

TOP TIPS

for Helping Our Sons Do Their Best in School



You can't control what happens at school—but you can help your son very practically at home.

- Encourage your son to move around while he is working on writing assignments. As boys move around, more of their brains stay awake, alert, learning, performing. When ideas come to them, they can sit for a while, write some words down, then get up and move again. Many of us tell our boys to sit still to do their homework. Moving around might be better at certain key times.
- Toss a ball to him (and have him toss it back to you) while you are brainstorming together about an assignment. This not only helps his brain stay out of a boredom state, it also activates the right side of his brain, the spatial side that is essential for his learning and performance. As you toss the ball and brainstorm, make sure that most times the ball comes to him, he says something—maybe he brainstorms a way to solve a problem or tells you details of the assignment. Thus you are not doing the assignment for him; you are giving him a boy-friendly way to verbally figure out what he needs to do.
- Send him out into nature for a while before he settles in to do schoolwork. Male learning is primed for natural life and experience. For millennia, males hunted in nature and the male brain developed toward roaming, wandering, activity, and movement. In nature, your son may gain a number of insights about what to write in his assignment, how the math problem can be solved, and how much more he has to learn.
- Involve the other parent or another adult in schoolwork. If, for instance, your son is rebelling against Mom's help and direction, it may be time to get Dad involved. Adolescent boys especially can need more than one parent to help with learning focus. By the time a boy becomes an adolescent, he may have had a number of troubling experiences in school. He needs all the help he can get.
- Get your son a tutor as needed. Individual and one-on-one mentoring is one of the most effective ways to close learning gaps. If you don't have the resources to pay for a tutor, ask an older brother, uncle, aunt, grandma, friend to take on the job. A tutor takes the helicopter-parent burden off of you; the tutor has a ritualized role in helping your son and can become a mentor who shares the labor with you.

- If your son has trouble with writing assignments, encourage him to draw a storyboard of the content he wants to write about. If, for instance, he is supposed to write about Abraham Lincoln, have him draw a comic book or other graphic depiction of Lincoln's life, then let him refer to the drawing as he writes. His grades in writing will most likely rise because now he has visual clues to jog his memory. Remember, the male brain is a highly visual system; it often needs visual-graphic cues in order to trigger memories and words.
- Withhold television, Internet, mobile devices, and video games if he does not meet your reasonable expectations for follow through and successful schooling. School is a great privilege and needs to be regarded as a priority; technological distractions are a lesser privilege that needs to be earned by strong performance and achievement in school and life.
- If you suspect your son has a learning disability or attention problem, get a diagnosis as soon as possible. That diagnosis will most likely mean seeing someone beyond your general pediatrician. You will probably need to seek out a psychologist or other professional who can administer neuro-psych batteries or specific diagnostic testing to evaluate learning disabilities and attention difficulties.
- If your son is having continued difficulty in school, form a parent advocacy team, document common difficulties among the boys (and girls) and then approach school administrators. It can feel quite lonely to go to the principal or teacher(s) yourself, with no back up, and plead your son's case. If you are seeing a number of boys having trouble in a classroom or school, reach out to the other parents, form an informal advocacy team, document the common issues the boys are having, and respectfully meet with the school officials from this empowered position. It may be that the teachers in your school have not learned about the male brain or male learning styles; if so, you can pool your resources along with the school to bring in a trainer who can help the teachers understand the science behind male learning styles.

