

# How to Help Your Child Fall in Love With School

Tools for College Success

[info@tools4collegesuccess.com](mailto:info@tools4collegesuccess.com)

Please consider this a general guide for college preparation. Each child is different so the particulars should be adjusted to fit the needs of an individual child. The important point is to guide our children in a way that they are prepared to do well at every step of their education journey and to make that journey as fun as possible.

## Make Learning FUN

### 0-5 years old (Infancy-Pre-K):

---

Read to your children EVERY day, preferably before they go to sleep. This does two things:

Hearing as many spoken words as possible builds brainpower in babies and young children. You're building their brain power!

Make sure your child can see the book as you are reading to him or her. If possible, have the child in your lap or by your side. By doing so you are establishing an emotional connection with your child. S/he is close to you and you're engaging in this adventure together. They can't wait for the nightly bedtime story!

Different types of books are appropriate for different ages. The first books you read to your infant might be filled with wonderful, colorful drawings, perhaps even something they can touch (e.g. feathers on a duck), and you can add to the fun by having different voices for different characters. In this way the child is learning through sight, sound, and touch. Children learn through different modalities so teaching in different modalities at an early age maximizes the chances that learning will be enjoyable and effective.

When your child is a toddler you may switch to books that begin teaching them basic core knowledge: animals, colors, and the like. They are building a knowledge base in a way that is fun and emotionally connective.

Around four years old you may want to start reading short chapter books with pictures. They are old enough to follow a story plot and they will likely enjoy it.

Keep reading to your child even after they head off to kindergarten! There are so many great books and series. The Roald Dahl series can keep them entertained for months.

# How to Help Your Child Fall in Love With School

You are instilling a love of reading and teaching them to read. Young children generally prefer to read a book over and over again. Through this sort of repetition they are literally learning to read. You will notice, for example, that they will know which words are associated with each page. Eventually they will begin to pick up particular sight words. Reading is the most important academic skill your child will build. Make the ritual consistent and fun.

## **Make Learning ROUTINE** **Ages 5-12 (Elementary School):**

---

Continue reading to your child every night. And set some reasonable, long term goals so that you ensure your child is making progress. For example:

- By 3rd grade: Have your child read a book independently.
- By 5th grade: Have your child read a chapter book independently. Harry Potter is a hit with many children.

Again, all children are different. Learning tends not to be linear. It often happens in bursts—just like your child's growth spurts. So don't fret if your child doesn't seem ready or interested in starting this journey in the ways outlined above. Please relax. This will keep the journey enjoyable.

Create academic skill building activities for your child that are fun and engaging. Examples include:

- Chess Club
- Spelling bee
- Math Team
- Trivia games
- Crossword puzzles
- Reading competitions
- Foreign language study/immersion
- Music lessons
- Puzzles

Buy toys that require constructing and building such as legos or erector sets. Card games can teach them strategy and build their math skills.

Games such as Monopoly and Risk require them to think several steps ahead and build strategic thinking.

# How to Help Your Child Fall in Love With School

Sports are great. They tend to enhance physical fitness, teach the value of collaboration, etc. For the vast majority of students they are not a reliable mechanism for enhancing college admissions. Very few student athletes compete at a college level. If your child loves sports, then by all means have your child participate in sports. Also, look at the students who are being admitted to the top colleges and ask yourself what their parents have them doing when they're in elementary school. Do some of that with your children.

## **Ages 12-14 (Middle School):**

---

Now that your child loves learning, make sure that s/he is properly placed and that you get reliable feedback on their academic skills.

Make sure your child is taking Algebra by 8th grade. This is one of the most important markers for college readiness. If your child excels in math and their middle school offers it, consider Algebra in 7th grade and Geometry in 8th grade. If your child struggles in math, consider some gentle, skill building math experiences during the summer. "Math phobia" is fairly common and is often the result of a child wanting to see the answer immediately, rather than focusing on the first step of an equation. If a child can learn to stay calm and simply walk through a math problem one step at a time, that child will likely become much more comfortable with math. Companies such as Duolingo are developing excellent, free, step-by-step math games. Ditto for Khan Academy.

If your child's middle school offers the PSAT 8/9 make sure your child takes it. It will provide a useful summary of your child's academic skills. It's essentially an academic health check. When appropriate, use the scores to place your child in advanced high school courses. If your child's scores indicate that s/he is ready for advanced coursework, enroll him/her in those courses. Do not take "no" for an answer! The test results will also likely indicate some areas where you can focus over the summer. Are the reading scores below where you'd like them to be? Pick out three books for your child to read over the summer. Are the math scores a tad behind? Set up a reasonable schedule (for example, 30 minutes a day, five days a week) for your child to walk through math skill building exercises on sites such as Duolingo and Khan Academy.

If your child is significantly academically advanced—and it's perfectly fine if they are not—consider enrolling him/her in accelerated courses to keep them engaged. Johns Hopkins Center for Talented Youth (colloquially known as CTY)

# How to Help Your Child Fall in Love With School

is the gold standard. But there are other excellent programs. You can also consider free programs such as those offered by Duolingo.

## **14-18 (High School):** **This is where the fun begins!**

---

### **9th grade:**

---

Honors everything. If your child's high school requires specific courses in order to "qualify" for AP courses, find out what those courses are and enroll your child. Ask your child's high school what the qualifications are for AP courses BEFORE the 9th grade school year begins.

Take the PSAT 8/9. It gives you a sense of where your child is academically strong and where she needs some improvement. Again, it's an "academic physical".

If your child is academically advanced and the school allows it, place your child in one AP course. Do not push your child into AP if it's too much of a stretch. You want the first year of high school to be pleasant. It's okay for your child to stretch him or herself academically. But you want to avoid undue stress and allow your child to evolve at a natural pace.

### **10th grade:**

---

Take at least one AP course. DO NOT let any teacher or administrator tell you that your child should not be in these courses. If your child is ready, have her/him take 2 or 3 AP courses. But don't push too hard. We want our children to enjoy school. We want to avoid making them anxious.

TAKE THE AP EXAM!!!! Don't worry if your child scores a 1 or a 2 on the exam. Keep at it and their scores will improve in 11th and 12th grade. If they receive high AP exam scores in 10th grade that's great! But it's okay if they don't. AP courses mimic college introductory courses so don't get overly anxious if the first test is difficult.

Take the PSAT 10. See if your child has improved from the PSAT 8/9. If your child didn't take the PSAT 8/9 the PSAT 10 still provides useful information. Again, think of it as an academic health check.

# How to Help Your Child Fall in Love With School

Download Big Future School App. This allows you to begin connecting with colleges.

Over the summer have your child spend 30-60 minutes a day, five days a week practicing on Khan Academy's Official SAT Practice site (<https://www.khanacademy.org/test-prep/digital-sat#v2>). Have your child alternate between Reading sections and Math sections. This will improve your child's math and critical reading skills and prepare him for college entrance exams. As a parent you can monitor your child's progress and make sure they are staying on pace.

Use College Board's Big Future site to opt into the Search program. If you take the ACT opt into their search program. This allows colleges to see your child and begin recruiting her.

If your child is super academically advanced and wants to get ahead on her coursework, consider signing up for one of the many courses offered by Johns Hopkins University's Center for Talented Youth.

## **11th grade:**

---

Take at least two AP courses. TAKE THE AP EXAMS!!!! It is likely that your child's scores will improve from the AP exam he took in 10th grade. If your child is ready, have him take 3 or 4 AP courses. But don't push too hard. We want our children to enjoy school. We want to avoid making them anxious. Take the PSAT/NMSQT. This gives your child a chance to earn scholarships and recognition honors that will help her in the college admissions process. Take the test seriously even though it plays almost no role in college admissions.

Over the summer have your child spend 30-60 minutes a day, five days a week practicing on Khan Academy's Official SAT Practice site. (ACT does not have high quality, free testing materials. If it did, they would be recommended.) Have your child alternate between Reading sections and Math sections. Monitor your child's progress. You can do so quite easily online.

Have your child take the July administration of the ACT or the August administration of the SAT. Your child can study over the summer without worrying about other school work. If you like your child's score you can submit it with her college applications. If you don't like the score you don't need to submit

# How to Help Your Child Fall in Love With School

it to test optional colleges. Taking the ACT or the SAT can help your child. Since most colleges (though not all) are remaining test optional, it can't hurt her. Create a college list! Create a balanced list with a mix of reach, fit and safety schools. Your child can go to College Board's Big Future site to create a balanced list. If your child's school uses Naviance you can plug in your child's GPA and test scores to get a sense of the colleges that are within his range. The ideal mix of colleges is a ratio where 3 are reach schools, 2 are fit, and 1 is a safety. No matter the number of schools your child applies to, keep this ratio in mind.

During the summer complete the Common App. DO NOT WAIT UNTIL THE LAST MINUTE!!!!

By August, most colleges will have their applications online. Download the applications. If your child's school uses Naviance, download the applications into your child's Naviance page.

Before the first day of school have your child complete at least TWO SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAYS for colleges on his list. Three would be better. As the parent, take as much time as you need to create a "Brag sheet" about your child. This sheet highlights all of your child's strengths that are not immediately clear on her academic transcripts.(e.g., her parents get home late from work so she prepares dinner for the family twice a week). Give the Brag sheet to your child's school counselor. It will make it easier for the counselor to put together a letter of recommendation. Hopefully the counselor will appreciate it!

## **12th grade:**

---

Take at least two AP courses. With at least five AP courses under her belt, your child will be dramatically better able to handle the rigors of college coursework. She will be much more likely to matriculate, earn good grades and graduate from college.

If your child is ready, have him take 3 or 4 AP courses. But don't push too hard. We want our children to enjoy school. We want to avoid making them anxious. TAKE THE AP EXAMS!!!! By 12th grade your child is much more likely to score in a range that earns college credit. If she ends up attending a college that does not give AP credits she will likely be able to opt out of some core requirements and/or introductory courses.



# How to Help Your Child Fall in Love With School

Take the September or October ACT or the October SAT test in school if your school offers it.

Complete the CSS Profile (the “common app” for financial aid) in October.

Complete the FAFSA as soon as it is released (usually October).

Apply early to at least one college. Admissions rates are higher in the early application round, so consider having your child apply to his dream school in this round.

If you are hoping to receive financial aid, think very carefully about applying Early Action (EA) vs. Early Decision (ED). EA usually allows your child to apply to other colleges during the regular admissions round. ED tends to be binding, meaning that if your child is accepted ED, he has to accept the offer and withdraw all other applications, or reject the admissions offer. Anecdotally, financial aid seems to be less generous for ED admits, though every case is different. But sometimes admission rates are higher with ED. There are costs and benefits to both ED and EA. Please carefully weigh each option.

Create personal essays that let the admissions office know something about you that they will not learn from your academic record. Colleges are trying to balance many factors when building a class. Knowing about you - your personality, your interests, your stories - will help them consider you as part of an entire class. Avoid essays that highlight accomplishments or activities that are evident beyond the essays. Colleges can see your academic record on your transcripts and through your scores. They will have a sense of your extracurricular activities from the activities section on your Common App. Don't double down on information they already have.

Apply to a balanced list of schools during the regular admissions process.

Have your child consider the college with the highest four-year graduation rate to which she is admitted. This is so important and often overlooked!

The primary factor many families consider in deciding where their child will attend college is financial aid. This is important and understandable given the substantial cost of college. Though not always the case, financial aid awards tend to be more generous at the more selective colleges, so there is often no trade off between four-year graduation rates and financial aid awards. If a substantially less competitive college is offering much more aid, then your family should seriously consider the long term implications of saying “no” to a college that may have a deeper network of alums, more resources for campus activities, internships, research opportunities, graduate school opportunities, etc.

# How to Help Your Child Fall in Love With School

Breathe and relax. You've done everything the right way. The universe will take care of you.

## **Extra curriculars:**

---

There is a prevailing notion that college admission offices want their applicants to engage in loads of extra curricular activities. Generally speaking this is not true. Many college admissions offices want to see that an applicant dedicated herself to a finite set of activities. They don't necessarily need to become world class. They simply need to demonstrate commitment, since this is a character trait crucial to college and professional success. So avoid forcing your child into extracurriculars against their will. (Save that for homework!) This will more likely create exhaustion, anxiety, and make them less open to your guidance.

## **College:**

---

Students are typically 17 or 18 years old when they begin college. They are under an inordinate amount of pressure to declare a major, prepare for a career, etc. Resist this pressure. Most 17 and 18 year olds have no idea what they hope to do for the rest of their lives. Rushing these important choices can short cut the critically important processes of discovery. Your child should enjoy the freedom to explore different types of courses, different activities, a variety of friend groups, etc. Take the opportunity to explore. You may discover something you love!



# How to Help Your Child Fall in Love With School

## Important College Tips:

---

- Study every afternoon and evening from Sunday -Thursday. You can go out and have fun on Thursday night after you've studied. Study a bit on Friday afternoon. Take Friday night off and socialize with friends. Study on Saturday afternoon. Take Saturday night off and socialize with friends. Sunday is a study day.
- Go to class. Go to class! GO TO CLASS!!!
- Sit in the front row of the classroom.
- If you have a question, ask the professor or T.A. If you're not comfortable asking during class, ask after class is over.
- Schedule office hours with each professor at least once a semester.
- If your college offers free tutoring and writing services, go at least once a week during the first semester.
- Find the smartest student in each of your classes and ask her if you can study together.
- This is your first time away from home. You're going to be homesick. That's normal. Stay at school. Don't go home until Thanksgiving or Winter break. If you're super homesick, see if someone from your family can visit you for a weekend. If they can't, schedule regular calls. FaceTime if you have smartphones. Do not go home! Stay at school! DO NOT GO HOME!
- Return for the second semester the first day dorms reopen.
- Over the first two years do your best to figure out if there are courses you really love. If you find them, take them and make that your major. Study what you love! This is one of the secrets of college. If you put in the work in high school - and hew to the formula above - college courses will be MUCH more interesting than high school, where there's little room to adapt the courses to your personal preferences.