



By Elizabeth Swartz
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The Parent Connection

A Monthly Newsletter for Parents

Reorganization Nation

Fall's the time for families to prepare for the year ahead

Reorganization is expected every so often at work, whether you work in an office, factory or publishing house. Why should home be any different? School is going to start soon and activities will increase, so why not prepare ahead of time? Everyone plans for new school clothes, sneakers and lunch boxes, but what about planning for family life changes?

Family meeting time

Sit down with everyone in the house. Allow plenty of time for everybody to talk about their goals for the school year and the kinds of support they might need from the family. Some topics you might discuss are bedtimes, needed study supplies, preferred lunches,

rides to and from extracurricular activities and what sports and other activities the kids would like to participate in. What are your expectations, as parents for academic achievements? What about attendance and homework requirements? This is an ideal time to get it all out in the open – what is expected and how to best achieve it.

Let the kids know that you are there to help them achieve their goals, and then prove it by setting aside time each evening to go over papers from the day as well as homework. If there isn't any homework, then read together for that time. Gather notebooks and assignment books and prepare the study area. Start the new bedtime and mealtime schedule a week before school starts.

Treat the beginning of the school year as something really important, and your children will notice. If it seems important to you, it will be that much more important to them.

Meet the Teacher

Take time to get to know – and offer your help to – your child's teacher

The best time to meet your child's new teacher is at the beginning of the year. Many schools will offer Meet the Teacher nights even before the first day of school. Stop in and introduce yourself. Talk about your line of work and offer your expertise as a class guest or a volunteer reader for later in the year.

Look around the room so you'll have a mental image when your child is talking about his or her day.

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Books to Share

Start the school year by sharing these winning titles with your child.

If You Take a Mouse to School by Laura Joffe Numeroff (Laura Geringer Books, 2002). This takes an already popular mouse into the school setting.

Biscuit Goes To School by Alyssa Satin Capucilli (HarperCollins, 2002). A fun introduction to a school day by following a mischievous puppy.

Almost Gone: The World's Rarest Animals by Steve Jenkins (HarperTrophy, 2006). A nonfiction book for beginning readers about endangered animals.

Amazing Snakes! by Sarah L. Thomson (HarperCollins, 2006). A nonfiction easy reader with awesome photos.

The New Kid at School by Kate McMullan (Grosset & Dunlap, 2003). The first book in the "Dragon Slayer's Academy" series. It's a beginning chapter book in the realm of fantasy.

Lance Armstrong: Cyclist by Michael Benson (Ferguson, 2003). An engaging biography with wonderful photographs.

Field Trips from Home

1) Take the whole family for a drive around the school district. Show the kids all the schools, the playing fields and the administrative buildings. Go to some games and programs. Help your kids make the district theirs.

2) Take everyone to the local library. Sign up for library cards. Explore the collection and familiarize yourselves with hours and library policies. Let the kids know they'll be going there to work on homework. Meet the librarians.

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Meet the Teacher *continued from previous page*

Ask about the goals and expectations of the teacher for your child this year. Yes, there are the standardized tests, but what else? Is this the year your child will learn cursive handwriting, or that the times tables will be taught? Are there things you can be working on at home, like keyboarding (typing) skills?

Computer skills at home

Many schools across the country are doing away with teaching keyboarding. There are many reasons, but the main arguments are that it's a waste of time to teach keyboarding when so many children come to school with habits too hard to break. Many children come to school with computer skills, yet, keyboarding isn't one of them.

In order to write quickly and smoothly, whether it be in a creative writing class or while doing research, knowing where the keys are can save a lot of time. Perhaps it would be wise to get a basic keyboarding software package for home use. Most of them are based on games that the kids love to play, anyway. This skill is a good one to learn at the beginning of the year when workloads are lightest. Ask the teacher what he or she recommends about teaching keyboarding at home.

"Radical Math"

How math is taught in today's classrooms

When the NCTM (National Council of Teachers of Mathematics) introduced their standards, helping kids do math at home got confusing. Before 1989, elementary mathematics was largely computation. Solving rote problems was the standard, along with learning math facts like multiplication tables.

Computation is still taught in grades K-6, but with added information. From the very beginning of kindergarten, children now talk

Websites for Parents

- 1) www.preventchildabductionvideo.com shows a four-minute preview of an interactive video produced to prevent child abduction.
- 2) www.parentsasteachers.org features the latest recommendations in children's health and education.
- 3) www.guysread.com a website started by award-winning author Jon Scieszka, offers reading suggestions for the boys of all ages in your family.

about options for solving a problem before they tackle it. "Children must learn to use math skills to reduce a complex situation into something they can sort out," says Barbara J. Reys, professor of mathematics at the University of Missouri. "The more comfortable they are in analyzing the data, the better the decisions they'll make."

A "tremendous life skill"

The ability to solve problems is a "tremendous life skill" that has a much broader application than school mathematics, according to NCTM's past president Cathy Seeley. In learning to problem-solve, kids learn about cause and effect as well as about the consequences of actions.

When helping with math, ask your child what options are available for solving the problem. Why would they choose one option over another? When students can explain how and why they are solving a problem, it solidifies their understanding and confidence in the process.

Math is something young people will use in their futures to make all sorts of purchases. Computation is still an important part of mathematics education. It encompasses much more today because our students need to know what to do with all that arithmetic. A formula only comes in handy when you know where and how to use it. ▼

Skill-Builders at Home

1) **Sponge Math** – This is a fun way to practice math facts and skills, as well as artistic expression. Get some new sponges and cut them into fun shapes. Prepare several small dishes with a different color tempera paint in each. Use large paper and ask your child to demonstrate what 3 purple stars plus 4 purple stars equals. Have sponge shapes for +, – and = symbols.

2) **Foamy Speller** – This activity will help to review spelling words with lots of fun. Spray some shaving cream or whipped cream on a small area of the counter. Say the word that your child is to write in the foam. Take turns!

3) **You Read to Me, I'll Read to You** – Before bed and in waiting rooms or cars, have a book ready that your child can read. Take turns each reading a page.

4) **Calendar Countdown** – Give each child his or her own calendar to hang in his or her workspace. Help mark down gym days, library days, test days, etc. How many weeks until the project is due? What is the date of next Friday? etc. Update often.

5) **Tangram Time** – Get a set of tangrams at a bookstore or anywhere educational activities for kids are sold. Spend time together playing with shapes and spatial concepts. This will strengthen math skills in many different realms.