

Learning Coach Series

Module 3

Teach and practice good habits of learning.

Introduction

People who learn to study effectively and efficiently follow routines that work for them. They learn to reduce distraction, monitor their own understanding of the content, and track their own progress.

Practicing what you are learning is a fact of life. We have to write a lot to learn to write well, we have to do math problems, we have to carry out science procedures. Whatever you call this — “homework, or “school work”—no one learns without repetition and application. Organize your home so that learning time is productive and calm. Provide a good space. Control distractions. Maintain high expectations. Helping children get learning work done must be a family priority. All family members have a part. This starts with the person who needs to do the school work, but includes parents and brothers and sisters. Here are 12 things to think about.

- 1. Maintain high expectations.** Children need to know that their parents expect them to be successful with school assignments, to learn what they are taught, and to do a good job on their school work. Every time.
- 2. Establish routines.** Make sure all children have routines for the place and time they do their homework. Those routines may be different for each child, depending on their ages and outside obligations (work, music, sports, etc.). People learn better and work more quickly when doing school work in the same place as much as possible.
- 3. Reduce distractions.** The brain can process exactly one thing at a time.³ Teach children to study without listening to music and without TV or other distractions in the background. No matter what they say! This will take the cooperation of other family members, as the TV or music must be turned off. Make sure the lighting is adequate.
- 4. Control schedules.** Protect your child’s time. Do not let your child’s life get so cluttered with other activities that there is not enough time to do school work, and enough time for relaxing. There are many positive, fun things to get involved with, and most of them are good. But being involved in too many good things can become a problem!
- 5. Support teachers.** Sometimes there is an assignment that the child (and maybe even the parent!) doesn’t agree with or think is necessary. Do not criticize or belittle an assignment. If a problem exists, work it out between adults.

6. **Don't take over!** Do not do the child's work for them! Some children need more help from you than others, and some assignments will require more of your help than others. Sometimes a fine line exists between working *with* your child and doing it for them. You may want to help your child break difficult assignments into smaller chunks or steps to help it feel more manageable (a valuable executive function).
7. **Allow breaks.** Don't be afraid to allow breaks every 15-20 minutes—not long enough to get distracted and off-task, but long enough to “re-set” the brain.
8. **Plan for difficult assignments.** What is going to happen when your child doesn't know how to do their assignment? It cannot always be, “Have mom or dad help me.” Sometimes, especially as children get older, parents cannot do the school work! Find a person that can help with math. Find someone who can help with the English and writing. Reach out to the general ed IHLA teacher when needed. Advance planning on difficult assignments is important. Working in a good study group will help with difficult assignments.
9. **Plan and organize.** This is a great time to teach and strengthen executive function. Make lists and plans for the longer, more time-consuming assignments. Help them budget time, prioritize, and be successful in small steps.
10. **Monitor neatness.** Teachers and other evaluators tend to score neat work higher than sloppy work, even when the answers are identical. They are only human. You can help your child make a habit of doing neat and tidy work, even if you don't know how to do the work yourself! Help your child build pride in doing their best.
11. **Pay special attention to writing.** It matters a lot. Every subject requires writing. We cannot learn without language. Try to constantly improve your child's use of language as you monitor school work. Pay particular attention to writing. Help your child learn to write multiple drafts. Improving writing increases achievement in every subject. Be sure you are continually reacting more to the quality of their *thoughts* and *vocabulary*, and less to their spelling and grammar. There will be time for that.
12. **Remember, repetition is at the heart of learning.** Most things that seem hard to learn can be learned with repetition.

Remember: Keep it Calm and Positive!

When the brain stops feeling safe, it stops learning.⁴

- Anger and criticism are poisonous to learning. Be encouraging. Be persistent when necessary, but always be gentle emotionally. Do not criticize, yell, or get angry.
- Find reasons to laugh and have fun together while doing school work!
- The goal is to be the coach, not the Homework Police. Your child should feel comfortable knowing you are *with* them, not *against* them.

As students get older, they should be taught how to work in study groups.

A professor was asked by the president of Harvard University to identify the single best predictor of success in university. Surprisingly, he discovered that the best predictor is “the ability of a student to either create a study group or join a study group. *Nothing else began to approach the power of that single variable in explaining success in college*” (italics added).⁵



A study group is 3-5 students taking the same course who meet together regularly to complete assignments, talk about what they are learning, and help each other prepare for tests. There is lots of good information online about how to form and use study groups.

The more people get together and talk about what they are learning, the more they learn.

**In summary, the
Big Ideas**

Module 3

Teach and practice good learning habits.

- 1.** Getting school work done is a responsibility of the entire family, not just the one who has homework! The TV may have to be turned off to reduce distraction, or one child may have to monopolize the computer to get some work done.
- 2.** Monitor neatness. You can tell if an assignment is sloppy, even if you do not understand the work.
- 3.** Pay special attention to writing. Always pay attention to writing. Encourage thoughtful writing.
- 4.** If you do not like or agree with an assignment, do not criticize the teacher in front of your child. Doing so will ALWAYS weaken your child.
- 5.** Completing school work can get frustrating! Keep it calm! Scientists have demonstrated that the brain is nearly incapable of learning when the person is angry or embarrassed.

6. Allow breaks every 15-20 minutes if needed—long enough to get a drink or a snack, but not long enough to actually change activities and start thinking about or doing something else.