Aim High
Whaia Te Matauranga Tiketike

TE PUKE HIGH SCHOOL
Hot Tips for Parents/Caregivers
to Support their Child’s Success at School

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1. **Be a Positive Influence on your Child’s Learning**

   In many houses, late afternoon and early evenings can be times of high stress when children and parents/caregivers return from school and work. The pressure of household chores and homework/study demands can cause problems. This is an important time for parents/caregivers to manage their own stress and model calmness. Calm competent parents/caregivers who can manage their own stress are required for a hassle-free homework/study time.

   Parents/caregivers should avoid confrontations through the language they use e.g. “go and do your homework now” should be replaced with “let’s see how we can best manage this...” types of language. Get involved with your child’s learning by checking homework every night and promoting an atmosphere of co-operation and productivity. A home environment that encourages learning is more important to student achievement than income, education level or cultural background. When children and parents/caregivers talk regularly about school, children perform better academically. Celebrate your child’s achievements.

2. **Set High Achievable Expectations for Work habits and Performance**

   Setting and maintaining high, achievable expectations is critical to student performance. High expectations need to be matched with high levels of support and guidance. Provide positive feedback on your child’s performance. If your child has made mistakes, use this as a learning opportunity, “what can be learnt from this?” or “what could be done better next time?” Positive thinkers use ‘mistakes’ as an opportunity to learn something new.

   Encourage your child to aim to achieve their personal best, by aiming for excellence in everything they do.

3. **Set up a Brain-friendly Homework/Study Environment**

   The environment has a strong influence on a student’s ability to use their brain effectively for learning and their productivity during homework/study time. A stressful or distracting learning environment increases certain chemicals in the brain which in turn reduce the ability to think and process information. There are two aspects of the learning environment
that need to be considered; the physical environment and the ‘atmosphere’.

(a) **The Physical Element of the Learning Environment**

Parents/caregivers need to set up a personal learning space for their child, which promotes effective learning away from distractions such as the TV, radio, video games and other members of the household. Do not allow your child to do homework/study with the TV on or while laying on their bed. TV and fast beat music prevent deep learning. To establish an effective personal learning space parents/caregivers should take into account a comfortable desk and chair, lighting, temperature and ventilation. Personalise the learning space with a large year planner on the wall.

(b) **The ‘Atmosphere’ of the Learning Environment**

Parents/caregivers need to control the atmosphere to ensure that it is calm and productive thereby maximising effective learning. When people are under stress chemicals are produced in the body which shut-down regions of the brain limiting learning. In contrast, a calm, productive learning atmosphere allows the brain to release ‘learning-friendly chemicals’, which maximise the brain’s ability to “get in the zone” to process, interpret and make sense of information.

4. **Develop Good Homework and Study Habits**

Parents/caregivers who want to establish effective and efficient homework and study habits for their child need to establish regular daily routines. Each afternoon/evening every Year 9 to 13 student should engage in homework and/or study. Insist that your child uses their Te Puke High School Homework diary, which has been provided free of charge.

Research has shown that students benefit from completing homework and study on a regular basis. The optimum amount of time spent on homework and study is 1½ to 2½ hours per night for senior students and 1 hour per night for junior students.

Establish time each day at home when your child does their homework and study. If your child states they have no homework this provides an opportunity for them to do study. As with any sport to improve you need to practice. Start studying today – don’t wait till the end of the year. Consider study like putting money in the bank. If you start early enough and put in regular daily study you will build up a great bank account of
knowledge and skills over the course of the year with little effort. If you wait till the end of the year and start studying just weeks or days before the exams you need to put a huge investment of time into study during a stressful time to try and develop knowledge and skills.

Use the following checklist to help establish good homework and study habits:

1. **Before sitting down for learning eat some brain food, drink some water and use positive self-talk.**
2. **Get out all the equipment you will need including books, homework diary and pencil case.**
3. **Eliminate distractions, including the TV, radio and other noisy family members.**
4. **Sit in your personal learning space, open your diary and make a list of all the homework and/or study you want to achieve. This is your work schedule.**
5. **Estimate the time needed to complete each task.**
6. **Prioritise and schedule your tasks in to 30 minute time slots.**
7. **Starting with the first 30 minute time slot, visualise what you want to achieve and affirm this goal by saying it aloud: e.g. “During this 30 minutes I will complete ....”.
8. **Using time management matrix and homework/study timetable. Include short 2-3 minute break at the end of each 30 minute time slot to get up and walk around and mentally preparing for the next 30 minute time slot.**
9. **Work your way through your work schedule and cross off the tasks you have completed.**
10. **When you have finished your homework/study session, reward yourself.**

**5. Positive Thinking Affects the Fitness of the Brain**

One of the most powerful influences on your attitude, personality and behaviour is what you say to yourself; your internal dialogue or self-talk which leads to either positive or negative thinking. Using positive thinking boosts your self esteem, happiness, relieves stress, productivity and success.

Everyone faces challenges, difficulties and problems, which are unavoidable. By responding effectively to each challenge, you grow and become a stronger person. Setbacks help you to learn and grow. Positive, optimistic people are resilient and bounce back from set backs fast. Since your mind can hold only one thought at a time, either positive
or negative, if you deliberately choose the positive thought to dwell upon, you keep your mind optimistic and your emotions positive.

The brain of a person who is thinking positively is better prepared for working and learning. Positive thinking and the ability to achieve are closely related. Research shows that thinking negative or angry thoughts produces stress chemicals and prevents learning. On the other hand, thinking positively generates chemicals, which enable the brain to think and learn. A person who is active, focused, productive and motivated has different brain chemicals from a person who is feeling negative, unable to concentrate and is unmotivated. People who think positively produce a helpful mixture of chemicals that create a motivated state for thinking and learning.

The brain works better when there is a sense of personal choice and control and when there is positive thinking about successfully completing tasks. Children who are encouraged and who have families who believe in them are more likely to succeed. The use of positive language and positive thinking helps to create helpful brain chemistry and successful learning.

6. Provide Brain Food to Enhance Learning

Parents/caregivers should promote eating healthy brainfood. It is clear from research that the way our brains work depends a lot on the what food we eat and when we eat it. Consider your brain like a car engine. Using good quality fuel and looking after your engine enables you to get a good performance out of your car. It is the same for your brain, use good quality fuel in the form of brainfood helps to improve learning performance. A search on the internet will provide information of healthy brainfood.

Our body and brain works best when it is supplied with a steady supply of energy from good quality food. A good performance during homework/study time starts at breakfast time. Starting each day with a brainfood breakfast, high in complex carbohydrates and protein, and low in sugar and fat sets the learner up for a productive day at school. During the day the student’s brain needs small top-ups of good brainfood at regular intervals through to the end of homework/study time.

Homework/study hassles are often caused by students not having brainfood throughout the day, causing their energy levels to drop. As a result they binge on snack foods high in sugar when they get home which prevents their brains from working effectively during
homework/study time. Avoid commercial snacks and eliminate sweetened products.

7. **Drink Plenty of Wonderful Water**

Research has shown that when students drink water frequently their behaviour improves, work levels increase, their memory improves and they do better in tests and exams. Every cell in the human body contains about 80% water in which millions of chemical reactions occur every second. Drinking plenty of water is essential for keeping the brain cells switched on. A lack of water causes lapses in concentration, boredom, drowsiness and confusion.

Students should drink six to eight glasses of pure water each day (1.5-2 litres). Frequently sip water from a drink bottle equivalent of a glass and a half every hour. Avoid drinking drinks containing sugar, flavours, juices and caffeine as they react differently in your brain cells and can cause water to be removed from the body.

8. **Oxygenate the Brain to Enhance Learning**

Brain cells need a good supply of oxygen to enable thinking and learning to take place. One-quarter of the oxygen breathed in is used by the brain cells. A lack of oxygen causes drowsiness and leading to the inability for the brain to work properly. Limited exercise, poor posture, shallow breathing and anxiety all reduce the oxygen supply to the brain.

Students need to sit straight in their chairs with their bottom well back in the chair, shoulders and neck relaxed, and feet on the floor.

To supply sufficient oxygen to the brain students should practice slow deep inhaling which fills their lungs and then slow exhaling which expels all the ‘used air’. Shallow breathing leaves about a litre of stale air at the base of the lungs, which contributes to drowsiness.
9. **Ensure Plenty of Sleep**

Sleep is very important for effective learning. Sleep helps the brain process new information and commit to memory. In studies, people who had slept after learning a task did better on tests later.

During sleep the hippocampus region of the brain allows memories to be stored in the neocortex. Sleep allows for the brain the time needed to rewire the neural circuits to make sure that all newly gained information is best stored as memories for future use.

Sleep is essential for reducing stress and for allowing the brain to process and store information. Experiments conducted with university students have shown that those who get a good night’s sleep have a much better performance than those students who have less sleep. By cutting down on sleep we learn less, we develop less, we are less bright, we make worse decisions, we accomplish less, we are less productive, we are more prone to errors, and we undermine our true intellectual potential. Those who do not respect their sleep are not likely to develop their full mental potential.

A student’s brain needs at least 8-10 hours sleep per night.

10. **Regular Daily Exercise**

The benefits of regular exercise are well known for maintaining a healthy body. The same is true for a healthy brain. Regular daily exercise increases the flow of vital oxygen and food to the brain for thinking and learning. People who are physically active have healthier brains and are able to learn more effectively. Students should engage in a minimum of 30 minutes of physical exercise per day to keep fit, reduce stress, sleep well, and show good long-term learning results. Remember the saying healthy bodies, healthy minds.

11. **Eliminate Alcohol and Drugs**

Extensive scientific and medical information reveals just how harmful drinking alcohol is to the developing adolescent brain. The brain goes through dynamic change during adolescence, and alcohol can seriously damage short-term growth processes, thereby causing irreversible effects.

Even small quantities of alcohol impair learning and memory. Adolescent drinkers scored worse than non-users on many types of tests including:
vocabulary, general information, memory and memory retrieval. In addition, adolescent are more likely to fall behind and have an increased risk of social problems, depression, suicidal thoughts and violence. Alcohol affects the sleep cycle, resulting in impaired learning and memory as well as disrupted release of hormones necessary for growth and maturation.

It goes without saying that drugs negatively affect learning and social skills. Research demonstrates clearly that students who use drugs have reduced intellectual ability even if drugs are used for a short time.

12. Form Positive Supportive Relationships with the School

When parents/caregivers are involved in their child's education, the child does better in school. In study after study, researchers discover how important it is for parents/caregivers to be actively involved in their child's education and form positive supportive relationships with the school.

Parents/caregivers need to form a positive partnership with the school focussed on improving their child’s achievement. Your child’s learning is really a partnership between the school and yourself. It’s not just a matter of sending your child off to school for it to educate your child. Schools encourage parents/caregivers to have regular contact with teachers. You are welcome to contact your child’s teachers throughout the school year to discuss your child’s progress and what needs to be done to improve their performance.

You can also take an active interest in your child's education by:

- Going to parent-teacher meetings.
- Talking to your child and teachers about your child’s school reports.
- Making sure your child gets to school on time.
- Asking your child about school notices or newsletters.
- Standing for election on the Board of Trustees.
- Joining parent organisations such as PTA or Parents’ Forum.
- Helping with activities at the school.
- Visiting the school to discuss your child’s progress with the teacher directly.

The more positive and active the partnership is between parents/caregivers and the school, the more positive and productive your child’s education will be.

Consistent involvement in their child's education will make an important difference in your child's life.