

# Parents, School Success, and Health

*[Announcer] This podcast is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC - safer, healthier people.*

[Erica Mizelle] Hi, this Erica Mizelle with Dr. William Jeynes, guest speaker at the 2009 Parenting Speaker Series at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The start of a school year can be an exciting, as well as an anxious time for parents and children. Children think about what they will wear on the first day of school, whether or not they'll like their new teacher, and if their friends will be in their class. Parents wonder if their child will be inspired to learn, or be bored to tears. They wonder if the new teacher will nurture their child's strengths and advance the areas where he or she needs improvement.

Research has shown children and adolescents do better academically when parents are involved in their lives, including school activities. Children who do well academically are more likely to become healthy adults and do well financially, compared to children who do poorly in school. Today we're talking to Dr. Jeynes about the relationship of parenting to school success. Dr. Jeynes is a Professor of Education at California State University, Long Beach and has written six books and 60 academic articles on parenting and school success. Thank you for being here Dr. Jeynes.

[Dr. Jeynes] Thank you for inviting me. It is a joy to be here.

[Erica Mizelle] Dr. Jeynes, tell us how parenting behaviors relate to a child's success in school?

[Dr. Jeynes] Overall, the more parents are involved with their children's lives, the more likely they are to do well in school.

[Erica Mizelle] So what can parents do to help their children succeed in school?

[Dr. Jeynes] Children learn best in a home atmosphere that provides love and a reasonable degree of structure. Parental involvement is one expression of this love and structure. An involved parent invests in the overall life of their child so that the child will have a sense of purpose in life. To the extent that children have a sense of long-term purpose in their lives, they will tend to have an internal drive that will enable them to succeed.

There are many types of parental involvement, but the most important types also tend to be the least concrete. That is, the most important aspects of parental involvement are not so much attending school functions, checking homework, and establishing home rules, although these are helpful. Rather, it's even more helpful for children when parents clearly explain that they expect their children to do well in school. It's equally important for parents to demonstrate their love and support for their children and to set appropriate boundaries and rules.

[Erica Mizelle] So how does school success affect a child's lifelong health?

[Dr. Jeynes] There is a strong relationship between the factors that promote academic achievement and those that produce healthy children. In reality, a loving, supportive home environment is not only important for school outcomes but it is important for a child's mental health, as well. In other words, the same parenting qualities which produce impressive academic results can also encourage mental health. Children who are raised in stable, loving home environments are less likely to engage in substance abuse and premarital sex. Students who do better in school have lower rates of absenteeism and are generally in better health. Stable, supportive homes create an atmosphere of low stress and greater harmony which in turn leads to better health among children.

[Erica Mizelle] What are good ways for parents to get involved to encourage their child's school success?

[Dr. Jeynes] First, parents should participate in regular, two-way communication, involving academic learning and other school projects that help the child develop, as a student and a person. This signals the importance the parent places on these topics and the parent's commitment to their child. In order to encourage this communication, regular family times are highly recommended; for example, eating at least one meal together, every day. Also, family reading time where you can read aloud and then discuss what you have read has been associated with increased literacy. Second, parents should set reasonably high expectations for their children's school success and communicate them clearly. Third, and possibly most important, is to interact with your child warmly, but also set limits and use consistent discipline. These are some of the aspects of parental involvement that have a stronger relationship with academic outcomes. Attending school functions, checking homework, and establishing household rules are also very important but most important are communication and your strong relationship with your child.

[Erica Mizelle] How can family issues, such as divorce, remarriage, and family conflict affect a child's success in school?

[Dr. Jeynes] As a general rule, the more difficult family transitions that a child has, the more likely it is that family issues will affect the child's academic achievement. Difficult family transitions, such as divorce or remarriage, can influence how a child does in school in a number of ways. Learning might be affected by the child's stress and changes in the time and money that are available to the child. They also may indirectly affect children. For example, parents and siblings may become depressed or angry, which may make the effects of the family transition even worse. Family conflict can cause stress and a fear that the family may not survive as an intact unit. Parental divorce may cause a child to feel as if life has permanently come apart. It may also make the child feel as if his or her relationship with the non-custodial parent is gone forever. Parental remarriage is a family transition in which the child is asked to accept a new adult in the home and this may reduce the access that the child enjoys with each biological parent.

[Erica Mizelle] Is there anything parents can do to reduce these effects of family transitions?

[Dr. Jeynes] Yes. The effects of these family issues can be reduced by a number of factors, including parental involvement, understanding and acknowledging the unique challenges faced by children, and encouraging the children to draw strength from other sources, including their religious faith and other adults who have a special place in their life.

[Erica Mizelle] Thank you for taking the time to talk with us today, Dr. Jeynes. For more information on child health and safety, child development, and healthy school connections, please visit [www.cdc.gov/parents](http://www.cdc.gov/parents).

*[Announcer] For the most accurate health information visit [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov) or call 1-800-CDC-INFO, 24/7.*