

# FROM THE DEAN OF BOYS' EDUCATION

## HANDY HINTS FOR IMPROVING YOUR SON'S LEARNING

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The following seven handy hints for improving your son's learning have been adapted from Andrew Fuller's book "Help Your Child Succeed at School."

### 1. Ensure your son has an organised learning space

Many boys have difficulty setting up and maintaining a well organised learning space at home. Parents can assist with some of the practical aspects of setting up your son's home study area, and help with ways the space can be better organised and managed.

### 2. Lighting can help/hinder learning

Natural or indirect lighting such as a desk lamp is best for learning. Studying under fluorescent lighting is not ideal as it is related to raised cortisol levels, which is an indicator of anxiety and agitation.

### 3. How much television is too much?

From the age of two, a small amount of television viewing has been found to be positively associated with academic achievement. Once boys are nine, 1.5 hours per day is regarded as the upper limit. At 13, the limit drops to one hour per day. At 17, it drops even further to the optimal amount being around 30 minutes per day.

### 4. The importance of sleep

A good night's sleep (at least eight hours) is essential for optimal brain functioning. Memory consolidation occurs during sleep, especially dream (or REM) sleep. During the normal eight to nine hours of sleep, five dream (REM) cycles occur. Boys getting only five to six hours of sleep lose out on the last two REM cycles and thereby reduce the amount of time the brain has to consolidate information. There is also no such thing as a sleep bank. Just because you get ten hours one night doesn't mean you can get away with only sleeping six hours the next.

### 5. A good breakfast provides a great start

Many studies have shown that skipping breakfast in the morning has a negative effect on learning and concentration during the day. The type of breakfast boys have can also have an impact. A breakfast that is high in protein (eggs, low fat dairy products, lean meat, fish) and containing low GI index carbohydrates (e.g. porridge, muesli, bran-enriched cereal, most fruits) promotes concentration and learning. A high GI breakfast (e.g. sugary cereals, white toast) can lead to a decline in performance as the energy is less sustained throughout the day.

### 6. Giving your son feedback on his learning

Research has shown that the best way to provide feedback to improve student achievement on a learning task is to focus on the task itself and how to do it more effectively. Feedback related to general praise, rewards or punishment has little effect on improving learning.

### 7. The essential skills for success

Three of the skills needed for success at school (and in most areas of life) are concentration, memory and sequencing or getting things in the right order. The games parents play with their children such as Snap, Uno, Concentration, Battleships, Monopoly, Chess, Jigsaw puzzles, etc. all play an incredibly important role in developing these skills. Computer versions of these games have been found not to be as effective.



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