

10 Parenting Tips

For School Success with Complex Kids

Helping kids achieve school success can be difficult, especially when they face complex challenges. As parents, we often don't know how to support them without doing too much for them. Here are some quick tips to help you more confidently foster your child's independence, moving towards a future of success!!

1. Get Clear on Your Role(s). As parents, we play many roles in relationship with our children, including helper, advocate, instructor, and coach. Pay attention to the different roles you tend to play, and start noticing when you use them, and how effective they tend to be. This will help you to set realistic boundaries for yourself and become aware of potential pitfalls, like helping too much or letting go too fast.

2. Don't Take Things Personally. Your child's challenges are your responsibility to support, but they are not your fault. Our kids' behaviors are the result of brain-based learning challenges and/or gaps in executive function. Focus on helping your kids learn to understand and overcome their challenges, instead of seeing their challenges as a failure of parenting. Keep the focus on them, not you.

3. Assume Best Intentions. It may not always seem like it, but our kids want to do their best in school (and in life). If they aren't meeting the mark, it's likely that something is hard for them. When you start with this perspective, you can help them see their own potential, avoid upsets and focus on problem-solving.

4. Take Aim on One Thing at a Time. "But my child has so many challenges, how can I choose just one?" you ask. It's true, there are many things to work on. But when you focus on one thing at a time, it takes the pressure off, reduces the overwhelm and allows for gradual progress. Taking Aim helps to get buy-in, see some successes, and make sustainable change for your child.

5. Keep Things Simple. We know our kids need help managing and organizing their school work. Too often we come up with systems that are wildly complex (even if they work for us) and quickly overwhelm our kids. Focus on a few strategies that make life easier, and are simple enough to manage consistently.

6. Chunk Things Down. There are over 12 steps involved in completing any homework assignment. Multiply this by the number of classes and add some extra assignments, and WOW – overwhelmed kid! Help your child break-down assignments into manageable chunks, and make sure what's needed for completion (like turning it in) is included as one of the steps.

7. Plan Brain Breaks! All brains need a break — even hyper-focused ones — more often than you might think. Encourage your kids to plan breaks, whether for snacks or a quick jog to the corner with the dog. That will help their brains stay refreshed and able to focus on the tasks at hand.

8. Personalize Routines + Structures to Each Child. Every kid and every family is different. What works for you (or your neighbor) may NOT work for your kid. Together with your child, explore ways of doing things that make sense to him, and be willing to tweak and change them until they start to work. By helping him figure out how to turn in today's homework, you are setting him up for a lifetime of self-management!

9. Advocate. Advocate. Advocate. You know your child better than anyone, and are uniquely equipped to help get effective supports and structures put in place at school. Don't assume that every teacher automatically understands your kid or her challenges. Get yourself up to speed and be willing to educate in order to advocate.

10. Know Who's on Your Team. Parenting a complex kid can be frustrating, overwhelming, and isolating. It helps everyone when you create a team of support – for you and your child. This includes team members at your child's school, outside supports and family friends. Set yourself up for success by taking care of yourself and tapping into resources to help you, so that you can really help your child.