

Developing Habits to Succeed in School

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Can developing good habits help your kids succeed in school? Yes! Habits are powerful patterns of behavior that automatically unfold in certain situations. By establishing helpful habits, your kids will have routines that support them succeeding in school.

The brain loves to establish habits because it takes less thinking and energy. For example, when your children are learning something like how to tie their shoes or drive a car, it will take all their focus to accomplish the task. Once they master it, their brains will use far less energy as the process becomes automatic.

The problem is that your child's brain is just as happy to establish healthy habits as unhealthy ones. Establishing the habit of either having cookies for snack or vegetables with dip is equally appealing to your child's brain. Given how powerful habits are, it is worth figuring out which ones will help your kids succeed in school.



Looking at How Habits Form

In [The Power of Habit: Why We Do What We Do in Life and Business](#), Charles Duhigg describes a three step process he calls the habit loop:

"First, there is a cue, a trigger that tells your brain to go into automatic mode and which habit to use. Then there is the routine, which can be physical or mental or emotional. Finally there is a reward, which helps your brain figure out if this particular loop is worth remembering for the future.

Over time, this loop - cue, routine, reward; cue, routine, reward - becomes more and more automatic. ... When a habit emerges, the brain stops fully participating in decision making. It stops working so hard, or diverts focus to other tasks. So unless you deliberately fight a habit - unless you find a new routine - the pattern will unfold automatically."

There are many things that can serve as a cue for your kids' habits:

- Hearing the alarm going off in the morning.
- Walking into the kitchen.
- Stopping in the bathroom.
- Entering the house right after coming home from school.
- Sitting down at a desk to do homework.

Any of these cues can launch a habit. Upon hearing the alarm go off, your children might have the habit of hitting the snooze button or they might have the habit of doing some stretches before getting out of bed. If they're in the habit of hitting the snooze button, they are probably able to do this without really thinking - a bit risky if they want to get up in time!

Establishing Healthy Habits that Lead to School Success

By setting up healthy habits, your kids will be automatically behaving in ways that help them succeed. Let's consider some common routines along with questions about what habits to create.

Morning routine -

- What time do your kids need to get up so that they don't feel rushed?
- What do they need to get done in the morning before leaving for school? Creating a [morning routine chart](#) can help them remember what to do so you don't have to nag.
- What [healthy breakfast food](#) would they like to have available? By the time most kids are in grade school, they can be responsible for making their own breakfast.

After school routine -

- What healthy snacks would they like to have after school?
- When and how will they get exercise?
- Where do they want to do their homework? Will they have music playing while doing homework? Will they have their cell phones on? Will they be connected to their friends online?
- How much electronic entertainment time are they allowed?
- When will [chores](#) be done?

Evening routine -

- What do they need to have done before going to bed? Will they be packing their backpack or lunch for the next day?
- When do electronics get turned off for the day and where are they stored? Kids who sleep with their cell phones, computers and video games in their rooms have more sleep disturbances.
- What time do they need to be turning out the lights to get enough sleep? Although they may not always get to sleep at this time, it's at least good to have a target.

Establishing healthy habits takes willpower and self-discipline. It's one thing to say that you'll get out of bed at 6:00 AM but it takes willpower to actually do it on a daily basis! By helping your kids establish good habits, they'll be well on their way to success in school.

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