

# How Fathers Can Help Kids Succeed in School: Two Easy Ways That Won't Cost a Cent

by Esther Jantzen, EdD

You love your children, that's a given. You want them to be at least as successful in school as you were, maybe more so.

But sometimes you're not quite sure how to help your kids to become successful, right?

If this fits, please read on.

First, understand that as a dad, you are incredibly important to your children whether you live with them or not. Don't ever think otherwise. Even if society has labeled you a deadbeat dad, you are still important.

Understand that what kids need *most* from you actually doesn't take money, though providing for them financially is important.

Dads, here are two significant no-cost things you can do to help your kids achieve. It's best to start these at an early age, but if you didn't, it's not too late. You can start today.

**1) Talk with your kids.** That means more than asking "Did you do your homework?"

Instead, try conversation starters like "Tell me about..." or "What do you think about..." or "Describe..."

Then count to 10 very slowly in your head before you say anything else. Give them the time they need to gather their thoughts--teachers call that "wait time."

Listen carefully to what your child says and ask at least one follow-up question.

"Why...?" is often a good one. Or try, "Yes, and anything else?"

Don't hesitate to use big words when you talk with your children. That's how they learn them. Kids need to hear words from your mouth, not the television, radio, or computer.

There was a study recently of how many words young children hear in their homes.

What they found was that the average four-year-old in a low-income family has heard

only a third of the number of words that a child in a professional family has. And a child's vocabulary at age three predicts their reading success throughout their school life.

It costs nothing to talk with and listen more to your children. Overall, be quick to encourage and slow to criticize as you converse with children. It's easy, with a little practice. You can do it.

And it's also good to sing to them, even if it's a little awkward at first. Let your voice convey your love.

**2) Read aloud to your kids.** Part of the job of a father is to introduce kids to the world in safe and fun ways.

Reading books can do that. Books teach kids about words, history, geography, people, feelings, and science...well, just about everything.

It is especially important for boys to see men reading—and often! This means both reading aloud to them and reading by yourself.

If you're not a big reader of books yourself, get magazines (appropriate ones!) or newspapers you like and make sure your kids see you reading them.

Children learn by watching what their parents (or adults around them) do and then copying that.

Realize you can help your kids be successful in school by just talking and reading with them. Remember, scholastic achievement *and* success in life depend a lot on the ability to use language.

And finally, for the few short years your children are young, enjoy them wholeheartedly! That helps them succeed, too.

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