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Help kids study better

Playing to your children's skills can help them study without even realizing it

By Sharon Aschaiek, Special to QMI Agency

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For students who struggle in school, the thought of returning this fall can be downright daunting. But with the right attitude and strategies, we can help our kids develop superior study skills and succeed at school.



With the right attitude and strategies, we can help our kids develop superior study skills and succeed at school. (Mike Hensen/QMI Agency)

"We can teach our kids how to learn, and give them the gift of coming from a family that respects learning," says Rick Bavaria, a 40-year education professional and senior vice-president for education outreach at Sylvan Learning.

Learn their learning style

You need to know how your child learns best before you can effectively help them build good study habits, Bavaria says.

Some children are visual learners who absorb material through flash cards, whiteboards or videos, or by using different-coloured highlighters or sticky notes in their textbooks, he says.

Oral learners may benefit most from exercises or lectures in audio format, or by talking about their assignments, he says.

Kinaesthetic learners, he says, are motivated by motion, and may need to do homework through games or physical exercises.

Respect their routine

Some kids may be more effective doing their homework right after school, he says, while others may need to expend some energy and eat dinner before starting.

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Regarding setting, some kids may do better alone in their room, he says, while others may need to be supervised at the kitchen table.

Whatever their routine, Bavaria says, most important is to have a good one, and stick to it.

"Routine gives children security and makes them confident, and the first step to school success is confidence," he says.

Help them organize

Kids who are poorly organized have difficulty developing strong study skills, Bavaria says.

Parents can help children create a study space equipped with all schoolwork essentials such as their computer, notebooks and pens, he says.

Likewise, he says, they can support them in tracking school deadlines and activities—for young children, it might be a playful paper calendar or day planner; for tweens and teens, a digital organizer.

Also, he says, parents should encourage kids to have a classmate as a "study buddy" for preparing for tests together, reviewing assignments and celebrating achievements.

Add family and fun

Family involvement and innovative ideas makes learning fun and keeps kids motivated, Bavaria says.

For a young child struggling with writing, he suggests a family journal, to which every family member contributes a couple of sentences every day.

For students in kindergarten to Grade 8, programs like Book Adventure (www.bookadventure.com), a free reading motivation program, lets kids earn points and rewards for doing something that they already enjoy.

For older kids, the fun comes from more mature rewards, or celebrating academic victories with their parents

"We need to celebrate when our kids succeed," Bavaria says, "whether it's by spending extra time with them, extending their curfew, or even giving money, if it's done sensibly."

Study style

To strengthen your child's study habits, you need to know their individual learning style.

Rick Bavaria of Sylvan Learning suggests using the Learning Channel Preference Checklist, an assessment tool for determining if one is visual, auditory or kinaesthetic learner. To access the test, visit www.way2go.com.

Teen-approved reading material

If your teens are enthusiastic about reading, but not necessarily diving into the textbooks, encourage their interest with Indigo's first-ever Teen Read Awards, a celebration of popular books from across the generations. Fans can vote on their favourites at www.teenreadawards.ca and become eligible for daily prizes. Some picks from the categories, the winners of which will be awarded in a ceremony on September 25, include:

The Catcher in the Rye by J.D. Salinger - Best All Time Fave

Push by Sapphire - Best Book-to-Flick

Before I Fall by Lauren Oliver - Best New Writer

The Carrie Diaries by Candace Bushnell - Best Villain

For the Wine by Cory Doctorow - Best Canadian Read

Shadowland by Alyson Noel - Best Read

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