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## LEARNING STARTS WITH GOOD HABITS

*By Diane Trautman*

Many parents call me about tutoring as their children's mid-term or final exams loom on the horizon. "I wish I'd called you earlier, but I just didn't see this coming," they'll say. The pleas typically apply to students at the junior and senior high levels who've assured their parents that they could raise their grades by themselves. Frequently, a lack of organization, time management, and study skills are at the root of their problems.

As classes commence this month, let's review some tips to help your child start the year right and continue on that path. Younger children may still face challenges as they progress to middle school and beyond, but if you establish good habits early, the transitions will be easier.

Routines are helpful for us all, starting with a regular bedtime schedule. Children need plenty of sleep to help them focus during the day. Healthy foods at regular meal and snack times provide them with the brainpower and energy they need to function well at school and at home. Setting consistent times for study and recreation allows children to concentrate on their homework with the understanding that they'll have time for fun when they've completed their work.

Organizing work will become increasingly important as your child advances. When our sons were in elementary school, I would go through their backpacks with them each day and we would organize their work. Though not perfectly maintained, they did manage to keep their papers and binders fairly neat throughout high school. Likewise, having younger students maintain a log of assignments and due dates will prepare them to better manage the "binder-reminder" books they might use when they get to junior high.

Create a productive workspace with your child's input. The ideal setting includes a comfortable chair at an uncluttered desk or table with good lighting and minimal distractions. Some children need a quiet atmosphere, while others seem to perform better with music (ideally non-vocal) in the background. Make sure necessary pencils, paper and other supplies are organized and readily available.

Communicate your interest in your child and the importance of education by discussing their schoolwork with them regularly. In fast-paced classes, students can fail to see the value of what they're learning. When you help them connect their studies to practical applications and encourage enthusiasm for learning, school becomes a training-ground for life, not just daily endurance test.

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