



# **A Mother's Story and A Teacher's Plan**



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# *Mrs. Parker's Story*

**"We're partners in this, aren't we?"**

School had just let out, and children were all around me in the hall. My heart raced as I walked into Room 104. I had never been called to school by a teacher before. My older children had always received good reports from their teachers, but my son Roger was struggling with some of his subjects. His teacher wanted to talk with me about it. I was very nervous.

"Mrs. Parker, please come in," the teacher said. She stood, came from behind her desk, and walked toward me. "My name is Judy Henry. How are you today?"

"Fine," I said, even though I wasn't. A knot had been in my stomach since Roger brought the note home from Miss Henry. At first I had been angry at Roger, then angry at Miss Henry. Then I felt guilty because I hadn't done more to help Roger.

"Please have a seat," Miss Henry said. She pulled the chair to the side of the desk. I sat down and began removing my coat. Miss Henry moved her chair closer to me, sat down, and opened a grade book in front of both of us.

"I'm very sorry Roger is . . ." I began saying.

"Mrs. Parker, I'm sorry too, and I'm sure Roger is sorry, but being sorry won't help any of us. I hope we can talk about what we can all do next. Together, we are going to get Roger back on track. We're partners in this, aren't we?" She smiled and touched my arm. I smiled back and felt relieved. There was something about Miss Henry that I liked.

**“Learning is important to everyone in the family.  
That is why I have prepared a plan for your family.”**

We reviewed Roger's grades and Miss Henry showed me a few of his papers. We talked about Roger, and I was happy that Miss Henry knew him well. She knew the good things about Roger. She sincerely wanted Roger to do better. She really was my partner.

“What do we do now?” I asked.

“I've talked with Roger. I told him you would bring home a plan for your whole family.”

“But Roger is the only one of my children who is having trouble in school,” I said.

“I'm happy to hear that,” Miss Henry said, “but we want to be sure your children continue to do well. We also want Roger to know that learning is important to everyone in the family. That is why I have prepared a plan for your family.”

She handed me a few handwritten pages, held together by a paper clip. She explained the plan to me. I was glad to have such practical suggestions. I agreed to follow the plan and to return to see Miss Henry in two weeks.

That evening I called the family together and explained the plan to them. I made sure they knew this was a plan for the whole family, not just Roger. Miss Henry had told me not to make Roger feel singled-out or punished.

Miss Henry's plan for our family has been a huge success. Because of it, we are a closer family now. Roger is doing better with his schoolwork. I no longer feel angry or guilty. In fact, I have been so happy with Miss Henry's plan that I have decided to share it with other families. That is why I have written this booklet.

On the pages that follow, you will find Miss Henry's plan. It is valuable for any family. Please follow its steps. You will be very happy you did.

*Alice Parker*

## School Day #1: Getting the Family Together

Call your family together. Tell them you have something you wish to talk with them about. Have everyone seated in a quiet room — no television or radio. Then say the following: (Don't read this to them. Put it in your own words.)

"I have something to say to you that is very important. A mother wants to do her best for her children. I know that doing my best means seeing that you do your best in school. I want to do a better job of helping you do your best in school. I want you to follow a plan that has worked for many other families. To start, each student will bring schoolwork home tomorrow, and we will meet at the kitchen table at 7:00 [pick a time when everyone is home]. We will be following this plan because we care about each other, and because learning is important to our family. Remember, every student will bring schoolwork home tomorrow, and we will meet at the kitchen table at 7:00."

That is all you have to say. If there are two parents in the home, they should present this to the children together. There is no need for discussion at this point. Allow the children to be curious. Just be sure that they know to bring schoolwork home and to meet at the kitchen table at the time you decided upon.



### *Mrs. Parker's Notes*

I was a little scared for some reason, but I got everyone together and told them what Miss Henry had said to tell them. The kids giggled at first, but when they saw I was serious they settled down. Roger had a guilty look on his face. I made sure they knew I was talking to everyone, not just Roger. When Roger said he probably wouldn't have any homework, I told him to bring his books home anyway.

**"I have something to say to you that is very important."**

**“It makes me very proud to see my children studying and learning.”**

## **School Day #2: Study Place**

Remind the children in the morning to bring their schoolwork or books home that night. Remind them to meet at the kitchen table at the time you decided upon.

Before the study time, prepare the kitchen table to be a Study Place.

1. Be sure there is enough room and enough chairs for everyone. Maybe you will have to use a card table in addition to the kitchen table. Every student should have a place to sit and a surface to write on.
2. Put dictionary, paper, pencils, pens, and a pencil sharpener in the middle of the kitchen table.
3. The room must be quiet — no television, radio, or other disturbances.
4. Have a small, healthful snack and/or drink ready to serve the children later.

When it is time to begin, ask each child to sit in a chair and begin to study. Tell them that you will speak with them in just a few minutes. If a child says he has no homework, tell the child to read a book or do a few extra arithmetic problems.

### **Say something like this:**

“It makes me very proud to see my children studying and learning. We have created a special Study Place in our home. Please continue to work quietly. When you have finished your work, you may leave. We will meet here again tomorrow at 7:00 [pick a time when everyone is home].”

Serve the snack. Let each child leave when he or she wishes. Keep the children as quiet as possible. Smile at them and let them know you are proud.



### *Mrs. Parker's Notes*

My daughter usually studies in her room. She questioned why she should study at the kitchen table. I took her aside before the study time for a private talk. I told her she would be able to study in her room later, but that I needed her to be a good example to the other children. She understood and was very helpful to me. Roger, of course, brought no schoolwork or books home. I gave him a piece of paper and pencil and told him to make his own arithmetic problems and then to write a paragraph about his day at school. After the study time, I had a private talk with Roger and told him I was very disappointed and expected him to bring books home every school night. If he didn't, I said, he would not be allowed to play with friends on the weekend. I think he got the message.

### School Day #3: Study Time

Prepare your Study Place at the kitchen table as you did the day before. When the children begin studying, tell them you will talk with them in a few minutes. Let them study quietly for about 10 minutes, then say something like this:

“We now have a family Study Place. I am very happy to see my children studying and learning. But I know you are wondering how much time you should spend with your studies. You are also wondering if you must always study at the same time. I have some answers for you.

“Our family rule will be that each student will study 10 minutes per grade level per day, five days per week. We will not study on Friday or Saturday evening unless there is extra schoolwork that must be done. Ten minutes per grade level per day means that if you are in the second grade, you study 20 minutes each day. If you are in the sixth grade, you study 60 minutes each day. If you are in the ninth grade, you study 90 minutes each day.



#### *Mrs. Parker's Notes*

When I told the children how much time they were to spend studying, my oldest son sighed and started to complain. But he saw that I was firm. He was also relieved to know that he could adjust his schedule. The kids were noisier than I wanted, but they seemed to enjoy being together and having so much attention from me. I felt good because I was doing what was best for my children.

**“Our family rule will be that each student will study 10 minutes per grade level per day, five days per week.”**

“You may study more than this amount, but you may not study less than this amount. If your assignments are completed, you may spend the remaining time reading or organizing your notebooks or working extra problems.

“If you have an activity and cannot be home at the Study Time, you may study at another time. But I want to know when that time will be. So tell me. Plan ahead so that you complete your Study Time each day.”

Serve the snack. Let the children finish their Study Time. Check on them occasionally.

**Give your children plenty of praise for good study habits and for positive attitudes.**

### **School Day #4: Checking and Praising**

Your family now has a special Study Place, and your children know the amount of time you expect them to spend with their studies each day, five days per week. Now it is your job to see that the children meet your expectations. You must check on them. In a friendly but firm manner, you must see that each child continues to bring home schoolwork or books every day. You must see that the kitchen table is available as a Study Place. You must see that the minimum amount of Study Time is observed. Then give your children plenty of praise for good study habits and for positive attitudes.

Check:

1. Is each child studying 10 minutes per grade level per day?
2. Is the kitchen a quiet place to study?
3. Are your children bringing books and schoolwork home?

Your children should not think of Study Time as punishment. You can make it a happy time. Prepare a snack occasionally. Be interested in their work without disturbing them too much. **CHECK** on them. **PRAISE** them.



*Mrs. Parker's Notes*

I thought the hard part of this plan was over, but it had just begun. My kids kept trying the same excuses. They had no homework. They got all their work done at school. They had to call a friend. I worked hard to keep them on track. I reminded them that it was important to study each day even if they had no homework. I told them that they could not make or receive telephone calls during Study Time. I checked on them. I was friendly but firm, as Miss Henry had suggested. I praised them when they had good study habits.

## School Day #5: Listening

By now, your children should understand that you expect them to spend time each day studying in a quiet place. You must keep checking on them so that the habit of daily study is established.

You must also listen to your children. Show an interest in them. Each day, find at least one minute alone with each child. Sit down with the child. Ask him or her to tell you about his or her day. Then listen. Ask questions, but mostly listen. Don't let the child say, "Nothing happened today," and leave. Keep the conversation going with each child for at least a minute.



### *Mrs. Parker's Notes*

I kept checking and checking. My kids tried every trick, but each day got better. They soon knew that I meant business. Finally, they began to enjoy the Study Time, and they enjoyed the attention I gave them. The listening time became the most precious moments of my day. I learned so much I didn't know about my own children. As busy as I am, I find time to listen.

**Each day, find at least one minute alone with each child. Sit down with the child. Ask him or her to tell you about his or her day. Then listen.**



## Miss Henry's Five Rules

- Study Place:** 1. Every child should have a quiet place to study in the home.
- Study Time:** 2. Every child should spend at least 10 minutes per grade level per day studying at home.
- Check:** 3. Parents must check to see that Study Time is observed.
- Listen:** 4. Parents should listen to each child each day.
- Praise:** 5. Parents should praise children for studying and for having positive attitudes about school.



### *Mrs. Parker's Notes*

Everything was going fine in our home until my oldest son asked me to help him with his geometry assignment. I didn't understand the assignment at all. I felt terrible because I couldn't help my son, so I went to see Miss Henry. She told me that I should never feel bad for not understanding my child's schoolwork. It is my job to see that my children study and to let them know that learning is important to our family. It is not my job to do their work for them. Miss Henry said I had followed her plan perfectly, and Roger was doing much better in her class. What more could a mother want?



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