Success at School Starts At Home

You set the example for your children. Let your children know that you are just as proud of their reading and art skills as their sports achievements.

Once school starts parents start thinking about ways to get their kids to do their homework. One way to success in school and life is to raise children in a home friendly to learning and reading. That is not as scary as it sounds.

Routines:
One of the most important things children can do, to do well in school, is have a routine. There should be a consistent bedtime and get up time. Meals should be at a regular time. There should be chores for everyone from the age of 2 up. Even toddlers can help pick up their toys. You might want to be more lax in the summer, but you don’t want there to be no routine. In fact research shows that bedtime should stay consistent for adults as well as children.

Bedtime:
Most of our kids are not getting enough sleep. For that matter most parents aren’t either. When we sleep our brain practices the things we learn throughout the day. If we want our kids to learn, we need to help them by encouraging them to get enough sleep.
- The average preschooler needs 10–11 hours of sleep per night plus a nap.
- Average elementary students need 10 hours/night.
- Adolescents and teenagers need 9.25 hrs.
- The average adult needs 7-8 hours.

Quiet Place:
Make sure children have a quiet place where they can read, draw, do homework, and other quiet activities. The space does not have to be fancy. It should have few distractions, enough space to spread out homework without being in someone else’s way, and with good light to avoid eye strain.

Reading Can Be a Pleasure- Not a Chore:
Parents want their kids to read so they say things like, “It’s time to do your reading now;” or “turn off the TV and read a book!” Comments like these make reading sound like a chore.

Reading is Not Just From Books. Have your kids cook or bake by following a recipe. This involves reading, as well as math, and science, and they get to eat the results. Reading comics is still reading. Do your kids see you reading the newspaper, magazines or books? When they see you reading, they will see reading as a lifelong pleasure and not a chore.

Read Together: Read the newspaper together and talk about an article that interests you or them. It doesn’t have to be the front page. It could be a sports story or from the lifestyle section. If they are reading content on the computer, they are still reading.

Follow Kids’ Interests: When it comes to choice of books your child reads, of course you want them to read the required reading, but also make sure that they get to read books of subjects that interest them. Boys often like books about real people, sports, adventure, and how things work. Some boys really like to read manuals to learn how things work. Girls tend to like books about relationships and fantasy. The Harry Potter series is usually enjoyed by boys and girls alike.

Writing and Texting:
Today, many kids are writing; just not in the format we parents are familiar. They are probably texting and tweeting instead of writing letters. It is difficult to express yourself in a Twitter of only 140 characters. If you don’t know how, to text or tweet, ask your children. It does great things for your children’s self esteem when they are able to show you how to do something. This also gives them the message that everyone learns all the time, not just in school.

One caution about texting and tweeting: kids still need to learn to compose grammatically correct sentences. Encourage them to write a letter to family or to a company. Writing this letter does not have to be with paper and pen. It is fine to type and email; just make sure that it is not full of abbreviations and emoticons that are part of texting shorthand.

Limit Screen Time:
A highly literate home is one in which the TV is not on for more than a couple of hours a day. Children and adults should limit their screen time in front of the computer, video games, or phone screen, talking or texting.

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Parents & Kids Always Have Difficulty Communicating

Simple rules can make it easier.

Parents think their kids have it too easy. They don’t understand the slang their kids use. Kids think their parents don’t listen, or they can’t possibly understand.

Some families have smoother communications between parents and their children. In these homes there is very little yelling, fewer slammed doors, and although the parents and their children don’t always agree, they can talk things through. How do they do it? There are a few simple rules to follow that make communication easier.

Respect: If you want to get respect from your kids you have to give them respect. Kids talk to their parents and their siblings the way their parents talk to them.

Swearing: Parents should never swear at their kids. Kids shouldn’t swear at their parents either and it is less likely that they will do so if they don’t hear it from their parents. Swearing shuts down the other person’s ability to listen.

Make Time: Most families spend less than 3 minutes a day actually talking to their kids. Most of the communication between parents and kids is about homework, chores, and other discipline matters. We need to make time in our busy schedules to spend time with our kids. Put down the cell phone, turn off the TV, and get off the computer.

Mealtime Conversation: Eat meals together as a family. It doesn’t have to be every day, but families who eat together on a regular basis are more likely to talk to each other. Other benefits of family meals are that kids are more likely to do better in school and get in less trouble if their parents pass on values over table conversations. This should not be a lecture time, but if you talk to your kids about things that are going on in their lives and in the community, they are able to tell how you feel about behavior. So turn off the TV and talk to your family.

Listening: Listen more than you talk. Believe it or not, parents do not have all the answers. Parents have the final say, but they need to listen to their kid’s point of view to get the whole story. As they get into the teens years this becomes even more important because you want your kids to be able to think through decisions they make away from you. If you have never given them a chance to think through alternatives, or argue their point of view with you, how can they make good decisions when you are not around?

Using Technology: Most young people today spend more time texting than talking. Texting is a great tool for staying in touch. It is not a tool for problem solving. Do use it to check in with them, to say where you are, or to find out where they are. It can be used to ask short questions, or to ask them to run small errands. They are less likely to ignore a text than a phone call.

Pilikia: When your child gets in trouble, listen to their side and then problem solve with them about how to handle the situation better the next time. When you yell at them, ground them, or take their side, they won’t learn the lesson to avoid the same mistake. They just learn not to get caught. Don’t try to solve their problems for them. The best thing to do is listen.

Fun: By all means have fun with your kids. When families do fun things together, whether it is going to the beach, for a hike, playing board games, or watching a funny movie, they draw closer together. If you have fun with your kids, you are more likely to talk to them, and they are more likely to talk to you.

For More Information:
How to Talk so Kids will Listen & Listen so Kids will Talk, by Adele Faber & Elaine Mazlish

Grounded for Life?!...Communicating with Your Teenager, by Louise Felton Tracy, M.S

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Helping Our Kids Deal with Their Feelings

One of the best indicators of how successful a child will be in school, as well as in life, is how well they are able to understand and manage their feelings.

Think about how you express your own emotions. Are you a good role model for your children?

This ability to be emotionally grounded is called having good ‘emotional intelligence.’ Children who have good emotional intelligence may not be the most outgoing in the group, but they are the ones who know how to get along well with others. This is often defined as having good people skills. They usually grow up to be successful because they know how to be a good employee, a good team player, as well as a good boss.

Some children are born with good emotional intelligence, but for most people it is something that we learn from our parents, teachers, and other important adults in our lives.

This may be the most important skill that we teach our children.

It may even be more important than reading and writing. If we have good social emotional competence, than we can learn to read and write.

Five Easy Pieces of Good People Skills

Peter Salovey, a Yale psychologist, looked at five domains of emotional intelligence:

1. Knowing one’s emotions. Being able to recognize a feeling as it is happening
2. Managing emotions. Being able to manage these emotions in a socially acceptable manner.
3. Motivating oneself. Being able to use feelings to accomplish a task, whether paying attention in school, or being able to wait to merge in traffic.
4. Recognizing emotions in others. Empathy
5. Handling relationships. Being able to manage not only our own emotions but also being able to manage other people’s emotions.

Self Control

A study was recently completed with Head Start programs which showed that teaching children about self control was just as important as learning about shapes, colors, numbers and the alphabet.

Being able to have self control is critical to being able to listen and pay attention.

These researchers found that there were not only fewer behavior issues in the classrooms where self control techniques were taught, but that these same children also scored higher on school readiness screenings.

Boys and Girls are Different:

Males and females process and respond to emotions differently. Females usually respond to emotions verbally and are more likely to talk about how they are feeling. Males tend to respond to emotions physically, either by acting out or shutting down.

For More Information:

A good resource is the book Emotional Intelligence by Daniel Goleman.

Tips for Parents

How do we teach social emotional skills? Remember the words we always heard in school, “Use your words?” For young children, and especially young boys, that is sometimes difficult to do. We need to teach them to calm themselves down first, and then teach them what words to use. There is a great technique for teaching young children. See: www.vanderbilt.edu/csfei/familytools/teaching_emotions.pdf

Listening is Key: With older children and teens it is important that we listen to them and not react to the words they use. Instead we should listen to their feelings. Adolescents and teens tend to shout and use profanity when they are feeling frustrated, angry, or even sad. As caring adults we must listen to the emotion behind the words.

Getting In Touch with Your Feelings

A good exercise to get everyone in touch with their feelings is to have everyone describe how their body feels when they are happy or calm, angry or frustrated. Then go on to all the emotions you can think of during these moods. When you know how your body feels when you have a strong emotion, then it is easier to then express it in an appropriate manner.

- Teach your children to take deep breaths
- Go outside and run it off
- Jump up on down on the trampoline
- Hit a punching bag
- Talk about it
- Listen to music
- It is ok to cry.

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The Teen Brain: Helping Teens Make Good Choices

Since their brains do not fully developed until their early-to-mid 20's, you must act as their executive brain.

Have you ever asked your middle schooler or high schooler why they did something and they give you a blank look, and say “I don’t know.”? Is your adolescent child’s room a total disaster? Does your teenager have a difficult time getting out of bed in the morning? If you answered yes to any of these questions, your teenager is normal!

One of the things that happen around the time of adolescence, usually between ages 11 to 13, depending on the child, is that the frontal lobe of their brain has a huge growth spurt. The frontal lobe is the executive functioning area of our brain. Scientists now believe that the brain is not fully developed until we are in our early 20’s if female and mid 20’s if male.

The functions of the frontal lobes:

- Organization of multiple tasks
- Impulse control
- Self control
- Setting priorities
- Setting goals
- Making sound judgments
- Planning ahead
- Empathy
- Changing behavior as the situation changes

What is Happening Inside Their Brain?

A major thing that is going on in the brain during this time is called myelination. Myelin is the coating around the neurons, similar to the coating you see on the electrical wires in your house. The more myelin the faster the connections are completed. The last part of the brain to complete this process is the frontal lobes.

The teen’s emotional center matures sooner than the frontal lobes. Therefore teens react, rather than think about consequences. They say the first thing that pops into their head without thinking about how it makes the other person feel.

If it seems like fun to engage in risky behavior, they may not think about the long term consequences.

Another thing that happens during this period is the teen’s circadian rhythms get out of whack. They stay awake until 11 PM, or later, and their normal waking would be around 9 or 10 AM. Add to that most teens have cell phones, computers, video games, iPods and any number of other activities to keep them up and few teens are getting the 9.25 hours of sleep the experts say they require.

Resources:

- Yes, Your Teen is Crazy! Michael J. Bradley, Ed.D.
- Talking to Tweens Elizabeth Hartley-Brewer
- Staying Connected to Your Teenager Michael Riera, Ph.D.
- Why do They Act That Way? David Walsh, Ph.D.

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What Do Parents Need to Do?

Only a Few Rules:

You must act as you teen’s executive brain. Set very clear, reasonable rules that you can enforce. For example:

- You need to set a reasonable curfew;
- You need to have very clear rules about not driving with other teens in the car;
- They have to let you know where they are going.

They won’t like any of these rules, but the decision making center of their brain is not developed and they need you to make these decisions for them.

Getting Enough Sleep:

Sleep is crucial for learning, health and stress management. Make sure that your child is getting sleep. Have them remove portable electronic equipment from their room by 10 PM, (even if they paid for them). You cannot guarantee that they will sleep, but by limiting their access to portable electronics, they will be more likely to go to sleep earlier. Let them sleep-in on weekends. Their bodies are trying to make up for their sleep deprivation and it is better that they recover.

Breakfast is Important!

Try to get them to eat breakfast, especially one that includes protein. Protein is necessary for the developing brain and will help them learn better at school.

Avoid Caffeine.

Try to avoid providing them with caffeinated drinks, especially in the afternoon. Because most kids are sleep deprived, they will try to keep themselves awake with high sugar, high caffeine energy drinks, soda or coffee house drinks. These drinks in the afternoon contribute to their difficulty sleeping.

Focus on the Important Battles.

Does it really matter if their room is messy, or if they tend to sometimes act like they left their brain somewhere, if they are going to school, getting decent grades, coming home on time, and staying away from drugs and alcohol?

Parent Tips by the Ho ‘āla Hou Project, Pacific American Foundation, ‘Reawakening Parent Involvement’ April 2009
Tips for Parents

Your Unborn Child Drinks With You

By Kathy Bentley, Parent Educator

Often the most harm is done when Moms drink very early in pregnancy, even before she knows she is pregnant.

Despite attempts to increase public awareness of the risks involved, increasing numbers of women are drinking during pregnancy.

Some doctors say moderate drinking during pregnancy is okay, but many others now believe taking even one drink is putting your baby's long term health and success in life at risk.

One thing is clear, if you are pregnant and take a drink -- one glass of wine, one beer or one mixed drink -- your unborn child takes the same drink. Whatever you eat or drink while you are pregnant goes directly through your bloodstream into the placenta.

Some children are more susceptible than others to the effects of alcohol exposure, namely, those whose mothers are older than 30 years, those whose mothers have alcohol dependence, those whose parents provide a less stimulating environment, and those whose mothers reported drinking during the time of conception. For those children, there are strongly negative effects of alcohol exposure on verbal IQ and working memory, both important for learning and success in school.

Researchers have found that alcohol use by mom in the first trimester of pregnancy significantly increases their child’s chance of becoming an alcoholic. Drinking alcohol in the 3rd trimester inhibits the growth of baby’s brain. There is a direct correlation between the size of the brain surface and IQ. For the unborn child, the alcohol interferes with his ability to get enough oxygen and nourishment for normal cell development in the brain and other body organs.

Therefore, if you are thinking about becoming pregnant, or if you are having unprotected sex, stop drinking now for the good of your keiki.

No Big Deal, or Danger for Keiki?

Infants born to mothers who drink during pregnancy can have serious problems. Research has shown that a developing fetus has very little tolerance for alcohol.

For those who might think drinking during pregnancy is no big deal, here is a partial list of the potential problems their newborns could be facing as a result:

- Small body size and weight
- Slower than normal development and failure to "catch up."
- Nearsightedness
- Failure of eyes to move in same direction
- Heart defects or heart murmurs
- Faulty arrangement of brain cells and connective tissue
- Mental retardation -- occasionally severe
- Learning disabilities
- Short attention span
- Irritability in infancy
- Hyperactivity in childhood
- Poor body, hand, and finger coordination

Missouri Department of Mental Health, Division of Alcohol and Drug Abuse

60% of drug or alcohol exposed children end up in jail as teenagers or adults.

Today, fetal alcohol exposure remains the leading known preventable cause of mental retardation.

Prenatal alcohol exposure may lead to poor academic performance as well as legal and employment difficulties in adolescence and adulthood.

Attention problems have been considered a hallmark of prenatal alcohol exposure. Consequently, Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) is often incorrectly diagnosed as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and treated inappropriately.

Researchers found that children with ADHD exhibited difficulty focusing and sustaining attention over time. In contrast, children who were exposed to alcohol prenatally were able to focus and maintain attention, but displayed difficulty in shifting attention from one task to another.

For More Information see:
http://minnesota.publicradio.org/display/project_display.php?proj_identifier=2007/09/05/jud

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Parenting Tips by the Pacific American Foundation, Ho‘ala Hou Project ‘Reawakening Parent Involvement’
Mixed Martial Arts: Good for Kids or Too Dangerous?

By Kathy Bentley, Parent Educator

Mixed Martial Arts has been steadily gaining in popularity in the past few years. It has moved from pay-per-view to network television to YouTube. Disturbingly, kids as fighters are a growing trend.

What is concerning to many parents and service agency professionals are the fights being staged in parking lots and other sites with no rules, no supervision, and no one to stop them when they become too dangerous. Some parents are even encouraging their children to fight; they are often the ones filming the fights and putting them on YouTube.

Many proponents of Mixed Martial Arts say that it is better to have kids involved in this sport than sitting around playing video games. While it is good for kids to be involved in an activity that requires them to move their bodies; the fights shown on YouTube or taking place in people’s back yards are unsupervised and are not what the proponents are advocating.

Mixed Martial Arts fights may appear to be all out scrapping, but professionals train and are experts in a variety of martial arts like wrestling, kick boxing, jujitsu, and karate.

Tips for Parents:

- First talk to your child; ask them if there are fights in your neighborhood. Your child may not admit that they have attended fights, but they will know about them. Talk to them about the dangers. Tell them straight out that you do not want them to participate.

- If you child is interested in the sport, look for classes they can attend. Many gyms now offer programs, which will teach children skills, and emphasize that these skills should only be used in the ring under supervision.

- In classes, make sure your child will be wearing protective headgear, shin guards, groin protection, and padded martial arts gloves. The floor should have padding as well.

- Teach your child that just like other forms of fighting, mixed martial arts should not happen in a parking lot, schoolyard, or any other unsupervised place.

- If your student is feeling bullied, or threatened, notify their school and teach them how to ask for help from other adults in the area. Tell them to leave if they see a fight break out, notify an authority if they hear of a pending fight, and encourage them to call the police if they see fights going on. Your child may be saving another child from serious injury or even death.

- Many fighters have had run-ins with the law for aggressive behavior, abuse of a family member, assault, and other crimes. Talk to you child about their choice of role models.

- Help your child learn better problem solving skills.
Dangers for Young, Developing Bodies
What are some of the dangers of mixed martial arts for developing bodies? A person’s brain continues to develop into their early 20’s. The pre-frontal lobe, which contains the executive functioning of our brain, is what allows us to be organized, make good decisions and think about consequences of our actions. This part of the brain is not fully developed until around 23 or 24 years of age. An injury to this portion of the brain, while it is developing, may cause a person to have difficulty making good decisions, and can even make holding a job more challenging as they get older.

Dangers to the Brain:
Our brain is the consistency of soft tofu. The inside of our skull is full of ridges. When a child jars their head, whether taking a hard hit in football, making a header in soccer, falling while skate boarding, or especially when fighting; their brain can hit against one of these ridges and cause brain damage. This damage may not show up for years. This is why there are laws requiring children under 16 to wear helmets while bike riding, why football players must wear helmets, why young boxers wear head protection and why even adult boxers wear head protection when practicing.

NOT the Pros, continued:

- The bluster building up to a professional match is for show, the contestants actually have a great deal of respect for the other’s skills. -Neighborhood fights are often designed to settle a beef between students.

- In a professional match the fighters are matched based on size and weight. A fighter is only allowed to fight someone within their weight class.
-Neighborhood fights have no such restrictions.

- In a supervised match each round is only three minutes and each fighter has time to go to their corner and regain their focus as well as to be checked over to make sure they are still ok to fight.
- Most neighborhood fights have no time limit.

- There are moves which are not allowed in professional fights such as;
  - No hits to the back of the neck or head.
  - No groin kicks.
  - No head butting.
- In most neighborhood fights anything goes, and the bloodier the better.

Neighborhood Fights are NOT the Pros:

- During a Mixed Martial Arts competition there is always a judge and doctor on site who can stop the match at any time.
- During neighborhood fights there is rarely anyone around to stop the fight and there are no medical professionals to determine if someone has sustained a concussion or worse.

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