

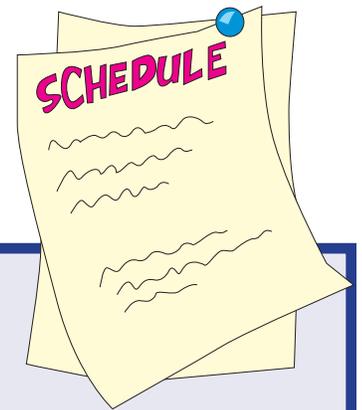
# Helping Hand

Volume 20, Issue 1

## School Success Right from the Start of the Year

The start of the school year is an exciting time for both parents and children. In order to make the year a success, it's important that the entire family works together right from the start.

You can help your children reach their goals in the classroom, stay healthy, and feel good about themselves. Set them up for success at school and help them prepare for their days in the classroom with the following steps:



**Plan ahead.** By getting organized, you and your child can find the right balance of work and play. Your child will learn to manage her time better, and so will you.

**Make a schedule.** Sitting down to plan your activities together will help you and your child stay involved in each other's lives. Talk with your child about his interests, and work with him to set goals for the school year and make a plan for achieving them.

**Get plenty of sleep.** Having enough rest will help your family start the day alert and refreshed. A good night's sleep will fuel a positive attitude through the day and during family time in the evenings.

**Eat breakfast.** Get a healthy start to each day by eating breakfast together. It will give your whole family fuel for the day ahead.

**Know the rules.** Review the classroom's rules and your expectations with your child. Check in with your child's teachers to make sure that your child is on track.

Most important, talk with your child and ask questions about what's going on in her life.

By setting an example and showing your kids how to get ready for the classroom, you help set up your kids for success at school. You're also helping them develop good habits and a healthy routine that will last long after the final school bell rings.

## Teaching Respect

Respect is an important quality for students of all ages to understand and emulate, both in class and out. Help students review the qualities that respect includes such as:

- **Listening without interrupting**
- **Valuing oneself and others**
- **Obeying the rules at school and home**
- **Treating others the way one would like to be treated**

These can be challenging concepts, especially for younger students. With the help of both parents and teachers, however, children can explore them with confidence and find answers that will help him or her grow into a person of moral strength. At home, talk with your child in positive ways about how s/he shows respect for others and about ways you can help your child reach his/her goals while remaining respectful of others.



# Preventing Childhood Overweight and Obesity

Parents and schools can work together to help keep students healthy. At home, parents and guardians should balance the calories a child consumes from foods and beverages with the calories a child uses through physical activity and normal growth.

There's no great secret to healthy eating. To help your children and family develop healthy eating habits:

- Provide plenty of vegetables, fruits, and whole-grain products.
- Include low-fat or non-fat milk or dairy products.
- Choose lean meats, poultry, fish, lentils, and beans for protein.
- Serve reasonably sized portions.
- Encourage your family to drink lots of water.
- Limit sugar-sweetened beverages.
- Limit consumption of sugar and saturated fat.
- Remember that small changes every day can lead to a recipe for success.



Schools and teachers can help prevent obesity by incorporating physical activity into the daily classroom routine and by setting a good example of healthy living. Rather than promoting unhealthy foods at the cafeteria or at bake sales and extracurricular activities, for example, try and encourage students to eat healthy foods by giving them healthy choices.

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## What A Traumatic Situation Is Like for a Young Child

Today our society continues to be plagued by traumatic events ranging from natural disasters to violence at work, school, and home. While these upsetting events can certainly take their toll on adults, think of what it is like for young children to be in traumatic situations. They can feel totally helpless and passive. They can cry for help or desperately wish for someone to intervene. They can feel deeply threatened by separation from parents or caretakers. Young children rely on a “protective shield” provided by adults and older siblings to judge the seriousness of danger and to ensure their safety and welfare.

Children often don't recognize a traumatic danger until it happens, for example, in a near drowning, attack by a dog, or accidental scalding. They can be the target of physical and sexual abuse by the very people they rely on for their own protection and safety. Young children can witness violence within the family or be left helpless after a parent or caretaker is injured, as might occur in a serious automobile accident. They have the most difficulty with their intense physical and emotional reactions. They become really upset when they hear cries of distress from a parent or caretaker.

School-age children start to face additional dangers, with more ability to judge the seriousness of a threat and to think about protective actions. They usually do not see themselves as able to counter a serious danger directly, but they imagine actions they wish they could take, like those of their comic strip heroes. So, in traumatic situations when there is violence against family members, they can feel like failures for not having done something helpful. They may also feel very ashamed or guilty. They may be without their parents when something traumatic happens, either on their own or with friends at school or in the neighborhood. Sexual molestation occurs at the highest rate among this age group. School-age children get scared of the speeding up of their emotions and physical reactions, adding new fears to the danger from outside. For example, an 8 year-old child described, “My heart was beating so fast I thought it was going to break.”

After a traumatic event, it is important to make sure that young children receive the help that they need. This may include counseling, group therapy and other forms of treatment.

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# Marijuana is Still the Most Abused Illicit Drug

With all the headlines about methamphetamine, prescription drugs and club drugs, it might be hard to believe that marijuana is still actually the most abused drug in America. Unfortunately, many people don't see marijuana as a "hard" drug, and many people seem to think it cannot lead to addiction. That's just not true.

According to experts at the National Institutes of Health, long-term marijuana abuse can lead to addiction; that is, compulsive drug seeking and abuse despite its known harmful effects upon social functioning in the context of family, school, work, and recreational activities. Long-term marijuana abusers trying to quit report irritability, sleeplessness, decreased appetite, anxiety, and drug craving, all of which make it difficult to quit. These withdrawal symptoms begin within about one day following abstinence, peak at two–three days, and subside within one or two weeks following drug cessation.

Research clearly demonstrates that marijuana has the potential to cause problems in daily life or make a person's existing problems worse. In one study, heavy marijuana abusers reported that the drug impaired several important measures of life achievement including physical and mental health, cognitive abilities, social life, and career status. Several studies associate workers' marijuana smoking with increased absences, tardiness, and other problems. Like other addictions, marijuana addiction requires treatment.

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## Homework Helpers: Monitor Assignments

According to the US Department of Education, children are more likely to complete homework successfully when parents monitor their assignments. How closely you need to monitor your child depends upon her age, how independent she is and how well she does in school. Whatever the age of your child, if she is not getting assignments done satisfactorily, she requires more supervision.

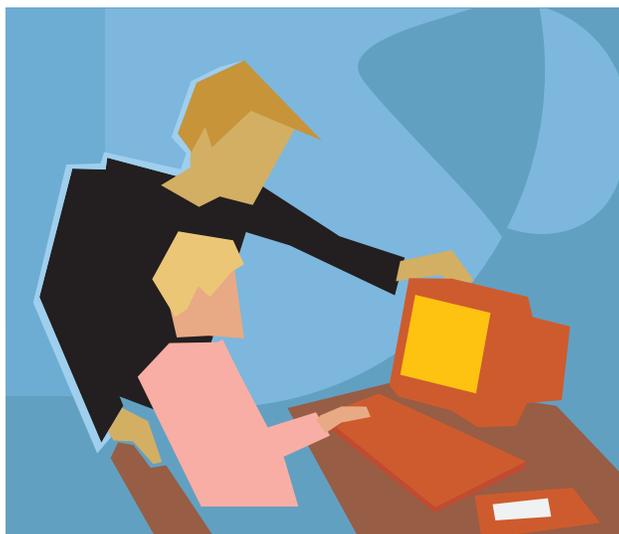
Here are some ways to monitor your child's assignments.

### **Ask about the School's Homework Policy**

At the start of the school year, ask your child's teacher about any rules or guidelines that children are expected to follow as they complete homework. Ask about the kinds of assignments that will be given and the purposes for the assignments.

### **Be Available**

Many elementary school students often like to have someone with them to answer questions as they work on assignments. If your child is cared for by someone else, talk to that caregiver about how to deal with homework. For an older child, if no one will be around, let him know when you want him to begin work and call to remind him if necessary.



### **Look over Completed Assignments**

It's usually a good idea to check to see that your elementary school child has finished her assignments. If your middle-school student is having trouble finishing assignments, check his work too. After the teacher returns completed homework, read the comments to see if your child has done the assignment satisfactorily.

### **Monitor Time Spent Viewing TV and Playing Video Games**

American children on average spend far more time watching TV or playing video games than they do completing homework. In many homes, more homework gets done when TV viewing and game time is limited.

Once you and your child have worked out a homework schedule, take time to discuss how much TV and what programs she can watch. It's worth noting that television can be a learning tool. Look for programs that relate to what your child is study-

ing in school, such as programs on history or science or dramatizations of children's literature. When you can, watch shows with your child, discuss them and encourage follow-up activities such as reading or a trip to the museum.

# What is Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder?

Everyone double-checks things sometimes, for example, checking the stove before leaving the house to make sure it's turned off. But people with obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) feel the need to check things over and over, or have certain thoughts or perform routines and rituals over and over. The thoughts and rituals of OCD cause distress and get in the way of daily life.

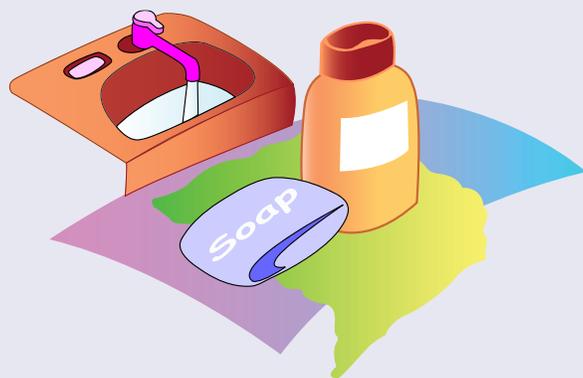
The repeated, upsetting thoughts of OCD are called obsessions. To try to control them, people with OCD repeat rituals or behaviors, which are called compulsions. People with OCD can't control these thoughts and rituals. For many people, OCD starts during childhood or the teen years. Most people are diagnosed at about age 19. Symptoms of OCD may come and go and be better or worse at different times.

Examples of obsessions are fear of germs, of being hurt or of hurting others, and troubling religious or sexual thoughts. Examples of compulsions are repeatedly counting things, cleaning things, washing the body or parts of it, or putting things in a certain order, when these actions are not needed, and checking things over and over.

People with OCD have these thoughts and do these rituals for at least an hour on most days, often longer. The reason OCD gets in the way of their lives is that they can't stop the thoughts or rituals, so they sometimes miss school, work, or meetings with friends, for example.

## People with OCD:

- Have repeated thoughts or images about many different things, such as fear of germs, dirt, or intruders; violence; hurting loved ones; sexual acts; conflicts with religious beliefs; or being overly neat.
- Do the same rituals over and over such as washing hands, locking and unlocking doors, counting, keeping unneeded items, or repeating the same steps again and again.
- Have unwanted thoughts and behaviors they can't control.
- Don't get pleasure from the behaviors or rituals, but get brief relief from the anxiety the thoughts cause.
- Spend at least an hour a day on the thoughts and rituals, which cause distress and get in the way of daily life.



There is help for people with OCD. The first step is to go to a physician or health clinic to talk about symptoms. Remember, only a professional can make a diagnosis. If you suspect a student may be exhibiting signs of OCD, contact the student assistance program or other support services at school to connect the student to the resources they need.

**For more information, contact:**