



# Grandparents Raising Grandchildren:



## Helping Your Grandchildren Succeed in School

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All grandparents want their grandchildren to do well in school. Your grandchild doesn't have to be the smartest child in the class to succeed in school. School success requires good study skills and habits, self-confidence, and the ability to make friends. And children are much more likely to succeed in school when their families support their learning at home.

As your grandchildren start school, you may be faced with new issues. How do you support your grandchildren in doing their homework? How can you help them feel good about their ability to learn? What do you do if they have trouble making friends? Here are some basic ideas for supporting your grandchildren in school.

### **Homework Help**

Homework can be a useful tool for children's learning. The main purpose of homework is to help children practice, reinforce, or expand important skills that they learn during the school day. But many children think of homework as punishment rather than reinforcement.

How can you reduce homework headaches? When adults nag children to get their homework done, children look for ways to put it off—and the whole process of doing homework can become a power struggle. Don't encourage your grandchildren to develop a negative attitude about homework! Here are some ways to keep homework time from becoming a battleground.

- ***Set a consistent quiet time for homework.*** Setting an established "homework time" helps your grandchildren understand that homework is a priority. Having an established time also 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 have. Younger children usually need less time than older children. Make it clear that the children are expected to complete their homework during the quiet time. If children don't have any homework one night, you might encourage them to spend that 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 watch television. 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 in the floor. Choose the time and place that works best for each grandchild, even if they end up doing homework at different times. And you can make occasional exceptions to the homework routine. If a special school event happens during "homework time," you can 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

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water, or even take a short walk. But pay attention to how often children take breaks. Most elementary-age children can work for 15-30 minutes before needing a break, and most older children can concentrate for at least 30-45 minutes. If children are taking breaks every few minutes, they may be trying to put off an assignment.

• ***Help children complete one or two examples, but not every question.*** Many adults

struggle to decide how much help to give children. Keep in mind that many teachers use homework to judge whether children have learned the material. It's fine to work through a question or two with your grandchild, but make sure that he's doing most of the work himself. When your grandchild turns in homework done correctly, the teacher assumes that he understands how to do it. If you're doing the homework for your grandchild, he won't necessarily know how to do it at school, when you're not there to help.

• ***Help your grandchildren organize for long-term projects.*** Science projects and term

papers cannot be done overnight. But many children don't know how to break a large assignment down into manageable steps; and 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. 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 or dance lessons, clubs, and art classes may be too much for a child to do 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. And be sure your grandchildren have some free time to simply relax and play.

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• ***Consider hiring a tutor.*** Do you get irritated when your grandchild has trouble with a math assignment? Are your grandchildren asking for your help on schoolwork you don't remember how to do? You don't have to handle all homework struggles by yourself. 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 your grandchildren in areas where they need a little extra help. Your grandchild's teacher or someone from the neighborhood could recommend a good tutor. Having a tutor may also reduce tensions around homework in your family.

• ***Use a non-threatening approach.*** React calmly when your grandchildren make mistakes in their homework assignments. Instead of saying, "That's wrong; here's the right answer," ask how they got the answer. When they explains their thinking process, they may catch their own mistakes. And 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.

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- **Get to know your grandchildren's teachers.**

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



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.

Remember that 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.

- **Be alert for special learning needs.** If your grandchild regularly has problems with homework in one area, but does well in other areas, talk to the teacher. Your grandchild may just need extra practice in the problem area, but it's also possible that the child has a special learning need. Your grandchild's teacher is trained to spot any special needs your grandchild may have. If the teacher suspects that your grandchild has a special learning need, he 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 help you and your grandchild tackle barriers to school success.

- **Consult the school counselor about problems.** Your grandchildren's school probably has a counselor available to help them 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 schoolwork. If your grandchildren's parent doesn't show up for a scheduled visit, for

### 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 to have! Your grandchildren are more likely to do well, both academically and socially, if they feel confident about themselves.

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. How can you help your grandchildren feel confident that they can succeed in school? Here are some

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ways to help your grandchildren build their self-confidence.

- **Encourage your grandchildren to try new things.** Help them find activities that they enjoy. Encourage them to take small steps toward mastering something new. Help them see the small ways that they are succeeding. If your grandchild is taking art lessons, point out the new shapes that he has learned to draw or the colors he created.

- **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. Say things like, "You worked really hard to paint that picture."

- **Make sure activities are age-appropriate.** Choose activities that are just challenging enough for children to learn something new, but not so difficult that they will become frustrated because they can't finish. Give children chances to feel successful. Know your grandchildren's abilities, and pick activities that fit them. Start with easier activities, such as a 5-piece puzzle. Once she has mastered the easy activities, you can move on to harder ones, such as a 20-piece puzzle.

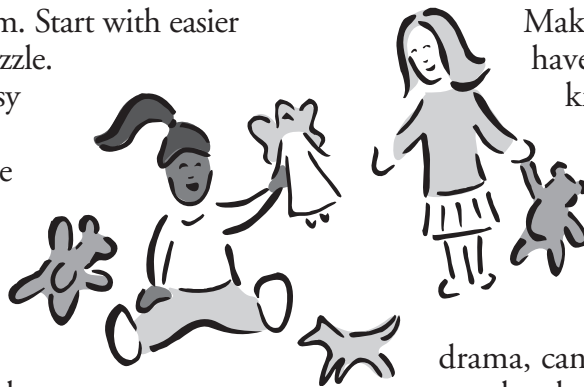
- **Don't compare your grandchild to other children.** Children have different talents and abilities. Celebrate each child's abilities and achievements, and pay attention to how they have improved over time. Instead of encouraging children to

compete with each other, encourage them to improve their "personal best." If you want children to clean up quickly, for example, 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 leading 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

Having friends plays 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. Most well-adjusted children have one or two best friends and several casual friends.



Make sure your grandchildren have opportunities to get to know other children their age. Especially when they are new to a community and school, some children are slow to make friends. Structured activities, such as sports or drama, can be a good way to meet people who share their interests. And be sure that your grandchildren have some unstructured time for free play with friends. If they don't have anyone to play with

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in the neighborhood, invite children from their school over for “play dates,” or go to a local 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 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 grandchild is having difficulty making friends, you might think about which of these qualities she has. 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 grandchild has trouble cooperating, for example, you can play games that require turn taking or talk about sharing. If your grandchild has trouble keeping his cool, practice smiling, making a joke, or counting to ten 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 have the tools they need to 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!

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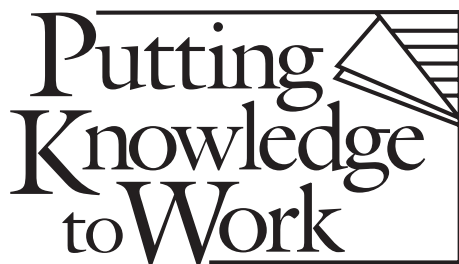
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