

Papers. Pencils. Confidence.

by Nathalie Kunin

What do these three things have in common? Well, they're all on our first day of school checklist. And that third word—Confidence—can't be found in the back-to-school section at Staples.

Before the first day of school, our children start to become consumed by questions like Will I like my new teacher? Will I make new friends? Will there be even more homework this year?

As parents, we can set some goals for ourselves for this year. We can value and celebrate our children's strengths—not dwell on their weaknesses. We can ward off their nerves and trepidation with support—not criticism. We can anticipate success—not failure. Our involvement and encouragement are undoubtedly the most influential factors in their academic achievement.

As the school year approaches, put these 5 tips into practice to pump up your child's self-confidence.

- 1. Shake off the summer.** First and foremost, set your child up for success by helping them get organized. Designate folders for each class, install a bulletin board or whiteboard in their room to display the week's assignments, and establish a consistent after-school homework routine.
- 2. Teach self-advocacy.** Urge your child to communicate directly with his or her teachers rather than passing that task on to you. Act out a conversation in which your child asks why they received a poor grade on a paper and how they could improve on the next one.
- 3. Build a foundation.** Help your child develop decision-making and problem-solving skills by encouraging him or her to find their own solutions. Break down large tasks into smaller, more manageable ones. This ensures mastery and retention and increases the chances of a successful outcome.
- 4. Use scaffolded assistance.** This teaching tool gives children the support and guidance they need to succeed but allows them do the majority of the work independently. Let your child know that you're there to lend a hand—but only when they need it.
- 5. Slip up and move on.** Remind your child that you expect effort, not perfection. And when things don't go according to plan, use those mistakes—poor grades, missed deadlines, etc.—to teach him or her that making mistakes is a valuable (and inevitable) part of the learning process.