
Helping Your Grandchildren Succeed in School

The goal of school is to prepare children to succeed in their academic, professional, and personal goals. Your grandchild doesn't have to be the smartest child in the class to be successful in school; they just need to learn and grow. School success requires good study skills and habits, self-confidence, and the ability to make friends.

Children are much more likely to succeed in school when their families support their learning at home. Grandparents sometimes wonder how they should support their grandchildren in doing their homework, how to help them feel good about their ability to learn, and what to do if they have trouble making friends. Here are some basic ideas for supporting your grandchildren in school.

Homework Help

Homework can help children practice, reinforce, and expand on important skills that they learn during the school day. But many children think of homework as punishment rather than reinforcement. When adults nag children to get their homework done and children look for ways to put it off, the whole process of doing homework can become a power struggle.

Homework doesn't have to be a struggle. When you make homework a priority in your home, you are offering your grandchildren support, helping them deal with mistakes, teaching them to take responsibility for their own learning, and helping them develop problem-solving skills.

You can keep homework from becoming a battleground using some of these tips:

Set a Consistent Quiet Time for Homework

Having a specific "homework time" helps your grandchildren understand that homework is important and cuts down on arguments about when to do the work. The length of time depends on the children's ages and the amount of homework they usually have. Younger children usually need less time than older children. Make it clear that the children are expected to work on their homework during the quiet time. If children don't have any homework, encourage them to spend homework time reading a book or working on a science project that interests them.

Know Your Grandchildren's Personalities

Some children are better off completing their homework before they play outside or play video games. Others need some relaxation time after school before they're ready to do homework. Some children study best at a desk with bright light. Others are more successful if they are more comfortable, perhaps lying on the bed or floor. Choose the time and place that works best for each grandchild, even if they end up doing homework at different times. Make occasional exceptions to the homework routine. If a special school event happens during homework time, it's okay to rearrange the time for that night.

Allow Time for Study Breaks

If children have a lot of homework, short breaks between assignments or parts may help refresh them. Encourage them to stretch, get a drink of water, or even take a short walk, but pay attention to how often children take breaks. Elementary-age children should be able to work for 15–30 min before needing a break, and middle- and high-schoolers should be able to concentrate for at least 30–45 min. If children are taking breaks every few minutes, they may be avoiding an assignment.

Help Children Complete One or Two Examples, not Every Question

Many adults struggle with how much help to give children with homework. Remember that many teachers use homework to judge whether children have learned the material. When your grandchildren turn in homework done correctly, the teacher assumes they understand how to do it. If you're doing the homework for them, they won't know how to do it at school when you're not there to help. It's fine to work through a question or two with your grandchildren, but make sure they are doing most of the work themselves.



Help Your Grandchildren Organize for Long-Term Projects

Big assignments like science projects and term papers cannot be done overnight. Many children don't know how to break a large assignment down into manageable steps, and they don't start on it until a few days before it's due. When your grandchildren come home with big assignments, sit down the first night and encourage them to plan out a strategy. Help them choose specific dates to have information gathered, to complete a first draft, and to finish

revisions. Encourage your grandchildren to spend a little bit of homework time each night on the big assignment.

Reduce the Stress in Your Grandchildren's Lives

Some children have so many out-of-school activities that they're too tired or distracted to do homework. Activities like sports, music, dance lessons, clubs, and art classes may be too much when there is also homework to complete. Help your grandchildren choose one or two activities that they especially enjoy, and don't commit to too much. Make sure homework is a top priority in the schedule. Build in some free time for your grandchildren to simply relax and play.

Use a Nonthreatening Approach

React calmly when your grandchildren make mistakes on homework. Instead of saying, "That's wrong; here's the right answer," ask how they got the answer. When they explain their thinking process, they may catch their own mistakes. Asking how they got the answer may help you discover why they made the mistake in the first place. Resist the temptation to just give them the right answer; instead, help them learn how to think it through for themselves.

Get to Know Your Grandchildren's Teachers

You and your grandchildren's teachers are most likely to help your grandchild succeed in school when you cooperate. Get to know their teachers and let them know that you want to help your grandchildren succeed in school. Find time to be involved with your grandchildren's school. If your grandchildren are having regular problems completing homework, or you see problems with the amount or type of homework being assigned, make an appointment with the teacher to discuss the issue.

Consider Hiring a Tutor

Do you get irritated when your grandchildren have trouble with a math assignment? Are your grandchildren asking for your help on schoolwork you don't remember how to do? If your grandchild is struggling, or needs extra support in some subject, you may want to hire a tutor. Tutors work one-on-one with students in areas where they need a little extra help. Your grandchildren's teachers or someone from your neighborhood could recommend a good tutor. Having a tutor may also reduce tensions around homework in your family.

Be Alert for Special Learning Needs

If your grandchildren regularly have problems with homework in one area, but do well in other areas, talk to the teacher. Your grandchildren may just need extra practice in the problem area, but it's also possible that they have a special learning need. Teachers are trained to spot any special needs your grandchildren may have. If the teacher suspects a special learning need, they may recommend that the child be tested. If the tests indicate a special need, the teacher will help bring together a student support team (SST) of teachers and other learning specialists to create an individualized educational plan (IEP) to support your grandchild's learning and school success.

Consult a School Counselor About Problems

School counselors are available to help children cope with stresses that may get in the way of school success. Let the teacher or counselor know about problems at home that could cause problems in school. If your grandchildren's parents don't show up for a scheduled visit, for example, the children may feel upset and schoolwork may suffer. When the teacher and school counselor know about the problem, they can work with you to support your grandchildren.

More Than Just Academics

Mastering reading, math, and other academic subjects is clearly an important part of your grandchildren's education. But school isn't just about "reading, writing, and arithmetic." It's also a time for children to learn how to value themselves and how to get along with others—valuable skills that will serve them well throughout their lives. Your grandchildren are more likely to do well, both academically and socially, if they feel confident about themselves. Making friends also is an important part of the school experience. Here are some ideas for helping your grandchildren with self-confidence and friendships.

Helping Your Grandchildren Build Self-Confidence

Feeling confident is important for school success. Children who are sure of themselves are less likely to give up when an assignment is hard. Confident children are not afraid to raise their hands, are more willing to ask questions, and are more likely to try again when they make a mistake. Because self-confident children believe they will succeed, they tend to be more successful. Unfortunately, some children lose self-confidence when they have trouble in school. Here are some tips to help build your grandchildren's self-confidence.

Explore New Activities

Encourage your grandchildren to try new things, and help them find activities they enjoy. Encourage them to take small steps toward mastering something new. Help them see the small ways that they are succeeding. If your grandchildren are taking art lessons, point out the new shapes they have learned to draw or the colors they created. If they are playing baseball, point out improvements in their batting or catching abilities.

Help Children Handle Mistakes Calmly

Nobody succeeds at every activity the first time. Failure is a part of life, and children need to know how to handle it. React calmly when your grandchildren make mistakes. Focus on what they learned from the mistake and help them figure out how to do better in the future. Encourage children's efforts by saying things like, "You worked really hard to paint that picture."

Choose Age-Appropriate Activities

Choose activities that are just challenging enough for children to learn something new, but not so difficult that they get frustrated because they can't finish. Give children chances to feel successful. Know your grandchildren's abilities and pick activities that are challenging but not

overwhelming. Start with easier activities, such as a five-piece puzzle. Once they have mastered the easy activities, you can move on to harder ones, such as a 10- or 20-piece puzzle.

Don't Compare Your Grandchildren to Other Children

Children have different talents and abilities. Celebrate each child's abilities and achievements, and pay attention to how they have improved over time. Instead of encouraging children to compete with each other, encourage them to improve their own personal best. If you want children to clean up quickly, time them with a stop watch. Say things like, "You finished in 30 seconds last time. I bet you can go even faster this time."

Ask Questions

Telling children what to do may be easier and faster, but it doesn't teach them how to accomplish things on their own. Questions can help children think about the next step or different ways to reach a goal. If your grandchildren want to build a city of blocks but don't know how to get started, you might ask them what kinds of buildings will be in their city.

Making Friends

Friends play an important role in children's development. Playing with friends helps children learn to get along with others, to negotiate when they disagree, and to share and take turns. Friends provide companionship and teach children social skills. Children who don't have friends tend to have lower self-esteem and may even feel depressed. Well-rounded children usually have one or two best friends and other casual friends.

Especially when they are new to a community and school, some children are slow to meet other children and make friends. Make sure your grandchildren have opportunities to get to know other children their age. Structured activities, such as sports or drama, can be a good way to meet people who share their interests. Be sure your grandchildren have some unstructured time for free play with friends. If they don't have anyone to play with in the neighborhood, invite children from their school over for play dates, or go to a local park or playground.

What makes a good friend? Children, like adults, look for certain qualities when choosing friends. Here are some of most common qualities that make a good friend:

- Is this child fun to be with? (sense of humor, ready to play, has ideas for play)
- Is this child trustworthy? (honest, loyal, reliable)
- Do we influence each other in ways that I like? (cooperative, responsive)
- Does this child help me achieve my goals? (helpful, ready to get involved)
- Does this child make me feel good about myself? (kind, likes me, respects me)

If your grandchildren are having difficulty making friends, think about which of these qualities they have. When you ask yourself these questions, are any of the answers "no"? If so, these may be specific skills that you can work on together.

If your grandchildren have trouble cooperating, for example, you can play games that require turn taking or sharing. If your grandchildren have trouble keeping their cool, you might practice

smiling, making a joke, or counting to 10 when something is upsetting. Talk about what makes a good friend, and read children's books about making friends. Above all, be patient—making friends takes time.

In Summary

You can help your grandchildren succeed in school. Help them learn how to manage homework. Teach them to value themselves and to recognize their own talents and abilities. Set up opportunities for them to make friends with other children, and be patient as they learn to become good friends themselves. The most important thing to remember is that children need to feel capable and lovable. When children feel sure of themselves, they can achieve almost anything!

References

- Chen, G. (2022). *Parental involvement is key to student success*. Public School Review. Retrieved July 1, 2022, from <https://www.publicschoolreview.com/blog/parental-involvement-is-key-to-student-success>
- Dewar, G. (2020). *How to help kids make friends: 12 evidence-based tips*. Parenting Science. Retrieved July 1, 2022, from <https://parentingscience.com/kids-make-friends/>
- Edwards, O. W. (2018). School perceptions of children raised by grandparents. *Journal of Applied School Psychology*, 34(1), 86–100. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15377903.2017.1403401>
- Jones, D. E., Greenberg, M., & Crowley, M. (2015). Early social-emotional functioning and public health: The relationship between kindergarten social competence and future wellness. *American Journal of Public Health*, 105, 2283–2290. <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2015.302630>
- Miller, H. (2018). *Homework help for reluctant children*. Harvard Graduate School of Education. Retrieved July 1, 2022, from <https://www.gse.harvard.edu/news/uk/18/10/homework-help-reluctant-children>
- Orenstein, A. (n.d.). *Homework without tears: 12 homework tips for parents*. MIND Research Institute. Retrieved July 1, 2022, from <https://blog.mindresearch.org/blog/bid/396559/homework-without-tears-12-tips-tricks>
- Sancassiani, F., Pintus, E., Holte, A., Paulus, P., Moro, M. F., Cossu, G., Angermeyer, M. C., Carta, M. G., & Lindert, J. (2015). Enhancing the emotional and social skills of the youth to promote their wellbeing and positive development: A systematic review of universal school-based randomized controlled trials. *Clinical Practice & Epidemiology in Mental Health*, 11(Suppl 1, M2), 21–40. <https://doi.org/10.2174/1745017901511010021>
- Sudderth, A. (2022). *The relationship between parental and family involvement and student success: How to engage and involve families for student success*. XQ. Retrieved July 1, 2022, from <https://xqsuperschool.org/rethinktogether/relationship-between-parental-and-family-involvement-and-academic-achievement/>