standards are important, be certain they are realistic and understood.
- Set aside time for recognizing and rewarding cooperation.
- When extra time, energy and/or money is gained because of family cooperation, involve family members in determining how it will be used.
- Recognize family members as a valued team.

Parents' Safety Suggestions for Children



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