

## Parents' Effort Makes School Work

*by Susan Ginsberg*

When children reach school age, working parents everywhere breathe a collective sigh of relief. But then homework hits, the teacher calls, and extracurricular activities begin. Your job and household responsibilities just keep on coming. And soon, you find yourself even more out of breath than before. There are answers. It is possible to help your child succeed in school and still carry out your other commitments. You just need to learn new ways to use your time and energy. Driving to school, playing in the park, preparing dinner. All of these activities can be full of learning experiences. Often, the way we handle everyday events lays the groundwork for success in school.

### **Morning Rush Hour**

Getting a calm start will help children focus on the day ahead at school.

Having children choose clothes, gather their school work, and decide on the breakfast menu the night before not only speeds things up but encourages good organizational skills.

Before walking out the door, check backpacks and make sure children have their homework, books, permission slips, lunch or lunch money.

### **Drive Time**

Use the few minutes it takes to get to school to review spelling or vocabulary words, recite multiplication tables, or quiz your child on an upcoming test if he or she wants some extra help.

### **The Business Plan**

Stay in touch with what's happening at school. Research shows it helps children succeed in school.

### **Make Contact**

Make sure the school knows how to reach you at work, even when your voice mail is on, and that you are available. Know the best time to contact your child's teacher.

### **Note This**

Send an occasional note to your child's teacher(s), not only about problematic situations, but positive feedback as well, such as "David really enjoyed the rain forest unit," or "I've noticed a real improvement in Sarah's reading ability lately."

### **Stay Noticed**

Make an effort to volunteer in some capacity; e.g., chaperone a field trip, staff a booth at the school fair, or provide some of the refreshments for a school function.

### **Have A Stand-In**

Identify one or two people (a relative, neighbor, child care provider) who can "sub" for you at a special school event or on a field trip day when your work schedule keeps you from attending. Make arrangements for your "sub" to take pictures or videotape the event. That way, your family can relive the moment and make a celebration of watching it together.

**Afternoon Contacts**

When school lets out for the day, parents at work may feel guilty for not being with their children in the afternoon. There are other ways to be there for them via e-mail or a message on the answering machine.

**Schedule Flex Time**

At work, find out if you can schedule one day a week to come in early so you can leave early to spend time with your children. Let them choose the activity and use this time to relax, have some fun, and even do a little work together.

**Cook up Some Fun**

Use cooking as a math lesson. Children can help read the recipe, measure and mix ingredients, or assist with preparation such as forming meatballs, cutting up vegetables or fruit, buttering bread, etc.

**Eat It Up**

The dinner table is a good place to catch up on what happened during everyone's day. Ask everyone to share something learned at school or work, introduce a "word of the day" to be used sometime during the dinner hour, etc.

**Be A Role Model**

Children learn through observation. When you turn off the television set to read or do work either from the office or as part of your household responsibilities, it sends a powerful message and offers an opportunity to do your "homework" together.

**Pillow Talk**

To help children develop good communication skills, listen to and hold conversations with them. Before bedtime is often a good time to discuss thoughts and feelings.

This gives children a chance to try out new ideas, ask questions, and receive feedback that their knowledge is valued and respected.

Remember, parents play a powerful role in helping their children perform well in school. The attitudes and skills that lead to success are formed at home and can be nurtured at every age and every stage of childhood.

Adapted from an article written by Susan Ginsberg for the Birth To Three column in *The Register-Guard* when she was a consultant for Sylvan Learning Center.