

News Notes To Parents

Purdue University Cooperative Extension Service of Wells County

September 2025

3 Ways to Help Your Kids Have a Healthy School Year

Every school day matters. Missing too many days can hurt a child's learning, friendships, and overall well-being. School provides opportunities for academic growth, social connections, nutritious meals, exercise, and support.

1. Build Healthy Routines

A strong start begins with nutritious meals, regular exercise, and enough sleep. Balanced meals fuel focus and learning. Families can apply for free or reduced-price school meal programs through their child's school. Adequate sleep is essential for memory, concentration, and academic performance, while too little sleep is linked to lower grades and increased tardiness. Help kids set limits on screen time, especially before bed, and encourage daily physical activity to improve rest and mood.



Photo from <https://www.freeimages.com/photo/thc0019146-2022806>

2. Keep Up with Checkups & Immunizations

Schedule an annual well-child checkup before school starts. Doctors can address health concerns, complete medication and sports forms, and discuss diet, fitness, and body image. Even non-athletes benefit from sports physicals.

Vaccinations protect against contagious diseases that spread easily in schools. Staying up to date keeps children and classmates healthy and reduces disruptions to learning. If your child lacks health insurance, ask your pediatrician about options like Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP).

3. Support Mental Health

Growing up brings both excitement and challenges. Watch for warning signs such as declining grades, changes in sleep, frequent complaints of physical symptoms, or increased absences.

- Encourage open conversations about feelings and reassure your child that it's okay to ask for help.
- Ensure they know at least one trusted adult at school—such as a counselor or social worker—especially if facing bullying or exclusion in person or online.
- Consult your pediatrician for guidance and referrals if mental health concerns arise.

Early support makes a big difference—helping children feel secure, connected, and ready to learn. By focusing on healthy routines, preventive care, and emotional well-being, you set them up for success all year long.

Adopted From:

Source: <https://www.healthychildren.org>

Teaching Young Kids About Needs vs. Wants

Understanding the difference between *needs* and *wants* is one of the first steps in building smart money habits. Even young children can begin learning this concept through everyday experiences that you can facilitate.

Why It Matters:

When children can identify what is necessary (needs) versus what is nice to have (wants), they develop decision-making skills that can guide their spending and saving choices as they grow. This skill helps them become thoughtful consumers and better money managers.

Tips on Teaching It:

Start with Simple Examples: Explain that *needs* are things we must have to live, like food, water, clothing, and a safe place to live. *Wants* are things that are fun or nice to have, like toys, extra snacks/treats, or the latest video/board game.

Use Real-Life Moments: At the grocery store, point to an apple and say, "This is food we need to be healthy." Then point to a candy bar and say, "This is something we might want, but don't need."

Encourage Choices: If your child wants something extra, help them think through whether it's a need or a want and if it's worth spending money on.

Fun Interactive Activity #1 – Needs vs. Wants Sort:

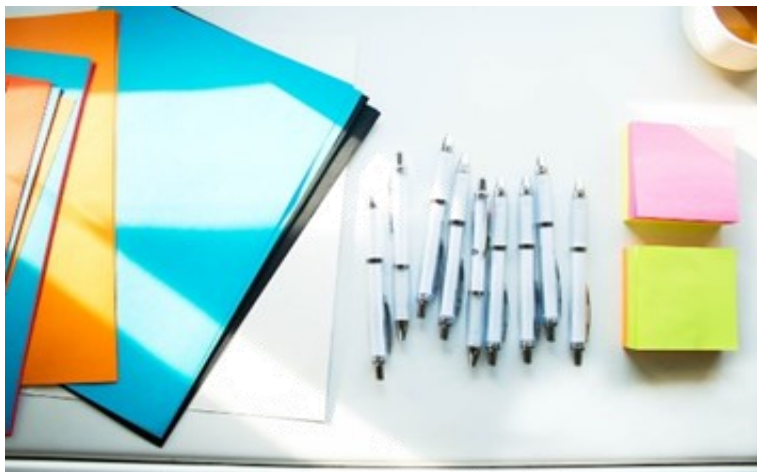
Materials: Two paper bags or boxes, sticky notes, and a few small household items or printed pictures.

Instructions: Label one bag "Needs" and one "Wants." Write or draw items on sticky notes (e.g., shoes, ice cream, toothbrush, tablet, blanket, video game).

Directions: Ask your child to sort the items into the correct bag. Talk about why they chose each category. Try switching it up by mixing in tricky items, like a winter coat, which you need when the weather is cold. This will help spark discussion. By practicing regularly, you're setting the foundation for lifelong money smarts, one thoughtful choice at a time.

Fun Interactive Activity #2 – Needs vs. Wants Scavenger Hunt

Directions: You can do this at home. Give your child 3 minutes to find three "needs" and three "wants." Then sit together and talk about each item. During your discussion, ask your child how some items can be both, depending on the situation (e.g., a bike could be a want or a need if it's their only way to get to school).



Resource: (OpenAI, 2025)

Photo resource: pexels.com

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