

Helping Your Child Learn



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National Education Association**



**Parent Tips from the
Utah Education Association**

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Helping Your Child Learn

Parent Tips from the Utah Education Association

*A Message to Parents from
UEA President Kim Campbell*



Ask a parent what they think is the most important factor in school success and they are likely to say ‘a good teacher.’ Ask a teacher the same question and they will probably say school success depends on parental involvement.

While many factors contribute to a child’s success in school, research shows parental involvement is one of the most significant. Because of the critical role both parents and teachers play in a child’s education, we have asked a few of Utah’s most experienced school teachers to share tips on how parents can support the efforts of teachers in the classroom. These tips are included in this booklet and also available at www.utea.org.

By working together, parents and teachers can help children learn and make each child’s educational experience the very best it can be.



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Ready to Learn – First Day

The start of a new school year can be the beginning of a journey toward success when parents, students and teachers work together. Here are some suggestions for parents who want to help their children learn.

Start talking now about the upcoming school year and the first day of classes. Discuss what to expect on the first day – new clothes, new school supplies, seeing old friends and making new ones, new teachers and all of the new things they'll learn. Take note of how you feel about your child going off to school. If you're anxious, your child might sense your feelings.

If you're new to the area, make a visit to the school before classes begin. Talk to the teachers and administration. Walk or drive the bus route to familiarize your child with the trip to and from school. The more you both know about your school and how it operates, the more likely it is that your child will have a productive and positive school experience.

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Ready to Learn – Meeting Teachers

The start of a new school year can be the beginning of a journey toward success when parents, students and teachers work together. Here are some suggestions for parents who want to help their children learn.

Make time to meet and get to know your child's teachers. Let the teachers know that you appreciate feedback on your child's progress – both positive and negative – and that you will follow through at home. Alert teachers to medical or other problems that may affect your child's ability to learn. Make a point of meeting the principal, school secretary, bus driver, cafeteria staff and others who work at the school. The better you know the school and how it operates, the more likely your child will be to have a productive and positive school experience.

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Ready to Learn – Well Rested

By Beverlee A. Simpson, M.Ed., National Board Certified Teacher, language arts teacher at East High School, Salt Lake City

Research shows that students who are well-rested perform better in school. Elementary aged children need at least nine hours of sleep each night. Many parents may be surprised to learn that pediatricians suggest that teens get between eight and nine hours of sleep per night as well.

If your child has problems sleeping, here are some ideas that might help:

- Establish a routine. Students should go to bed and get up at the same time every day.
- Have your child avoid drinks with caffeine.
- Give your child the responsibility of going to sleep and waking up by him or herself—this builds self-reliance and confidence.
- Make your child’s bed a “sleep-only” zone. No watching TV, using the computer, or even reading in bed.
- If your child can’t fall asleep within 10-15 minutes, allow him to get up and read or write in a journal until he or she feels sleepy, once again, no TV or computer time.
- If your teen consistently stays awake until the wee hours, continue to have him or her get up at a regular time; the pattern of falling asleep earlier will eventually be established.
- Consult a pediatrician if your child has trouble sleeping for a prolonged period of time.

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Parent tips from the Utah Education Association

Ready to Learn – Attendance, Tardies and Communication

By Katherine Christiansen, sixth-grade reading, writing and social studies teacher at Cedar Ridge Middle School, Hyde Park, Utah

“Students whose parents are involved in their lives have higher graduation rates and greater enrollment rates in postsecondary education.”¹ Those students can also experience more success during their public school years. Parents can encourage success in school when they encourage and expect their child to be at school, arrive on time, and get acquainted with their teachers.

Unless students are ill, they should be in school. So much learning takes place in the classroom with the teacher that when students miss a class, they miss valuable instruction time. This instruction cannot be made up outside of school and the student’s chain of knowledge ends up with a missing link. This can cause students to become discouraged or confused. School then becomes a chore.

Excessive tardiness also contributes to failure in the classroom. Being consistently late can quickly ruin the reputation of a student. Not only does it make the student appear irresponsible, but coming late, is discourteous. Being tardy interrupts teaching time and distracts both the teacher and students in the classroom. Encourage your child to be in his/her seat ready to learn when the bell rings.

Advise your child to occasionally visit with the teachers. Teachers tend to take more interest in those students they know. Remind students to make their visits short as they share their ideas or thoughts.

With just a few tips on proper conduct at school, your child can become a positive force in the classroom.

¹*A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievements 2002.*

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Ready to Learn – Study Time

The start of a new school year can be the beginning of a journey toward success when parents, students and teachers work together. Here are some suggestions for parents who want to help their children learn.

Set aside time for studying every night. Discuss with your child what time of day would work best. Right after school? Just before dinner? Before bedtime? Adjust the schedule as needed to accommodate extra-curricular activities. If your child attends an after-school program, find out if students will be expected to do homework there. If your child completes homework assignments away from home, plan to review the work together every night. If there is no homework assignment, have the child use study time for reading or reviewing problem areas.

And don't forget – whether it's a bedroom desk or the kitchen table, every child needs a regular place to study and complete homework. This area should be well-lit and equipped with school supplies like paper, pencils, and a dictionary.

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Parent tips from the Utah Education Association

Ready to Learn – Giving Feedback

The start of a new school year can be the beginning of a journey toward success when parents, students, and teachers work together. Here are some suggestions for parents who want to help their children learn.

To learn, children must believe that they can learn. As the parent, you are the most important adult in your child's life. The feedback you give them — what you say and do about their abilities — will have a lasting impact on your child's self-confidence. Be encouraging and praise your child for the amount of effort put into a project. See setbacks as opportunities to grow. Emphasize that doing their best is what counts.

Be prepared for your next parent-teacher conference. Find out if your child has anything that he or she would like you to discuss. Write down your own list of questions. Ask how your child interacts with other students, or participates in classroom activities. Most importantly, talk to the teachers about ways you can work together to help your child.

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Parent tips from the Utah Education Association

Reading and Writing – Pre-Readers

By Denise Ulrich, reading teacher at Crestview Elementary School, Salt Lake City, and literacy coach at Syracuse Elementary School, Syracuse, Utah

Did you know that when your student sees a picture of a cow and says "moo" they are already taking an early step towards becoming a successful reader? Just like a cow says "moo" the letter b says "b". The ability to recognize that symbols have specific sounds attached to them will help your student understand the concept of phonics. Who knew a trip to the farm would start your reader off on the right foot?!!

Did you know that many things can be done to set your reader up for success before they even know the alphabet song? Often students get hung up in reading because they do not understand that words are made up of many smaller sounds. For example, the word "cat" has three distinct sounds: c-a-t. Practicing breaking apart words into their individual letter sounds can be done long before your student knows the names and symbols for each letter. A strong ability to hear sound segments in words is a fundamentally important step in the reading process and can be practiced long before kindergarten.

Did you know that tracking words with your finger while you read aloud to your children helps set the stage for your young readers? Knowing which way to read the words and where to go next when you finish a line seems a simple task to adult readers, but for these youngsters it's best to keep in mind that nothing is too obvious.

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Parent tips from the Utah Education Association

Reading and Writing – Be a Reading Example

By Beverlee A. Simpson, M.Ed., National Board Certified Teacher, language arts teacher at East High School, Salt Lake City

Modeling a positive attitude toward reading will help your child become a better reader.

No matter what your child's grade or reading level, reading together encourages a love for reading. Reading out loud helps students become more confident and provides good practice.

Take turns reading out loud with your child. If your child is just learning to read, this will help him/her hear smooth reading to imitate and give your child a relaxing break from reading. Older students also like to share what they are reading with an adult. Many parents take pleasure in re-reading books and enjoy the fun of rediscovering the classics with their teens. So take turns reading, or get two copies of the book and read together, then talk about what is going on in the story.

Encourage your child to connect the events in the books to your own family experiences, to other books or movies you are familiar with, and to what is happening in the world.

Strong reading skills are the basis for a successful academic career. Encourage your student to enjoy the reading process as a way to excel in school.

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Parent tips from the Utah Education Association

Reading and Writing – Raising Readers

By Katherine Christiansen, sixth-grade reading, writing and social studies teacher at Cedar Ridge Middle School, Hyde Park, Utah

By encouraging children to read, parents can assure school success. It is never too early to start reading to a child. Even newborns react to hearing their parents read. So, begin sharing bedtime stories with newborns. Then, continue reading together even when the child learns to read. As you read, always make your voice animated by using different voices for the different characters and emotions in the story. Ask questions about the reading and listen intently to your child's answers. Oftentimes, children's thoughts and ideas are 'magical.' Make each reading time special. Turn off the television, move away from the computer, and put the music player and headphones in the drawer. Then, cuddle together in a comfortable spot so your child will associate reading with feeling secure and loved.

Whenever you go places, take along your children's favorite books. Read in the car, on the bus, or in waiting rooms. Get a library card and visit the library often. Let children peruse the aisles of books and select a variety of books to check out and take home. Children love having new stories read to them.

Finally, be a role model by letting your child see *you* read. When they see you enjoy reading, they will learn it is a fountain of knowledge and fun. With just a few minutes a day focused on reading, parents can raise readers.

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Parent tips from the Utah Education Association

Reading and Writing – Developing Readers

By Denise Ulrich, reading teacher at Crestview Elementary School, Salt Lake City, and literacy coach at Syracuse Elementary School, Syracuse

Did you know that the average vocabulary level used on prime time television shows is fourth grade? Exposing your students to quality literature, whether they read it independently or listen to it read aloud, does wonders for their vocabulary. Make story time a priority in your home.

Did you know that Thomas Edison, Albert Einstein, and Alexander Graham Bell all had difficulty reading? If your student struggles in the early stages of reading, don't lose heart. These things can be overcome with persistence and the right tools. Talk with your student's teacher or school literacy specialist. They have a wealth of knowledge and experience to offer that can make all the difference. And don't wait, detecting and solving problems is much easier now than later.

Did you know that success in reading and planning for retirement have a lot in common? Just as investing early in retirement has exponential benefits, so does early and frequent exposure to books. An investment in your students knowledge base by introducing them to good literature as often as possible will pay high dividends in their educational experience. Reading success brings overall greater success in any subject area. If you want the most bang for your buck, turn off the TV and pull out a book. It will be 30 minutes you will never regret spending.

Did you know that your child's love for the computer can be a benefit to their reading skills? In a technologically based society it is easy to find ways to motivate your students to read and write. Blogs, informational Web sites, e-mail and a variety of other tools can help your student use their passion for technology as a vehicle for reading success. Watchful and careful parents can help students discover a wealth of quality literature under the clever disguise of a computer screen.

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Parent tips from the Utah Education Association

Reading and Writing – Take the Time to Talk

By Katherine Christiansen, sixth-grade reading, writing and social studies teacher at Cedar Ridge Middle School, Hyde Park, Utah

The writing is on the wall. It's true. When parents are involved in their child's education, their child will achieve more. Essential to becoming a good writer, children must experience a climate of words at home. So, parents, give your child something to talk about. Dinnertime conversations and family excursions are a basis for rich talk in the home. At dinnertime, parents and children can share their experiences of the day. When parents take their child to the zoo, playground, a parade, or to visit family or friends, they can talk about what was seen, heard, smelled, tasted, touched, and felt.

Parents can introduce new vocabulary words to children through their conversations. After using a new vocabulary word, parents should explain its meaning or repeat a synonym (a word that means the same) to the children. "The basis of good writing is good talk, and younger children, especially, grow into stronger control of language when loving parents share experiences" and new vocabulary words "through daily conversation."

(Quote taken from "How to Help Your Child Become a Better Writer" published by the National Council of Teachers of English.)

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Reading and Writing – Helping Young Readers

Every parent wants his or her child to be a successful reader. Reading, after all, is the foundation for a great education as well as a lifelong skill that brings not only knowledge, but pleasure.

Research on reading – and learning to read – shows there are things that can be done at home from an early age that help children become successful readers. For example:

- Teaching young children to recognize the letters of the alphabet is a big boost to reading readiness.
- Reading to children helps them understand about books and printed language.
- Talking with your child about a book or story helps him develop vocabulary.
- Reading about familiar topics helps children relate to what is being read to them.
- Showing the relationship between writing and reading is another way to build reading skills. Have your young child dictate a story to you. You write the words and they can illustrate!

Working on reading skills is time well spent between parents and children.

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Reading and Writing – Make Reading a Habit

Research shows that children who are read to in their early years are more successful in school.

Make reading a habit in your home, for both you and your child. Seeing parents enjoying a book is a strong image for children. Each night before bed, read to your child for at least 20 minutes. If the child is learning to read, ask him or her to read to you.

For older children, set 30 minutes aside each night for family reading time when everyone reads. Keep plenty of reading materials available—books, magazines and newspapers. Be sure the material is appealing, and not always another textbook. Let your kids see you reading and they're more likely to pick up the habit for themselves.

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Reading and Writing – Building a Solid Reading Foundation

Would you like to build a solid reading foundation for your young child? Here are a few suggestions:

- Label things in the home such as the table, the refrigerator, doors, etc. Collect the labels and have your child put them back on the correct objects.
- While in the car, walking, or riding the bus, have your child look for and read familiar signs.
- Talk to children about what they like to do — their favorite games, pastimes, and books. Listen to your child's stories, accounts of events and ideas. Allow them to dictate the stories to you, and make a written collection to enjoy.
- Make plans for the day with your child. As children get older, plans can be written in a short schedule. The schedule can be used to search for familiar words and to learn new words.
- Encourage your child to ask questions. Show how some questions can be answered by looking for information in books.

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Reading and Writing – Reading to Develop Thinking Skills

By Katherine Christiansen, sixth-grade reading, writing and social studies teacher at Cedar Ridge Middle School, Hyde Park, Utah

Simply reading text without discussion does not help children reach mastery in reading. Talking about and discussing the reading material is key in helping students reinforce comprehension skills taught in the classroom and developing high-level thinking skills. Some discussion ideas might include:

1. Describe the setting and characters.
2. How does reading this story make you feel?
3. What do you think will happen next?
4. What is a problem in the story and how do you think it will be solved?
5. How is something in the story like real life?
6. What did you like about the story?
7. What is the main idea or lesson (theme) the story teaches?
8. Summarize today's reading.

Today's readers will become tomorrow's leaders—leaders with high-level thinking skills beyond surface-reading.

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Reading and Writing – Teaching Children to Understand Content

Do you want your child to be a successful reader with a love of books? As a parent, it's important for you to talk to your children about the books and stories they enjoy.

For example, you can:

- Ask your child to predict what might happen next while reading a story. Be sure to ask your child to give reasons for the prediction.
- Ask your child why a character might have taken a specific action. Again, ask for reasons behind the answer.
- Ask your child to compare a book to another familiar book. How are the characters alike or different? Do the stories take place in similar places? How are the illustrations similar or different?
- Ask what part of the story your child liked best and why.
- Ask whether your child liked the ending of the story and why or why not.

Reading is more than decoding words. Help your child learn to think about the content of the material, not just the words.

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Reading and Writing – Practice Key to Reading Success

By Katherine Christiansen, sixth-grade reading, writing and social studies teacher at Cedar Ridge Middle School, Hyde Park, Utah

A study conducted by the Institute for Academic Excellence provides disturbing evidence that America's children are not getting enough reading practice. According to the study, America's students spend an average of only seven minutes per day reading (from *Patterns of Reading Practice*). It would be laughable if a piano teacher sent his students on stage for a concert after having scarcely practiced seven minutes a day. Yet, we are sending students into the world without having practiced the essential skill of reading. Studies also show that the most competent readers read 144 times as much as the least able. If a football player throws 144 passes a day and another player throws one, who will become the better football player?

Reading practice is essential to fostering better readers and more effective students. Students should read 20 to 30 minutes each day and be supervised, as needed, by an adult.

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Reading and Writing – Be an Example

By Katherine Christiansen, sixth-grade reading, writing and social studies teacher at Cedar Ridge Middle School, Hyde Park, Utah

Parents can be both a model and teacher when it comes to writing. Parents should let children see them writing notes to friends, letters to businesses, and perhaps even stories to share. Making changes in what is written lets children see that revision is important in the writing process.

When children are writing, parents should talk through their ideas with them; help them discover what they want to say. When they ask for help with spelling, punctuation, grammar, or word usage, supply the help. Always praise children for writing. It is especially important that parents remember to be helpers, not critics.

Rejoice in effort, delight in ideas, and always display your child's writing. With the right encouragement, children can develop the love and skill of writing.

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Parent tips from the Utah Education Association

Reading and Writing – Encourage Writing at Home

By Katherine Christiansen, sixth-grade reading, writing and social studies teacher at Cedar Ridge Middle School, Hyde Park, Utah

Parents can take a hand and open a mind when they provide opportunities for children to practice purposeful writing at home. Writing for real purposes is rewarding to children, and family activities present many opportunities for this. Children can help write a grocery list for mom, or add some notes at the end of a parent’s letter. They can design, draw and write the message for holiday and birthday cards or invitations for family parties.

Some other occasions when children can be involved in writing at home are in taking down telephone messages or writing thank-you notes for gifts they have received. Parents not only teach writing, but also courtesy when they encourage children to write notes of gratitude to family members, teachers, and friends for thoughtful acts of kindness towards them. Involving older children may take some effort, but it will be worth it. Writing helps children better understand what they think.

When children know what they think, they can express themselves better and voice their opinions more intelligently. Parents should never underestimate their power when helping children get on the “Write Track” to “Write Their Own Future.”

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Reading and Writing – Good Writing Takes Practice

*By Beverlee A. Simpson, M.Ed., National Board Certified Teacher,
language arts teacher at East High School, Salt Lake City*

Many parents have questions about how to best help their students with writing assignments.

Students learn to write well by writing, revising, and editing. Remember to give your student the privilege of mastering writing skills and feeling the sense of accomplishment that is the reward of hard work. You can help your child become a stronger writer when you:

- Ask your student to discuss and explain his or her writing topics with you; this will help your child organize his or her ideas.
- Ask your student to read his or her writing to you and then give honest and thoughtful feedback.
- Ask questions about the piece of writing such as: How do you feel about this writing? What part of your writing (beginning, ending, specific sentences or phrases) do you like best/least? If you had all the time you needed, what would you do differently?

Remind your student that good writing takes practice – there are no shortcuts – but the rewards last a lifetime.

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Reading and Writing – Connect Reading and Writing

Want to help your child connect reading and writing? Here are some suggestions:

- Encourage your child to draw pictures about books or experiences. Drawing is a preparation for writing because it develops both the muscles needed for writing and children's ability to represent their ideas.
- Show your child how to write his or her name.

Help your child compose a note to a relative or friend. Have your child dictate as you write. Read the note back to the child, pointing to the words as you read them. Some children might be able to find familiar words in the note.

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Math and Science – A Different Kind of Math

Have you noticed? Math looks different these days.

When you visit your child's mathematics classroom, it may look different from what you remember. $2 \text{ apples} + 2 \text{ apples}$ still equals 4 apples, and 7×8 is still 56, but now you're likely to see students counting real apples instead of just seeing them in a book. The math hasn't changed, but how we look at it has.

We want ALL students to realize that math is more than adding, subtracting, multiplying and dividing. We want children to be able to connect math to their everyday lives. We know that every child is capable of achieving in math topics such as geometry, data and statistics, algebra, and measurement — topics we've traditionally thought of as only accessible to some.

Teachers are now designing mathematical tasks that ask students to think deeply about math and how that math is part of their real lives. The problems students encounter won't be the two problems at the end of the lesson page that we all remember, but they'll be "real" problems that use math in a "real" way. It may be a problem that takes the child an hour, or perhaps several, to solve. There may be multiple ways to solve the problem.

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Math and Science – Studying Math and Working in Groups

When studying mathematics, does your child work in pairs and groups?

Research shows that students working together enhances learning. Working together provides time for students to talk about the math they understand and the math they don't understand. This also provides more opportunities for more students to talk and allows the teachers to hear more students' thoughts and ideas.

In addition to group work, many different materials seem to be used in math class.

Materials like pattern blocks and algebra tiles help students make sense of math. Psychologists believe that all students need to understand concepts at a concrete level before they move onto abstract ideas. Some materials inherently have math concepts connected to them and help students bridge their understanding of math concepts (sixth-graders may fill a box with 1-inch cubes as they learn about volume, and fourth- graders may make fraction kits to help them understand fractional parts).

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Math and Science – Helping Your Student with Math

By Debra Rossi, M.Ed., sixth-grade teacher at David Gourley Elementary School, Salt Lake City

Math is a good way for a mind to develop. It is one of the best ways to start to see connections in an everyday environment. Because of this, math skills are critical to a child's development.

Many parents are intimidated by math. Rest assured, your child's teacher is working hard to make sure your student is learning the skills to do homework accurately. Spend time with your student reviewing math assignments. Studies show students retain more when they are teaching skills to someone else, so even if you don't know how to do the math, your student is learning as he or she struggles to explain it to you!

Your students learn more than just basic math facts. They learn how to balance a checkbook, shop efficiently, manage finances and how to make wise decisions with money. And it is all called math.

When you work with your child regularly, you might even learn some more math yourself.

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Math and Science – Math Homework

Today's math homework is different, and the amount may be different too. Today's teachers know that practice is still important, and students will continue to do that. However, we also know from research that students need activities and tasks that ask them to delve deeper into the concepts and content of mathematics. Because of this, there may be fewer problems assigned, but these problems will require students to think more deeply about math and make connections to math in their own lives.

You may also see fewer graded papers coming home. Teachers continue to use traditional paper and pencil tests as well as district and statewide tests to help them make decisions about instruction and assessment. However, teachers are also using tried and true methods of "kidwatching." Watching students while they work in pairs and alone provides teachers with valuable information about your child's progress. Students are asked to communicate their understanding in a variety of ways. They may be asked to keep a math journal and write about the math they are learning. For example, after learning a concept your child may be asked to write and describe how he would teach that concept to a younger child. Teachers can learn a great deal about a student's understanding this way.

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Math and Science – Becoming “Scientifically Literate”

Science is all around us. Nearly everything we do has a scientific or technological implication. We are a nation of citizens that depend greatly on science and technology. Parents and educators can do many things to build a love and respect for science in our children.

What does it mean to be scientifically literate?

Scientifically literate children have and continue to develop the critical thinking skills necessary for academic success. Scientifically literate citizens understand the importance of science in their daily lives, can evaluate public policy decisions, and make informed decisions about science reports in the media.

In the past, science was only defined as reading the text and answering questions about the science content or watching the instructor demonstrate a science experiment. Teachers still use these strategies, but now we also see children with their "hands-on" the materials, learning about science first-hand and conducting experiments themselves. Under the guidance of teachers, students experience the excitement of observing scientific phenomena directly.

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Math and Science – Foster Your Child’s Natural Curiosity

Ever wonder how you might help your child become more interested in science?

Foster your child's natural curiosity. Take a 10-minute walk around the backyard, your neighborhood or a local park. Start a collection of natural items such as leaves. Take the leaves home and identify the trees they came from. You and your child can make rubbings of the leaves by placing white or notebook paper over the leaves and using a crayon to rub over the paper. You should see an imprint of the leaf on the paper. Write one or two sentences that describe what you and your child observed.

Take your child to a museum or a nature center. Many cities and towns have museums or technology and nature centers designed specifically for children. If there isn't a center or museum in your town, take a virtual field trip on your computer or a computer in the library.

Consider a camp that focuses on science or technology. If your child is interested in space, the U.S. Space and Rocket Center holds week-long space camps for children ages 9-18, and the United State's first woman astronaut, Sally Ride, sponsors a special parent/daughter weekend program, specifically designed for girls between 7 and 11 years of age.

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Parent tips from the Utah Education Association

Testing – Achievement Tests

Quizzes and exams that teachers routinely use to check on students' learning are the most common — and frequent — tests your child takes in school.

In addition to regular classroom tests, your child will take one or more achievement tests that public schools are required to give each year. These tests, which provide a snapshot of what children know, are used to gauge how well schools educate students.

When your child takes a state-required achievement test, your child's performance is compared with the performance of other students in the school district — and the entire state. Remember that as a parent, you should receive information regularly about your child's performance on tests — the tests teachers use routinely in the classroom as well as state-required achievement tests. Remember, it is the combined information from many sources, not any one test that will give you the best picture of your child's academic success.

Helping Your Child Learn

Parent tips from the Utah Education Association

Testing – Asking Questions

As a parent, you should receive information regularly about your child's performance on tests — the evaluations teachers use routinely in the classroom as well as state-required achievement tests.

Don't hesitate to ask questions like these about the tests your child takes at school:

- How does the material my child learns in class relate to what is covered on tests?
- In what other ways do the school — and the teachers — measure how well my child is learning?
- How much time does my child spend taking tests during the school year?
- Does my child's performance on state-required achievement tests match his performance in the classroom? (If an achievement test is not well matched to what your child is being taught at school, he could score poorly on the achievement test while still earning good grades.)
- How do the teachers — and the school — use test results?

Helping Your Child Learn

Parent tips from the Utah Education Association

Testing – “High-Stakes” Tests

Some of the tests your child takes in school might be "high-stakes" tests. These are tests that school districts and schools use to make important decisions that affect your child's future – such as going on to the next grade level or graduating from high school.

High-stakes tests aren't the only tests schools administer. School districts and schools also use test results to identify children who will receive special services or participate in special programs. Special education services and programs for gifted and talented students are two examples.

You should not be overly concerned if test results are used as one factor in making high-stakes decisions, but you should be very concerned if they are the only factor considered. Your child's report cards, his/her performance on routine classroom tests throughout the school year, and information your child's teacher can provide about his/her performance, also should be taken into account.

Ask about the multiple measures of success being used in your school.

Helping Your Child Learn

Parent tips from the Utah Education Association

Testing – Helping Your Child

Want to know how you can help your children do their best on tests at school? First, make sure they attend school every day so they have an opportunity to learn what is needed to do well in school — and to do well on tests. Here are some other tips:

- Take an interest in your child's school work and in the results of the tests.
- Encourage your children to do their best on tests.
- Provide a quiet place at home for your child to do homework assignments that reinforce what is learned at school.
- Work with your children at home, as well as with the school and teacher, to ensure they will become good readers. Good reading skills are important to success in school and help students do well on tests.
- Ask your child's teacher about the tests your child takes — classroom quizzes and tests, as well as required achievement tests. Ask about the subjects, knowledge, and skills that are tested — and how the test results will be used to help your child be successful.
- Don't judge your child's abilities — or let others judge your child's abilities — on the basis of a single test score. Any test provides only limited information about what your child knows and is able to do.

Helping Your Child Learn

Parent tips from the Utah Education Association

Testing – A More Complete Picture

Contrary to what you may have heard, tests are far from perfect measures of what your child has learned at school. At best, they only measure a portion of what students have learned.

A more complete picture also includes:

- The teacher's review of your child's daily work in class; class projects, discussions and group work.
- The teacher's observations of your child as he or she completes classroom assignments; and
- Conversations with you and your child about how well he or she understands concepts, and how the teacher can work with your child, and with you, to increase your child's school success.

Helping Your Child Learn

Parent tips from the Utah Education Association

Parent-Teacher Partnerships – Be Involved as School Begins

By Dessie R. Olson, M.Ed., National Board Certified Teacher, social studies teacher at East High School, Salt Lake City

Research shows one of the best ways to help your child succeed in school is to be involved in their education. Being involved may take many different forms, but the efforts should always lead you to becoming more aware of your child's school experience. How can you become more aware as the school year begins? Here are some suggestions:

- Read the school and classroom policies and procedures, and don't forget about the school newsletter and Web site – they're full of reminders and information that could be helpful to you and your student. Being familiar with how things work is a great way to get off on the right foot.
- Help your child calm nerves by visiting the school your child will be attending before school starts. In addition to finding their classrooms, keep an eye out for where their locker and other important areas are such as the lunch room, office, gyms and restrooms.
- Review the core curriculum to get an idea of what concepts, knowledge, and skills your student will be learning. You can access the Utah State Core Curriculum at www.schools.utah.gov.

Do what you can to keep communication between you, your child, and the school open. The more you communicate, the more you'll be aware and the more support your child will feel and receive.

Helping Your Child Learn

Parent tips from the Utah Education Association

Parent–Teacher Partnerships – Improving Student Achievement

More than ever before, schools and teachers need parent and community support.

Thirty years of research clearly shows that parent and community involvement in schools improves student achievement. To reach their potential, students need parents and the community to take an active role in their education.

Schools are working hard to provide a high quality education for every child. But they can't do it alone. Parent and community involvement is critical to creating great schools.

There are many ways community groups, parents, and other adults who play an important role in a child's life, can be involved with children's education at home, at school, and in the community.

Talk to the teachers and PTA at your neighborhood school to find out how you can help.

Helping Your Child Learn

Parent tips from the Utah Education Association

Parent–Teacher Partnerships – Showing Your Child You Value Education

As a parent, or an adult who plays an important role in the life of a child, your involvement in your child's education at school and at home shows your child that you value education. You can provide teachers with the most reliable source of information about your child. The partnership between you and your child's teacher is powerful.

Here are some ways you can be involved in your child's education each year at school:

- Meet the teacher.
- Make a date with the teacher to visit your child's classroom.
- Go to parent-teacher conferences.
- Join the PTA or other school/community groups.
- Stay up-to-date on school policies, schedules, and rules.
- Make sure your child is learning.
- Find a teacher or counselor you feel comfortable talking to about concerns you might have about your child.
- Keep in regular contact with your school. Volunteer if time permits.

Remember, we are all working together to help your child be successful.

Helping Your Child Learn

Parent tips from the Utah Education Association

Parent-Teacher Partnerships – Be Involved During the School Year

By Dessie R. Olson, M.Ed., National Board Certified Teacher, social studies teacher at East High School, Salt Lake City

Research shows one of the best ways to help your child succeed in school is to be involved in their education. Being involved may take many different forms, but the efforts should always lead you to becoming more aware of your child's school experience. How can you become more aware during the school year? Here are some suggestions:

- Talk to your child about what they are learning in school. Ask them what they learned from a particular assignment or activity in class. Help them make connections between the “real world” and what they are learning in school. For example, is there a news story or community event that is relevant to what they are studying?
- Attend parent-teacher conferences. If you are unable to attend the scheduled parent-teacher conference, be sure to contact the teacher to make other arrangements. It is important for you to be aware of what is happening in your child's classroom(s). During parent-teacher conference be sure to ask questions such as:
 - What are your child's strengths? What do they struggle with? How is their behavior and social interaction?
 - What can your child expect to be doing and learning in the remainder of the class?
 - How you can support your child's success in the class?
- Volunteer
 - In the classroom
 - In the PTA
 - In the School Community Council

Helping Your Child Learn

Parent tips from the Utah Education Association

Parent-Teacher Partnerships – Homework

By Katherine Christiansen, sixth-grade reading, writing and social studies teacher at Cedar Ridge Middle School, Hyde Park, Utah

A must for school success is completing homework assignments and turning them in on time. It is a good idea to sit down with your child and make a homework plan together. First, decide where your child will do homework. A quiet place with a flat surface, plenty of elbow room, a comfortable chair, and good light will work. Make sure there are necessary supplies like paper, pens, pencils, a dictionary, thesaurus, and erasers. For older children, and some younger, access to a computer is a must.

Next, decide when homework will be done and what assignments your child should do first. Will your child be expected to start homework right after school, before dinner, or after dinner? In organizing homework, the sandwich method seems to work best for most children—have your child start with something easy, do something hard, and finish with something else easy.

Some other questions you will need to discuss are: Will television or music be allowed during homework time? Can your child take breaks during homework time? Who will check up on your child to make sure everything is complete? What rewards or consequences will be administered concerning homework? Who will call the teacher if there is a question or problem concerning an assignment?

Getting children to complete homework is not always easy, but being consistent with your plan is essential in helping children become successful students. As parents support and guide children, children will learn to value education and find that school becomes less stressful and more fun.

Helping Your Child Learn

Parent tips from the Utah Education Association

Parent-Teacher Partnerships – Partners, Part I

Communities, parents, and teachers make great partners when it comes to helping children learn.

Here are some ways we can all work together to provide a high quality education for all Utah children:

- Establish school-business partnerships. Schools and businesses can work together to prepare students for further education — and for life as productive members of their communities.
- Employers can grant parents leave to attend school meetings, conferences, or to volunteer in the school.
- Engage in activities to better meet the needs of children and their families. For example, the county health department can schedule regular visits to the school health clinic. Social service workers can meet with school counselors. After-school program providers can operate homework clubs utilizing textbooks and other materials provided by the school.

Creative solutions exist that can lead to educational success for all children. Let's work together.

Helping Your Child Learn

Parent tips from the Utah Education Association

Parent-Teacher Partnerships – Partners, Part II

Communities, parents, and teachers make great partners when it comes to helping children learn.

Here are some ways we can all work together to provide a high quality education for all Utah children:

- Establish and operate a mentoring program for "at risk" students through the involvement of volunteers from community, civic, and religious organizations, local businesses, or the Chamber of Commerce.
- Check out public libraries, which are strong educational partners. They can sponsor story hours for preschoolers and their parents, special programs that motivate children to read, or specialized evening topics of interest to parents.
- Ask businesses, PTA's, churches, and civic organizations to provide valuable services for schools. Many are excellent sources for volunteers, and many sponsor evening or after-school tutoring programs for students who need extra help. Some organize drives to collect school supplies for needy students, or raise funds for scholarships.

Helping Your Child Learn

Parent tips from the Utah Education Association

Parent-Teacher Partnerships – Contacting a Teacher

By Debra Rossi, M.Ed., sixth-grade teacher at David Gourley Elementary School, Salt Lake City

The best ways to contact a teacher are first, e-mail, then a personal note.

Teachers are in class with students most of the day and an e-mail gives the teacher a moment to pull up the information needed to respond to your concerns while considering an answer. A main benefit of e-mail is that it also remains private. Only for emergencies should a parent interrupt a class with a phone call or a visit.

Although most schools welcome parents, if you have private concerns, please address them in a private manner. It preserves learning time for the entire class. It shows respect for your child's privacy as well as showing professional courtesy to the teacher.

If you are unable to resolve your concerns using these methods, send an e-mail or note with a choice of reasonable times for the teacher to contact you. Be sure to include the phone number you want the teacher to call. The teacher will call you to set up an appointment or discuss your concerns over the phone. By handling delicate matters in a private way you help preserve your student's confidential information.

Helping Your Child Learn

Parent tips from the Utah Education Association

Parent-Teacher Partnerships – Managing the Paper

Looking for a way to manage the mountains of papers and projects your child brings home from school? Here's a suggestion that may help you unclutter that refrigerator door.

Review the papers your child brings home each night, then place them in a box or drawer until Saturday. On Saturday, have your child choose the **ONE** paper that makes them most proud of their weekly accomplishments. That paper goes on the fridge for display, while the others are inserted into a large manila envelope.

Have your child decide whom they would like to send their work to as a special gift. Grandma and Grandpa? A cousin who lives far away? Santa Claus?

Address and stamp the envelope, being sure to include a note explaining the honor of receiving this package.

Let your child drop it in the mail.

You keep only one paper a week. Friends and relatives receive a heartfelt gift, and your child will be running to the mailbox looking for those inevitable letters of thanks!

Helping Your Child Learn

Parent tips from the Utah Education Association

Parent-Teacher Partnerships – Good, Better, Best

Good, Better, Best.

Never let it Rest.

Until your Good is Better, and your Better is Best!

Here are some tips for helping you teach your child to strive for their best.

Some students are more concerned with being DONE than with doing things well. You can help your teenager avoid that pitfall by suggesting a few tips they might follow:

Start right away. Waiting until the last minute to start assures that it will not be your best work.

- Organize your materials. Don't start working without everything you'll need.
- Break large projects into smaller tasks and work on one piece at a time. Don't let it become overwhelming.
- Set a timetable and a deadline for completion of the work. Be sure it isn't the night before it's due.
- Give suggestions, but not criticism as your child works. No one wants to be told over and over again, "it's good, but...."

All students want to get good grades. Whether they are good, better, or best, might depend on your support of their efforts.

Helping Your Child Learn

Parent tips from the Utah Education Association

Parent-Teacher Partnerships – Managing Homework

By Beverlee A. Simpson, M.Ed., National Board Certified Teacher, language arts teacher at East High School, Salt Lake City

How much homework should your child be expected to do? Experts agree that the amount of homework should depend on the age and skills of the student. Children in kindergarten through second grade should have between 10 and 20 minutes of homework per day. Third- through sixth-grade students benefit from 30 to 60 minutes of homework each day, while middle and high school students can benefit from additional homework time.

Reading at home is especially important for young children. High-interest reading assignments might push the time on homework a bit beyond the times suggested.

Support your child's homework time by providing a quiet place to study and the supplies your student will need to complete his or her work.

Maintain a positive attitude about the benefits of homework. Teachers have multiple reasons for assigning homework. The most common purpose is to give your child the opportunity to practice skills and reinforce learning. Sometimes your child will have preparation homework intended to introduce material that will be presented in future lessons. Extension homework asks students to apply skills they already have to new situations. And integration homework requires the student to apply many different skills to a single task, such as book reports, science projects or creative writing.

Homework fosters positive character traits such as independence, responsibility, and time management—help your child look at homework as an opportunity to become more competent and better prepared to take on more challenges.

Helping Your Child Learn

Parent tips from the Utah Education Association

Parent-Teacher Partnerships – How to Make Parent-Teacher Conferences Work for Your Child

You've been asked to attend a regularly scheduled "report card" conference with your child's teacher. Or you've gotten a special note from your child's teacher asking to see you. In either case, you might be a little nervous.

Well, relax. Teachers don't want to put parents on the spot. They just like to meet with parents from time to time to discuss how to help students do their best in school.

All children learn in different ways. They have their own individual personalities, and their own listening and work habits. To help their students learn new knowledge and skills, teachers must know as much as they can about each child's likes and dislikes. No one knows more about these things than you, the parents. And no one has more influence over your children than you.

That's why teachers need your help to do a first-class job. Working together, you and the teacher can help your child have a successful school year.

Helping Your Child Learn

Parent tips from the Utah Education Association

Parent-Teacher Partnerships – Getting Ready for a Parent-Teacher Conference, Part I

Getting ready for a parent-teacher conference? Here are some things to keep in mind:

- Start the conference right: Be there on time, and plan not to run over the amount of time that has been set aside, usually about 40 minutes.
- If you are a working parent who can't arrange to meet during regular hours, make this clear to the teacher and try to set up a time to meet that is good for both of you.

The best conferences are those in which both teachers and parents stay calm and try hard to work together for one purpose and one purpose only: to help your child do well. Arguing, or blaming each other for problems your child is having, helps no one.

Helping Your Child Learn

Parent tips from the Utah Education Association

Parent-Teacher Partnerships – Getting Ready for a Parent-Teacher Conference, Part II

Getting ready for a parent-teacher conference? Here are some things to keep in mind:

Each teacher will probably come prepared with samples of your children's work and with ideas to help them do even better in school. You should get ready for each conference, too.

Talk to your children before the conference. Find out what they think are their best subjects, and what subjects they like the least. Find out why. Also, ask your children if there is anything they would like you to talk about with their teachers. Make sure your children don't worry about the meeting. Help them understand that you and their teacher(s) are meeting together in order to help them.

Before you go to the school, write notes to yourself about:

- Things about your child's life at home, personality, problems, habits, and hobbies you feel it's important for the teacher to know.
- Your concerns about the school's programs or policies.
- Questions about your child's progress.
- How you and the school can work together to help your child.

If your spouse can't attend the conference with you, ask for his or her concerns and questions.

Helping Your Child Learn

Parent tips from the Utah Education Association

Parent-Teacher Partnerships – The Parent-Teacher Conference, Part I

Going to a parent-teacher conference. Here are some good questions to ask:

- Is my child in different groups for different subjects? Why?
- How well does my child get along with others?
- What are my child's best and worst subjects?
- Is my child working up to his or her ability?
- Does my child participate in class discussions and activities?
- Has my child missed any classes other than ones I contacted the school about?
- Have you noticed any sudden changes in the way my child acts? For example, have you noticed any squinting, tiredness or moodiness that might be a sign of physical or other problems?
- What kinds of tests are being done? What do the tests tell about my child's progress?
- How does my child handle taking tests?

It's a good idea to ask your most important questions first, just in case time runs out before you and the teacher have a chance to discuss them all. Be sure to ask the teacher for specific suggestions on ways to help your child do better.

Helping Your Child Learn

Parent tips from the Utah Education Association

Parent-Teacher Partnerships – The Parent-Teacher Conference, Part II

During your next parent-teacher conference, be sure to ask the teacher for specific suggestions on ways to help your child do better. This is the most important part of the meeting. It will become your action plan. If the teacher says something you don't quite understand, don't be shy about asking for an explanation. It's a good idea to end the conference by summing up decisions you've made together. If needed, ask to meet again.

After the conference, start immediately on the action plan you and the teacher worked out together. Discuss the plan with your child. Make sure he or she knows that you and the teacher care. To see if the action plan is working, watch your child's behavior and check your child's class work and homework.

Stay in regular touch with the teacher to discuss the progress your child is making. Meeting with your child's teachers should help build strong parent-teacher partnerships — partnerships that are needed if you and your child's teachers are to reach your common goal of helping your child get the best education possible.

Helping Your Child Learn

Parent tips from the Utah Education Association

Technology – Using Technology to Get Involved

By Debra Rossi, M.Ed., sixth-grade teacher at David Gourley Elementary School, Salt Lake City

Using just basic technology can help a parent be involved in their child's learning and life. Most schools have Web pages that will guide parents through registration, fees and even lunch accounts, complete with menus and pricing. Some teachers have Web pages as well. These pages often include assignments and links for learning. Grades are posted on the Internet and you can check your child's progress any time!

Technology is an easy and efficient way to participate in a child's educational efforts. Many teachers have information on their Web page showing what they are doing in class. In the upper grades, parents can track their student's grades, attendance, citizenship, test scores, lunch account balances, etc. Elementary grades will often provide grades and missing assignments.

All of this information is kept confidential through the use of personal passwords which you set at your convenience. Technology is a great way for parents to be more involved in their child's education in today's busy world.

Helping Your Child Learn

Parent tips from the Utah Education Association

Technology – Children and Television

Did you know American children watch an average of 3 to 5 hours of television each day?

Although TV can be fun and educational, it's important to know what your children are watching – to make sure it's not too much, and to make sure it doesn't stop them from doing schoolwork.

Need help? Here are some tips from the U.S. Department of Education:

- Monitor what your child is watching and, whenever possible, watch the programs with your child.
- Pick a TV show to watch as a family. What kind of conversations can you start from the TV show? For instance, ask, "Why are those people in the program so unkind to each other?"
- Plan other activities, such as crafts, reading, doing homework, or writing letters, instead of watching TV. Try to plan at least one different activity each week.
- Avoid using TV as a babysitter.
- Avoid using TV as a reward or punishment. It gives TV too much importance.
- Turn off the TV during meals and study time.

Helping Your Child Learn

Parent tips from the Utah Education Association

Technology – Computers

Computers let students travel around the world without ever leaving their desks at school or their homes. They can make learning easier and more fun, and learning how to use them will give your child many advantages in the future.

Want to help your child better understand computers and how they can ensure a quality education? Here are some tips from the U.S. Department of Education:

- Find out how computers are used at your child's school.
- At school, can your child use the Internet? Are there safeguards or filters to prevent inappropriate use?
- If you don't have a computer at home, find out if the local library or community center has computers your child can use to do homework and other school projects.
- Ask about the kind of work that your child is doing on the computer. Does it sound challenging? Is your child excited about learning on the computer?
- Take a computer class or learn how to use the computer to assist your child at home. Does the school, local library, or community center offer computer training for adults?

Helping Your Child Learn

Parent tips from the Utah Education Association

Thinking Past High School – A Room With Many Doors

By Susan Anderson, Language Arts teacher at Provo High School

College, career training, the military...will your child have opportunities awaiting them when they leave high school? Try to think of high school education as a room with many doors. When a child receives an “A” grade, each door stays open; when they receive a failing grade, a door closes. In other words, grades really do matter. Many scholarships are based on a student’s Grade Point Average (GPA).

Even though a perfect GPA should be every student’s goal, a 4.0 is not always necessary to obtain a scholarship. It is never too early to begin searching for scholarships. Start looking now for ways to help your son or daughter get the financial help they need. Talk with your school’s guidance center, search the Internet, or talk with other parents whose children have received help.

There are many opportunities for kids to further their education after high school. Begin today! Don’t let closed doors stop your child’s future.

Helping Your Child Learn

Parent tips from the Utah Education Association

Thinking Past High School – Be Ready for the Next Step

By Beverlee A. Simpson, M.Ed., National Board Certified Teacher, language arts teacher at East High School, Salt Lake City

One of the most important aspects of education is the responsibility of preparing young people for the future. Experts predict that many of the jobs our children will perform in the future haven't even been created yet! So in order to prepare your child for a career that is rewarding and productive, encourage him/her to take advantage of the wide spectrum of courses available in public school. Utah schools offer a wide range of courses as elective classes in an effort to capture the interest and imagination of students and prepare them for the future:

- Many chefs became interested in cooking by taking a food preparation class in middle or high school.
- Careers in broadcasting have been launched in a TV studio at school where students learn technical as well as performance skills.
- Sports medicine, physical therapy, dental assistant and nursing programs have introduced many students to the wide possibilities for careers in the medical profession.
- Science labs foster an interest in finding out how our universe works and help students develop the research skills to discover new and exciting things.
- Many students become skilled at sports while participating in school activities and go on to become professional athletes – or at least develop a life-long love for a sport.

Talk to your child's teacher and counselor to create a schedule that gives your student a variety of experiences during his/her school career. Encourage your student to take advantage of all the possibilities – who knows what the next generation will accomplish!

Helping Your Child Learn

Parent tips from the Utah Education Association

Safe at School – School Safety

Students learn best and achieve their full potential in safe and orderly classrooms. This positive academic environment begins with safe families and safe communities.

Statistically, schools continue to be one of the most secure places for our children. As Americans, Utah Education Association members have no tolerance for violence at school. That's why we're working as part of the greater society — and in our individual neighborhoods — to improve them.

Some of us argue for "hard" responses such as metal detectors, added security personnel, and zero-tolerance for weapons possession. Others favor "soft" solutions that include more counseling, conflict-resolution programs, and better communications between school and home.

It will take a combination of both approaches — administered with reason and centered in respect — to keep our children from harm.

Helping Your Child Learn

Parent tips from the Utah Education Association

Safe at School – Talking to Children after a Tragedy

September 11, 2001 forever changed the world, but it also made us more aware of the importance of helping our children in times of disaster. When tragedy strikes, you should:

- Provide children with opportunities to talk about what they are seeing on television and to ask questions.
- Don't be afraid to admit that you can't answer all their questions.
- Answer questions at a level the child can understand.
- Provide ongoing opportunities for children to talk. They will probably have more questions as time goes on.
- Use this as an opportunity to establish a family emergency plan. Feeling that there is something you can do may be very comforting to both children and adults.
- Monitor children's television watching. Some parents may wish to limit their child's exposure to graphic or troubling scenes. To the extent possible, watch reports of the disaster with children. It is at these times that questions might arise.
- In addition to the tragic things they see, help children identify good things, such as heroic actions, families who are grateful for being reunited, and the assistance offered by people throughout the country and the world.