

# Helping Children Learn<sup>®</sup>

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School



## Foster self-respect to help your child behave respectfully to others

In order to interact in positive ways with others in school, students need to have a sense of self-respect. When children don't value themselves, they find it hard to value other people and treat them with respect.

Several factors contribute to your child's sense of self-respect. Here are some ways to bolster:



- **Competence.** It feels great to be able to do things well. Give your child lots of chances to learn and practice skills—everything from reading to playing sports to doing chores.
- **Accomplishments.** Notice your child's progress and successes. "You worked hard to make your report great. That should make you feel proud."
- **Confidence.** Encourage your child to stay positive in challenging situations. Help him see mistakes as opportunities to learn, and show your confidence in him by displaying a "you can do it" attitude.
- **Independence.** Allow your child to make age-appropriate choices. For example, "Would you rather organize your binder now or this evening?"
- **Support.** Show your child that you accept, appreciate and love him for who he is. Ask about his day and listen attentively to his answers.
- **Imitation.** If you have self-respect, your child is more likely to have it, too. Stick to your principles. Take care of yourself and believe in your worth.



## Post a problem-solving guide to math

There is usually more than one way to solve a problem. This is definitely true when students are struggling with a math assignment.

To help your child remember the strategies to use if she gets confused while doing math, have her create a visual reminder to hang in her work area. Give her some posterboard, and help her list everything she can try to get herself back on track. Her list might include:

- **Reread the instructions.**
- **Restate the problem** in my own words.
- **Draw a diagram.**

- **Look for a similar sample** problem in my book or handout.
- **Think about how I solved** other problems like this one.
- **Estimate an answer** and then check it out.

The next time your child is stuck on a math problem, she can refer to her poster to find several ways to approach it.

Source: D. Ronis, *Brain-Compatible Mathematics*, Skyhorse Publishing.

## Avoid activity overload

Concerns about what your child missed during the pandemic may make it tempting to sign her up for every enrichment activity available. Keep in mind that your child also needs time—not in the car—to concentrate on her schoolwork, as well as some time to relax and avoid stress. If too many activities have her overwhelmed, ask her to choose one or two that she truly enjoys.

## Asking questions improves reading comprehension

Your child will get more out of reading if he asks and answers some questions along the way. Help him consider questions such as:

- **Does the title** of the book, chapter or unit offer clues to the content?
- **Are there words** he doesn't know? He can jot them down to look up later.
- **Is this topic** similar to anything else he knows? What ideas are familiar? What new things did he learn?



## Promote scientific discovery

An understanding of science is vital in today's world. To encourage your child to learn and enjoy the subject:

- **Investigate nature.** Observe the moon and stars together. Compare the weights of cups of snow, ice and water.
- **Ask questions.** "Why do you think ... ?" "What might happen if ... ?" "How could we find out ... ?"
- **Discuss** science happening in your home. Why do old apples shrink and get wrinkly?
- **Give your child** something to take apart to figure out how it works. Try a ballpoint pen, a candle or an old toy.



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## My child loves screens and hates rules. What can I do?

**Q:** Mornings at our house are hectic. In order to get everyone ready on time, I've established a rule: No screen time before school. My nine-year-old constantly tries to break it. Aside from taking away her games and videos forever, what can I do?

**A:** All kids break the rules once in a while. When your child does, calmly enforce the consequence you have established (banning screen time for a few days, for example). Then remind her that she's responsible for her choices. To help her avoid making the same poor choice again:



- 1. Have your child name the problem.** "I want to watch videos and play games after breakfast, but Mom says that slows me down and I'm not ready when it's time to get going."
- 2. Help her brainstorm solutions.** "If I do my math and reading right after school, I'll have time to watch a video after dinner." Or "If I put my game device away before bed, I won't see it lying out and be tempted to play with it in the morning."
- 3. Discuss her options** and help her decide which to try first.
- 4. Try her solution.**
- 5. Evaluate the outcome.** Did it work? Fantastic. Did it fail? Help her choose one of her other ideas to try or brainstorm some more.



## Do you use these read-aloud strategies?

Daily read-alouds with your child develop his reading skills and help him associate reading with enjoyable times with you. Are you using read-aloud strategies that make the most of this time? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

- 1. Do you set aside** at least 20 minutes a day to get cozy and read with your child?
- 2. Do you take** turns being the one to read aloud?
- 3. Do you let** your child choose where and what you'll read sometimes?
- 4. Do you pause** from time to time to discuss what you've read so far?
- 5. Do you stop** reading at an exciting place in the story so your child will want to continue the next day?

### How well are you doing?

*More yes answers mean you are helping your child become a better reader. For each no, try that idea.*

*"Reading should not be presented to children as a chore or duty. It should be offered to them as a precious gift."*

—Kate DiCamillo

## Supporting homework helps you stay in the know

Homework is a link between home and school. When you supervise your child's efforts, you find out what she is learning. Completing assignments is your child's responsibility, but it helps if you:

- 1. Make sure your child understands** the task. Have her explain it to you. If she's confused, read the instructions together. Display a positive attitude.
- 2. Review completed work.** This tells your child that schoolwork matters.
- 3. Let the teacher know** if your child repeatedly struggles with assignments. Ask how you can help.

## Should you pay for grades?

As a form of motivation, paying students for excellent grades shows inconsistent benefits and some serious drawbacks: It misses a lot of effort and progress. Your child is less likely to enjoy the satisfaction of learning for its own sake. And he may lose motivation to do anything he isn't being paid for.

Instead, help your child focus on what he's learning. Help him recognize his new skills. And praise him for working hard and doing his best.

## Jump-start writing ideas

If your child can't think what to write about, brainstorming is a good way to get her creative juices flowing. Encourage her to:

- Try a new point of view.** What would a picnic look like to an ant?
- Use visuals.** Have her look at a picture and write down everything it brings to mind.
- Add actions** to her ideas. What will happen next? How quickly?



Source: D.B. Reeves, Ph.D., *Reason to Write*, Kaplan Publishing.

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ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

## Quizzes and practice tests help students study for the real thing

Research shows that some ways of studying for tests work better than others. One of the most effective techniques is taking practice tests. In order to answer a question, your child must recall the information, and this reinforces it in her mind.

Practice testing can occur in several ways, including:

- **In-class quizzes.** Help your child understand that quizzes are opportunities to practice recalling material. After taking a quiz and learning her score, have your child correct any wrong answers and save the quiz to use for future studying.
- **Working with others.** You can help your child study by calling out questions from her worksheets or class handouts. Or she can call a study buddy from her class.
- **Independent study.** Your child can work with flash cards. Or she can create her own practice tests. Help her look at notes, vocabulary words and review questions in her class materials, and think of questions the teacher might ask about them. Then she can practice answering.

Encourage your child not to stop at one quiz. Research shows that quizzing several times reinforces learning even more!

Source: E. Kang, "5 Research-Backed Studying Techniques," *EduTopia*, [niswc.com/practice-test](http://niswc.com/practice-test).



## Refresh your child's resolve

January is a time for new beginnings. Ask your child about how she thinks the school year is going. Together, think about ways she can improve it. She could resolve to:

- **Commit** to study and sleep routines.
- **Turn** assignments in on time.
- **Take** specific steps to master a new skill.

## Prevent misbehavior before it happens again

Does your child frequently misbehave in the same way? Since you can predict his behavior, you can think about ways to prevent it before it happens.

If your child tends to be distracted and crabby during study time in the late afternoon, for example, he may be hungry. Let him munch on a healthy snack before he works.



If he pitches a fit when it's time to go to bed, he may need a longer bedtime routine to transition from playing to sleeping.

## Optimize read-aloud time

Reading aloud is a great way to boost your child's vocabulary and interest in reading. So don't stop when she can read to herself. For the best results:

- **Read aloud** every day.
- **Preview the text** before reading.
- **Read books you like.** Your enjoyment can increase your child's.
- **Emphasize the first sentence.** Use it to grab your child's attention.
- **Read with expression.** Use voices for each character. Add facial expressions, too.
- **Stop for the day** while your child still wants more.



## Use toothpicks to develop math skills

With a box of toothpicks, you can help your child learn serious math skills such as reasoning, pattern recognition and even basic geometry all while having fun. Here are some simple games to play together:

- **Last one wins.** This is a great game for two people. Lay 12 toothpicks on the table. Take turns removing one or two toothpicks. The player who takes the last toothpick wins. (Try to leave three toothpicks on the table to guarantee a win on your next turn.)
- **Can you copy this?** Using five toothpicks, create a design. Let your child look at it for three seconds. Then cover it and see if he can recreate it from memory.
- **Tricky triangles.** Give your child seven toothpicks. How many triangles can he create?

For some more fun, visit [niswc.com/toothpick](http://niswc.com/toothpick) and tackle some brain-teasing puzzles from the University of Hawaii at Manoa.

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ELEMENTARY SCHOOL



## How can I shift my child's focus from games to school?

**Q:** My son would rather play online games than do anything else. He rushes through his schoolwork so he can get back to gaming, and his grades show it. I'm glad he has something that makes him happy, but I'd like him to do better in school. What should I do?

**A:** Online games can be a fun way for kids to relax. Some can even promote physical activity and build academic skills. But with fewer recreational outlets, many kids are spending a lot more time with them, and game designers know how to create games that keep players coming back.



Since the amount of time your child spends playing games is interfering with his learning, it's time to provide some balance. Here's how:

- **Let your child know** that improving in school matters more than leveling up in a game. Say that you will be limiting the amount of time he spends on digital gaming so he'll have enough time for studying well.
- **Offer alternative recreation.** Plan enjoyable activities like reading aloud, playing board games, making art and getting exercise.
- **Set screen-free times** for the whole family, such as meal time, study time and at least 30 minutes before your child's bedtime.

## Parent Quiz

### Do you promote academic responsibility?

Completing assignments is part of a student's responsibility. But too many parents take it upon themselves to see that the work done. Are you encouraging your child take responsibility for schoolwork? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you remind** your child that her assignments are her responsibility?
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you have** a regular time set aside each day for your child to do assignments?
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you allow** your child to decide which subject to tackle first?
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you review** your child's work each day to make sure it is complete?
- \_\_\_ **5. Do you let** the teacher know if your child regularly struggles with schoolwork?

#### How well are you doing?

*More yes answers mean you are helping your child learn to meet responsibilities. For each no, try that idea.*

*"What we instill in our children will be the foundation upon which they build their future."*

*—Steve Maraboli*

## Build study skills that help your child read to learn

After learning to read, your child needs to understand how to read to learn. In order to retain material from the text, students must study as they read. Show your child how to:

- **Scan the text** to find important themes and points. He should look first at headings and subheadings. Then he can look for words in **boldface** and *italics*.
- **Make notes of key facts** and ideas in his notebook as he reads.
- **Pay attention to illustrations**, graphs, charts and tables. These often clarify central concepts.

## Chores are worth doing

Chances are, there will be a lot of things in school that your child will need to do even though she won't want to. Life is like that. Assigning her chores at home will help her learn the self-discipline she'll need. Doing a chore also reinforces the connection between effort and results. If she is doing her laundry, a stack of clean shirts is an accomplishment she can take pride in.



## Ask, 'How do you learn?'

Kids learn more and stay more motivated in their schoolwork when they think about *how* they learn. When you discuss assignments with your child, ask questions like:

- **What do you need** to know to do this work?
- **What do you already know** about it?
- **What questions could you ask** in order to learn more?
- **Which aspects** of this work do you think you do really well? Which are hard?
- **Does this get easier** as you go along?

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Coldwater Schools



## Stop a slump with strategies that encourage student motivation

The teacher wants your child to learn. You want your child to learn. But it's *your child's* desire to learn that really makes a difference to his success as a student. If his motivation is in a February slump, here are five strategies to revive it:

- 1. Tell your child** you believe he can do well in school. If he struggles, work with the teacher to find solutions.
- 2. Give your child** age-appropriate freedoms. Let him choose between two places to study, or whether to do assignments before or after dinner.
- 3. Correct mistakes** in a positive way. Don't say, "You had difficulty with spelling." Instead, try, "You spelled everything right except these three words. I bet you can learn them with practice."
- 4. Offer specific compliments.** Don't just say "Great job! Nice handwriting!" Say, "Your report is written so neatly. I can tell that put careful effort into it."
- 5. Add a real-life dimension** to learning. Let school lessons spark your imagination. Visit age-appropriate educational websites with your child. Visit a museum, in person if possible, or online. Do a science experiment or create a savings plan for a family purchase together.



## Promote math and science

Research suggests that children's attitudes toward math and science tend to be set in elementary school, and their parents' attitudes play a part in this. To make sure your child stays interested in math and science:

- **Play games together** that involve math and science skills.
- **Help your child see** herself as someone who can learn to master these subjects. Remind her that "Smart is something you *get*, not something you just *are*."
- **Point to diverse role models.** Math and science are for everyone, not just one kind of person.

Source: "Changing the Game in STEM with Family Engagement," Stem Next Opportunity Fund, [niswc.com/prostem](http://niswc.com/prostem).

## Suggest a holiday letter

Celebrate Presidents Day (Feb. 15) with a writing activity. What would your child like to say to the president? Which issues does your child think are important? What does he think the president should do? Have him put his thoughts in a letter. Be sure to follow the guidelines at [www.whitehouse.gov/get-involved](http://www.whitehouse.gov/get-involved).



## Overcome obstacles to thinking ahead

Parents know that young children can have a very hard time thinking ahead and following through on their plans. Here are three reasons why—and what you can do about each.

Most children:

- 1. Lack organizational skills.** Help your child use a calendar to track assignments, test dates and activities. Add a short "tidy time" to your child's study sessions and have her file papers and store materials where she can find them easily when she needs them.
- 2. Have a tough time resisting** the temptation to do something fun instead of something hard. You can give your child a break when the school day is over, but stick to a simple rule: No recreational screen time until assignments are finished.
- 3. Have little sense of time.** Your child may really think one day is enough time to finish a big project. Help her break it down into parts to do over several days.

## Breakfast is brain food

What one thing helps children focus during class, understand and remember more, and do better on spelling, reading and math tests? It's breakfast!

Children are less likely to eat breakfast if they feel rushed. Establish a schedule that lets your child have enough time to fuel up for a productive school day.



Source: M. Levin, MPH, "Research Brief: Breakfast for Learning," Food Research & Action Center, [niswc.com/breakfast](http://niswc.com/breakfast).

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## How can I help my child take a more positive outlook?

**Q:** My fifth grader has never been bubbly. But this year she has become so negative. She doesn't like school. She doesn't like her teacher. Last week, I asked her to plan something special for the two of us to do. Later, she said it was "OK, I guess." What else can I do?

**A:** These are challenging times, and there could be many reasons for your child's outlook. So begin by asking her about things that get her down. If one issue (or person) comes up over and over, you can brainstorm together about ways she can address it.

Here are some other steps to take:

- **Allow your child** to vent. Let her complain about schoolwork for a minute or two. Then redirect her by saying, "Well, you still need to do this before tomorrow." Say that everyone has responsibilities—like them or not.
- **Model the attitude** you'd like your child to have. Talk about ways you handle your own disappointments.
- **Help your child make choices** and take responsibility for improving her life where she can. It's a way of empowering her.
- **Consult with your child's doctor** or school counselor. If you think she may be overanxious or depressed, it's important to take action.



## Parent Quiz

### Do you add to your child's vocabulary?

There is a clear connection between a large vocabulary and academic success. Word knowledge improves comprehension and communication skills. Are you helping your child expand his vocabulary? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

\_\_\_ **1. Do you talk** with your child about new words and their meanings?

\_\_\_ **2. Do you relate** new words to familiar ideas? "Let's organize your room by *categorizing* your toys."

\_\_\_ **3. Do you select** a Word of the Day and have each family member try to use it at least three times?

\_\_\_ **4. Do you have** your child keep a personal dictionary where he writes new words and their meanings?

\_\_\_ **5. Do you play** word games as a family?

#### How well are you doing?

*More yes answers mean you are giving your child word power. For each no, try that idea.*

"Good words are worth much, and cost little."  
—George Herbert

## Review your expectations

Research links high parent expectations to high student achievement. But to be effective, expectations also need to be realistic. Make sure your expectations are:

- **Appropriate** for your individual child. Take her age, personality and maturity into account.
- **Clear.** State expectations in simple terms your child can easily understand.
- **Important.** Focus on expectations for behaviors that encourage school success, such as timeliness and effort.

Source: M. Pinquart and M. Ebeling, "Parental Educational Expectations and Academic Achievement in Children and Adolescents—A Meta-analysis," *Educational Psychology Review*, Springer, [nswc.com/highexpectations](http://nswc.com/highexpectations).

## Help your child apply past lessons to current projects

If your child is bogged down in big project, help him draw on previous experiences. He may not have had an assignment just like this, but he's done other projects. What has he learned from them about how he works best that might help him now?



## Ask questions to encourage thinking about reading

To deepen your child's comprehension of material she's reading, ask questions that encourage her to:

- 1. Consider cause and effect.** How were the characters affected by one another's actions?
- 2. Explain the message.** Did the author have a clear opinion or point to make? What was it? Does your child agree?
- 3. Make connections** to real-life. If the story is about a mouse, for example, what does she know about mice that matches or differs from the details in the story?

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## Provide lessons in responsibility to improve academic success

Responsibility is essential for so many aspects of learning and achievement—from timeliness to effort to cooperation. Luckily, there are at least as many ways for you to bolster your child's sense of responsibility at home.

To raise a responsible student:

- **Trust your child** with meaningful tasks. School-age children are capable of handling tasks such as getting up with an alarm, tidying their rooms and study areas, caring for plants and pets, and clearing the table.
- **Enforce a few** age-appropriate rules and consequences. Explain them clearly so your child knows exactly how you want her to behave—and what will happen if she doesn't.
- **Discuss what it means** to be a responsible member of a community. Look for ways your family can help others, such as by collecting food or donations to help a local food bank meet the increased demand.
- **Teach financial responsibility.** Help your child learn about budgeting and saving as well as spending.
- **Adjust rules** and responsibilities. As your child matures, her abilities will change. Perhaps she can make new decisions or take on more grown-up chores. Talk about how great it feels to be trusted to be responsible!



## Add an active dimension to reading

You may think of reading as a calm activity to be done while sitting still. But that's not the only way to read! Research suggests that kids can improve their comprehension and memory by physically acting out what they've read.

Acting out a phrase or passage can help kids connect abstract concepts—for example, *turning a blind eye*—with concrete actions. To encourage this kind of activity:

- **Do a dramatic reading.** Act out the story as you read it aloud. Take turns with your child or let him perform the whole thing.
- **Dress up** as favorite characters. Reenact exciting scenes, using new

words from the story. "The rats are following the sound of my piping. I'm luring them."

- **Put on a puppet show** based on the reading. Help your child write a short script and make puppets from old socks or paper lunch bags.

Source: M.P. Kaschak and others, "Enacted Reading Comprehension: Using Bodily Movement to Aid the Comprehension of Abstract Text Content," *PLOS ONE*, Public Library of Science.

## Rely on supportive basics

It's easy to get frustrated with your child when you're trying to help with schoolwork, especially if the assignment is tough. To avoid meltdowns and misunderstandings:

- **Accept your child** for who she is.
- **Believe in her.**
- **Communicate clearly** with her.



Source: J.S. Schumm, Ph.D., *How to Help Your Child with Homework*, Free Spirit Publishing.

## Turn poor results around

You know your child has the ability to do well. But he doesn't work up to his potential. What can you do? Stay positive. Then:

- **Ask your child** how he thinks he could improve his performance.
- **Consult the teacher.** Ask how much time your child should be spending on assignments and studying. Discuss strategies for supporting him.
- **Enforce a regular study time.** Set a timer for 20 minutes. After your child works hard for that time, let him take a short break, and then get back to work.
- **Let your child know** he is responsible for completing his assignments.

## Make praise meaningful

The right kind of praise from you encourages your child to try and keep trying. Offer her praise that:

- **Highlights behaviors** you want her to repeat.
- **Reflects reality.** Rather than saying "That was the best oral report ever," say "You kept practicing until your delivery was really smooth!"
- **Focuses on effort,** persistence and willingness to try new things, rather than on talent or intelligence.



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## Q&A How much help should I be giving my third grader?

**Q:** I supervise when my child does schoolwork. But he asks so many questions! I worry that I am helping too much. Where should I draw the line?

**A:** Whether he's studying ancient Greece or times tables, your child is learning facts, but he's also learning *how* to learn. To help while fostering his independence:



- **Make a rule** that your child has to *try* every assignment question by himself, starting with the easiest ones first to boost his confidence.
- **Let your child ask for help** after he's tried all the questions. Keep this goal in mind: He doesn't simply need correct answers. He needs to learn how to figure out what the answers should be.
- **Offer guidance instead of solutions** whenever possible. For example, if your child asks how to spell *Mississippi*, suggest that he get out a map or dictionary.
- **Review your child's work with him.** Don't just let him hand it to you and walk away. Compliment his progress, then address trouble spots by asking questions. Can he see anything that needs to be fixed?
- **Contact his teacher** and ask about the best ways you can support your child's learning.

## Parent Quiz

### Are you encouraging resilience?

When resilient students hit an obstacle, they don't give up. Instead, they approach the problem in positive ways. In this challenging year for learning, are you helping your child develop resilience? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you help** your child see her strengths and how she can apply them to challenges?
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you remind** your child of ways she has handled tough situations in the past?
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you provide** chances for your child to make decisions for herself? This skill takes practice.
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you encourage** your child to talk through problems she is trying to solve? Listen without jumping in to solve them for her.
- \_\_\_ **5. Do you talk** about strategies you use to solve problems?

#### How well are you doing?

*More yes answers mean you are boosting your child's ability to handle setbacks. For each no, try that idea.*

*"All things are difficult before they are easy."  
—Thomas Fuller*

## Instill respect for others

It's normal for your child to spot differences among people. It's also essential—in class and in society—that he be respectful of people who are different from him. To nurture respect for diversity:

- **Set an example.** Show respect for others through actions and words.
- **Learn about the challenges** and contributions of people from other backgrounds and cultures. Read books with your child about other ways of life. Talk about what you have in common.
- **Discuss stereotyping** and why it's unfair. Correct it when you hear it.

Source: M. Crouch, "Teaching Diversity to Your Kids," Parents, [niscw.com/diversity2](http://niscw.com/diversity2).

## Use small chunks of time

You've got a big project to do—but can't make the time. Your child has a science report due, but his schedule is full. The solution in both cases is the same. Don't wait until you have enough time to finish the job. Instead, look for just five minutes. In that time, you can get a start on any job. Your child can look for a source or take a few notes. Then look for the next five!

## Prepare for the next step

Will your child be moving up to middle school in the fall? To help him get ready:



- **Learn** about the school. Look at its website and social media together. Sign up to receive updates about operating plans, summer programs and other matters.
- **Emphasize** opportunities. Help your child learn about middle school classes that mesh with his interests.
- **Reinforce** effective study habits, such as organization, time management and regular review.

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## Save these special days to enjoy learning together this month

In April, nature seems to reawaken. April is also full of opportunities to reawaken your child's interest in learning. Celebrate these special days with some fun activities:

- **International Children's Book Day** (April 2). This day is designed to inspire a love of reading. Read a story from another country with your child.
- **National Walking Day** (April 7). Get out a map and help your child plan a new walking route to a familiar place. Walk there together. What new things do you notice?
- **Teach Children to Save Day** (April 11). Encourage financial literacy. Talk with your child about the difference between needs and wants, and about the different ways people save (in piggy banks and bank accounts, by using coupons, etc.). Have him decide on something to save for.
- **National Laundry Day** (April 15). Look online together for pictures of early washing machines. Then teach your child how to do his own laundry.
- **World Creativity and Innovation Day** (April 21). What would your child like to invent? Have him draw a picture of his idea.
- **National Honesty Day** (April 30). Talk with your child about why it is important to be honest *every* day!



## Help your child get started writing

A blank piece of paper can make any writer's mind go blank. Getting started is often the hardest part of writing. When your child has a case of writer's block, help her get off to a running start by asking questions.

If the assignment is to write about a personal experience for example, ask your child to:

- **List her recent experiences:** the day the power went out and she brushed her teeth by flash-light; the day she saw a baby deer in the yard, the day she learned to ride her bike; the day she sprained her ankle. Then, have her choose one experience to write about.
- **Tell you the story** of the experience. What happened first? Next? In the end?
- **Answer the basic** newspaper reporter questions: *who, what, when, where, why* and *how*. This will help her collect all the important details she'll need to include in her writing.

Source: C. Fuller, *Teaching Your Child to Write*, Berkeley Books.

## Teach your child to look for clues to word meaning

*Context clues* help students figure out the meaning of an unfamiliar word they read from other information in the sentence.

For example, in the sentence "Joe wanted to buy new shoes, but the price deterred him," context clues (the qualifier *but* and the word *price*) indicate that the sentence is about the cost of the shoes. That can help your child figure out that *deterred* means "prevented him" from buying the shoes.



## Model motivation to learn

The examples you set for your child have a huge influence on her. Here are three key ways to show her that learning is exciting:

1. **Be a learner** yourself.
2. **Share what** you learn.
3. **Show an interest** in what your child is learning, in and out of school.

## Reinforce online safety

Technology has made school possible for millions of students in the past year. But as kids become comfortable learning, creating and sharing content online, they can lose sight of the need to do it safely. To protect your child:

- **Review rules** and expectations. Your child should communicate online only with people you both know. Remind him never to share passwords.
- **Learn about the websites** he wants to visit and the apps he wants to download. Make sure you approve.
- **Ask him to tell you** if anything odd or inappropriate occurs while he's online.



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ELEMENTARY SCHOOL



## Strengthen a grasp of math

April is Mathematics Awareness Month. Creating a "fist list" is a fun way to build your child's awareness of the steps or concepts related to a math skill. Have her:

- **Trace her hand** on a piece of paper.
- **Write the skill** on the palm. For example, "Adding three digit numbers."
- **Think about the ideas** she needs to remember, such as "line up the ones, tens and hundreds columns" and "work from right to left."
- **Choose the five** most important steps or tips and write them on the fingers of the hand. She can study her fist list, and look at her own hand to help her recall it.

Source: H. Silver and others, *Math Tools, Grades 3-12*, Corwin.

## Q&A How can I encourage my child to move a little faster?

**Q:** I feel as though I'm always telling my child to hurry up. I don't like rushing her, but she tends to dawdle over everything. How can I help without constantly nagging?

**A:** Children are naturally curious, so a little dawdling can be a good thing. Some children may enjoy watching an ant walk up the window, or stop to see if they can see the clock hands move. This helps them learn.



But when kids dawdle too much, it can keep them from completing necessary tasks. It can also inconvenience others. Here are some things to try:

- **Be specific about things** you want your child to do. Saying "Please get dressed and brush your teeth now" is better than "Get ready for school."
- **Follow up.** If you say, "It's time to do your math," make sure that your child gets started. Otherwise, you'll probably have to make the same request 10 minutes later.
- **Avoid overwhelming your child.** If you ask her to do several things at once, she may do one but forget what else you said.
- **Use encouraging words.** Don't ask, "Why are you always so slow?" Your child won't know how to answer that. Instead say, "When you have finished your reading we can go outside and look for birds nests."

## Parent Quiz

### Are you taming test anxiety?

If your child approaches tests with anxiety and dread, it will be harder for him to show what he knows. Are you helping your elementary schooler stay calm and do his best on tests? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

1. **Do you help** your child make and stick to a study plan to prepare for a test?
2. **Do you tell** your child that you expect him to do his best, but that you will love him no matter what grade he earns?
3. **Do you encourage** your child to tell the teacher if tests make him nervous?
4. **Do you share** calming techniques with your child, such as deep breathing, picturing a happy place or pushing against a wall?

5. **Do you teach** your child to reassure himself with self-talk, such as "I studied. I know this. The answer will come to me"?

#### How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are reducing causes of test anxiety. For each no, try that idea.

"A day of worry is more exhausting than a week of work."  
—John Lubbock

## Self-talk is empowering

A strong self-image will help your child do what he knows is right, even when others seem to be doing something different. Teach him to repeat these statements to himself:

- **I can say** *no* to things that would put me in danger.
- **I can make** good choices for myself.
- **I can say** "You're my friend, but I don't choose to do that."
- **It's OK** if I make different choices.

## Focus on essential rules

Can you count your family's written-in-stone rules on one hand? If not, you may be trying to enforce too many.

Keep things simple by regularly emphasizing just your most important basics, such as no hitting, give every assignment a try, limit non-school screen-time, etc. Then as your child matures, you can modify your home and school-related rules, knowing she has the basics down pat.



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## Communicate directions, discipline with four effective strategies

Communication between you and your child supports learning. For example, having daily conversations about what your child is doing and thinking in class shows her that you care about her and that her education is a priority.

But when it comes to telling children what to do, many parents find themselves talking on and on—while their children listen less and less. When communicating about tasks, rules and discipline, experts recommend that parents:



- 1. Make infrequent requests.** As much as possible, help your child develop routines for doing things like schoolwork and chores.
- 2. Speak at a normal volume.** Your child will not hear you any more clearly if you yell. In fact, she is more likely to tune you out.
- 3. Keep it short.** When you give directions, limit the number of words you use. Instead of saying, "Alice, you know there's no TV until your work is done. I need you to finish your math. And you really should take a shower" try, "It's time for math. Then a shower—and then you can have TV."
- 4. Focus on the positive.** Roughly 85 percent your discipline should encourage the behavior you want to see. That leaves just 15 percent of the time for correcting negative behavior.



## Plan ways to make reading a fun and frequent summer activity

Maintaining your child's reading skills and habits over the summer is an important way to make sure he will be prepared for the next school year. To avoid a reading setback this summer:

- **Discuss your child's interests.** Is there something he'd like to learn about when he has more time over break? Maybe he wants to know how power plants work, or how to identify snakes.
- **Pair fiction and nonfiction.** If your child reads a story about knights, he might enjoy reading an article about the sport of jousting as it's practiced today.
- **Be creative** about reading materials. All kinds of reading—joke books, hobby magazines, graphic novels, cookbooks—can help your child practice reading skills.
- **Look for reading contests** locally and online that your child can participate in. Ask a librarian for a list.

Source: "Summer Reading," Reading Rockets, [niscw.com/summerreading](http://niscw.com/summerreading).

## Issue a writing challenge

Books all start in the same way—inside a writer's head. Raise this idea with your child. Say, "I bet you could write a book! You'd have the whole summer to do it." To get her thinking, have her pretend to be different characters. Then interview her. "What do you look like? What do you like to do?" Have her set aside regular writing time. Later she can design a cover and "publish" her book by making copies for friends.



## Respectful students make it easier to teach and learn

In today's society, children see examples of disrespect everywhere. So it's vital to instill the importance of behaving respectfully in your child. To promote respect:

- **Name it** when you see others showing it.
- **Praise it** when your child shows it.
- **Correct** disrespect privately. "Remember what we said about interrupting?"
- **Pass compliments** along. If someone tells you your child was polite, let him know how proud you are of his behavior.

## Head outdoors for math

Grab some chalk and enjoy some math activities on the sidewalk with your child!

- **Puddle watch.** After a rain, have your child trace around two puddles, one in the sun and one in the shade. Every hour, have her chart how much each puddle has changed and compare the rate of change.
- **Add it up.** Draw a large three by three grid. In each square, write a number from one to nine. Take turns tossing two stones into the grid and adding the two numbers. Write the answers down. After five rounds, who has the highest score?



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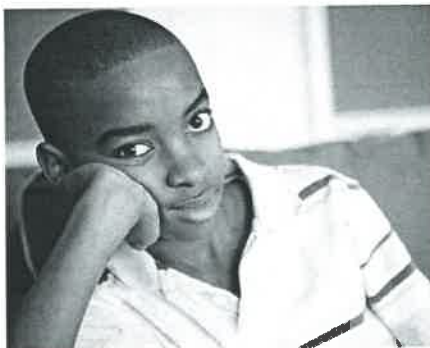
## Can anxiety about middle school cause bad behavior?

**Q:** My 11-year-old's behavior has been fine until this spring. Now he's acting out in class and with the family. I know he's anxious about going to middle school next fall. Could that be why? What can I do?

**A:** Anxious children tend to act out with the people they feel the closest to—usually parents and teachers.

The middle school transition can indeed bring out anxiety. Your child may have many worries: Will he be able to handle the work? See his friends? Will the virus still be changing how school works? If these fears are behind your child's behavior change, getting them out in the open will be a first step in dealing with them. Here's how:

- **Start the conversation.** See if you can get him to express his fears out loud. A low-key approach usually works best. You might say, "I bet you're wondering about who will be in your classes next year."
- **Discuss his concerns** with his teacher. Perhaps the teacher can lead a few class discussions about life in middle school. She may also be able to suggest a middle schooler your child could talk to about what it's like.
- **Remind him that he has coped** with the past year's changes, and you will help him cope next year. Then say that being worried is not an excuse to misbehave. He still needs to follow the school and family rules.



## Parent Quiz

### Are you connecting history to life?

One of the best ways to ignite children's interest in learning history is to make them feel connected to it. Sharing family information can do that. Are you teaching your child how she fits into history? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you show** your child old family photos and talk about the people in them?
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you look** at maps with your child to find the countries her ancestors came from and the routes they traveled?
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you encourage** your child to ask older relatives questions about their lives?
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you ask** your child to help you make scrapbooks to preserve family history?
- \_\_\_ **5. Do you cook** family recipes with your child?

#### How well are you doing?

*More yes answers mean you are giving your child roots in family history. For each no, try that idea.*

"... the attraction of history is in our human nature. What makes us tick? Why do we do what we do? How much is luck the deciding factor?"

—David McCullough

## Don't let up on attendance

Studies show that students who miss just 10 percent of the school year in the early grades are still behind their peers when they reach high school. That's one reason attendance is critical right through the last day of school.

Teachers are still teaching new content. By taking part in class every day, your child won't miss anything. And she'll learn to be dependable—a quality that will help her throughout her school career.

Source: A. Ansari, R.C. Pianta, "School absenteeism in the first decade of education and outcomes in adolescence," *Journal of School Psychology*, Elsevier.

## Reflect on the year's course

When people think of the 2020-2021 school year, many will remember its challenges. But don't lose sight of your child's successes! Sit down together and talk about:

- **Things that went well.** Did he persist despite difficulties? What new skills did he build? Celebrate his accomplishments!
- **Learning goals** for the summer. Ask the teacher what your child should work on to start the next year strong.

## Plan for family adventure

To prevent boredom and promote learning over the summer, plan some local family field trips. Consider outdoor sites such as:

- **A garden center** or nursery. Observe workers planting, watering and pruning. Learn about natural pest controls, such as ladybugs and praying mantises.
- **An airport.** See if your child can spot the control tower or planes taking off and landing.
- **A historic battlefield.** Before you go, read about the battle together.
- **A state or national park.** Bring a nature guide and maybe some binoculars and check out the hiking trails.



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## Start your student on the path to learning independence

Parents often want to know the best ways to help their children with schoolwork. One of the most important things you can do is to teach your child to become an independent learner.

Elementary schoolers are often assigned to solve problems and find and study facts. As they do this work, they practice their skills and reinforce their knowledge. To support your child's effort, first have him:

1. **Try to answer** all the questions by himself. He should start with the ones he knows the answers to, and skip over any that give him problems.
2. **Go back and think** again about the questions he couldn't answer the first time around.



Only after he does this should your child ask you for help. If he does, remember that your goal is not just for him to put down the right answer. You want him to learn how to get the right answer for himself.

So if your child asks you how to spell *constitution*, don't rattle off the spelling. Instead, ask, "Where could you find that?" Point him to a dictionary or his social studies packet. Demonstrating how to find information not only helps him learn facts now, it also prepares him to learn more in the future.



## Set up a system of routines to help your child get organized for school

The responsibilities of school this year will be easier for your child—and your family—to manage when you establish some basic routines and habits.

Start the year off on the right foot with these strategies:

- **Prepare in advance.** Use time in the evening to help your child prepare for the next day. You can review school communications, help your child collect and organize materials she needs for school, and agree on outfits.
- **Create a morning checklist.** Doing the same things in the same order each morning makes it less likely that your child will forget a step.
- **Schedule daily study time.** Pick a time when your child will have the most energy and motivation to do schoolwork.
- **Help your child** use tools like calendars and reminder lists to make sure she has what she needs when and where she needs it.

## Attendance is essential

Learning loss during the pandemic is a top concern for families and schools. Teachers will do everything possible this year to help students learn and master the skills they need. Your help ensuring your child's daily attendance is critical—whether learning is in person or online. Contact your child's teacher or the school counselor if you need help resolving attendance issues.

## Read and talk about words

Reading aloud to your child exposes him to vocabulary he might not get otherwise. This helps strengthen his reading comprehension. When you read aloud:

- **Define unfamiliar words.** Can your child think of words with similar meanings?
- **Give examples** of how a word's meaning can change depending on how it is used. *Sign* can be a noun (*stop sign*) or a verb (*sign your name*).



## Tap out sounds of science

Experiencing science with their senses can boost students' interest in it. Here's a teacher-recommended way to help your child *hear* some science:



1. **Find a few long, flat surfaces** around your home—a wall, a railing, the floor. Ask your child to guess which material will conduct sound the best.
2. **Have her put** her ear on one surface.
3. **Tap a coin steadily** on the surface as you move farther away from your child.
4. **Repeat** with the other surfaces.

Did you get farther apart on one surface than another before the tapping sound grew faint? Which one transmitted sound best?

Source: P. Barnes, "Low-Tech Scientific Exploration for Students at Home," Edutopia.

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## How can I make it easier for my child to make friends?

**Q:** My first grader is very shy and doesn't make friends easily. I want her to have school friends so she'll like school. How can I help her feel more comfortable doing that?

**A:** Some children have lots of social self-confidence. Others do not. Pandemic precautions may make approaching classmates seem more intimidating. While you can't change your child's personality, you can build her confidence when interacting with others.

To help your child practice social skills:

- **Rehearse things to say.** Say, "Let's pretend you're at recess. Arely and Emily are playing a game you'd like to join. What could you say?" At first, pretend to be your child and let her pretend to be another child. Then switch roles. If your child is learning virtually, role-play things she could say to classmates during an online break. "I like your unicorn shirt. Do you like ponies, too?"
- **Read about friends** together. Talk about what good friends do—and don't do. As your child thinks about what makes a good friend, she can start to look for someone in her class who seems to fit the bill.
- **Use her interests.** Does your child like art? Sports? Look for in-person or online activities, classes or teams that may be available in your area. Practicing skills she enjoys with kids who enjoy them too can make it easier to make friends. Success will give her confidence she can apply in school.



## Are you instilling resilience in your child?

Some parents want to protect their children so they never have to experience difficulties or failure. But overcoming challenges teaches valuable lessons. Are you helping your child develop resilience? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

- 1. Do you discuss** the fact that unexpected things happen? Do you talk about positive ways to react when they do?
- 2. Do you allow** your child time to solve some problems himself before offering help?
- 3. Do you provide** perspective when your child is disappointed? "You didn't get an A, but you earned a higher grade than last time!"
- 4. Do you encourage** your child to think about what to do differently next time?
- 5. Do you model** resilience when things go wrong for you?

### How well are you doing?

*More yes answers mean you are helping your child cope with setbacks and move forward. For each no, try that idea.*

*"Challenges are what makes life interesting and overcoming them is what makes life meaningful."*

—Joshua J. Marine

## 10 things to do together when you have 10 minutes

Engaging often in your child's education is important. But it doesn't always have to take a lot of time. In 10 minutes you can:

1. **Listen** and respond when your child talks about school.
2. **Help** your child study spelling or math facts.
3. **Share** a favorite poem or song.
4. **Look up** a word in the dictionary.
5. **Talk** about the daily news.
6. **Find** places in the news on a map.
7. **Review** your child's assignments.
8. **Practice** a tongue twister.
9. **Observe** an animal or bird in nature.
10. **Make up** a silly story.



## Stick to a sleep schedule

Lack of sleep affects your child's ability to plan, solve problems, control mood and behavior, focus and pay attention, and retain information—all vital school skills.

Elementary students need nine to 12 hours of sleep each night to do their best. Now is the time to establish an evening routine that helps your child relax and get to sleep in time to get the rest needed to learn.

Source: "Healthy Sleep Habits: How Many Hours Does Your Child Need?" American Academy of Pediatrics.

## Expect respectful behavior

It's true no matter what format classes take: Respectful behavior helps teachers teach and students learn. Talk with your child about the importance of:

- **Speaking politely**—raising a hand to be called on and listening to others.
- **Following directions**—paying attention, turning in work on time.
- **Accepting feedback** in a positive way.

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## Weekly goal-setting helps your child see how to achieve results

Setting goals helps motivate children to take control of their learning. While long-term goals, such as going to college, are important, they may seem too far off to be relevant to your elementary schooler. Setting short-term goals and experiencing the thrill of achieving them will help her stay focused on making progress.

Working toward a weekly goal helps students learn that planning and problem-solving are important parts of the process.

To get your child started:

- 1. Ask her to identify** one goal at the beginning of the week, such as finishing a book she has been reading for class. Goals are more motivating when your child is the one choosing them.
- 2. Have her write the goal** down and post it where she can see it often.
- 3. Discuss specific things she can do** to achieve the goal. For example, "You could read two chapters every day."
- 4. Check her progress** in a few days. If she's hit a snag, discuss possible solutions. If she's fallen behind in her reading, for example, reading 10 more minutes each day might help her catch up.
- 5. Help her evaluate** at the end of the week. What did she do that worked? What would she try next time? Whether or not she met her goal, celebrate her effort and progress. Then have her set a new goal for next week.



## Conferences help everyone

Online or in-person, a conference with your child's teacher is an opportunity for both of you to share information and focus on how to help your particular child learn.

Tell the teacher about your child's challenges in school, favorite subjects, medical needs and any sensitive issues. Ask about your child's strengths and weaknesses, and how you can help expand or address them.

## Trying is key for learning

Research shows that persistence is something children learn with practice. In one recent study, kids were given a puzzle to solve. Some were allowed to keep trying, while others got adult help right away. When given a second puzzle, the kids who were allowed to keep trying the first time persisted much longer than those who'd been helped.

Jumping in to help with a challenging task before your child has had a chance to practice "trying" sends the message that you didn't think she could do it. And that can make her less likely to persist in the future.



Source: M.W. Berger, "Children persist less when parents take over," *Penn Today*, University of Pennsylvania.



## Reinforce responsibility three ways

Students with a strong sense of responsibility make better decisions and are more likely to try, follow through and succeed in school.

Lessons in responsibility at home don't necessarily have to be related to schoolwork. To strengthen this key trait in your child, you can:

- 1. Assign meaningful tasks.** Most elementary schoolers are capable of self-care tasks such as making a lunch and putting away clean clothes. Let your child know these responsibilities are part of being a capable person who can handle more independence.
- 2. Teach money management.** Let your child see what budgeting looks like. Without sharing your financial details, say things like, "I'd love to order pizza tonight, but it will have to wait until after I get paid next week."
- 3. Let him learn** by experiencing the consequences of his actions. When he makes a poor choice, let him live with the outcome (unless it's a matter of safety).

## Exercise sharpens thinking

Helping your child get plenty of exercise is a smart thing to do. Studies show that adding daily aerobic activities, such as playing tag or ball, can improve children's impulse control, working memory and mental flexibility. These cognitive abilities all boost school performance.



Source: T. Ishihara and others, "Baseline Cognitive Performance Moderates the Effects of Physical Activity on Executive Functions in Children," *Journal of Clinical Medicine*, MDPI.

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## I'm not a math person. How can I help my child with it?

**Q:** Math was a real struggle for my son last year, and I wasn't much help. I'm no good at math either! Now he says he hates math and can't learn it. What can I do?

**A:** Pandemic learning situations may have something to do with your son's issues, and his teacher may be able to suggest specific things to work on. But another factor may also be at work, and it's one you can easily fix.



Research shows that parents' attitudes about math affect their children's success with it. When parents say they didn't do well in math in school, their kids often have trouble with it as well. To improve your child's outlook:

- **Shift the conversation.** Say that you think math is important and *everyone* can learn it. Ask your child to teach what he's learning to you.
- **Talk about real-world math.** Point out the ways that people use math everywhere you go with your child: making deposits at the bank, tracking inventory at a store, etc. Discuss exciting careers that involve math, like pilot, architect, astronaut or engineer.
- **Add fun to math practice.** Cook something delicious together and have your child double the recipe ingredients. That's the two times table. Play math games, like a card game where you each turn over a card and then take turns adding, subtracting or multiplying the numbers together.

## Parent Quiz

### Are you forging a school connection?

Studies consistently show that when families and schools work together, students learn more and do better in school. Are you an active partner in your child's education? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

- \_\_\_ **1. Have you talked** with your child's teacher at least once this year?
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you review** information you receive from the school and ask questions if something is unclear?
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you make** timely attendance a priority, and help your child start each day well-rested and ready to learn?
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you discuss** why school matters with your child, and let her know you think she'll be a successful student?
- \_\_\_ **5. Do you monitor** your child's effort and progress and ask the teacher how to help?

#### How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are building an important bridge between home and school. For each no, try that idea.

"The nice thing about teamwork is that you always have others on your side."

—Margaret Carty

## Improve your child's test-taking confidence

Anxiety about tests can keep students from doing their best. This fear often comes from self-doubt. So to help your child face tests with confidence, focus on preparation. Starting several days before the test, have him study a little each day. Help him focus on the material he hasn't mastered yet. Take the pressure off by explaining that tests just show the teacher what he has learned so far, and what he needs help with.

## Excite interest in reading

Reading often at home builds the skills and background knowledge that help your child get more out of reading for school. That's why schools ask families to make reading a daily priority. To encourage reading at home:

- **Take turns reading aloud.** You can alternate sentences, chapters or books.
- **Share reading** material. Choose a book or article you'll both read. Then set aside one dinner a week to talk about it.
- **Create a cozy** reading spot. A comfy chair, a soft pillow and a good light can make reading more appealing.
- **Let your child see you reading.** Be sure to tell her about it: "I just read the strangest story in the news."



## Start a better study habit

Sometimes kids put off doing assignments when they feel overwhelmed. But habitual procrastination harms school performance. To break the habit, have your child:

- 1. Focus on one** assignment at a time.
- 2. Set a timer** for 10-15 minutes and work only on that assignment until it goes off.
- 3. Take a short break,** and reset the timer.

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ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

## Offer your child different ways to practice writing every day

Just like reading and math, writing is a skill that takes practice to learn. That's why experts recommend that elementary schoolers spend time writing every day, for a variety of purposes.

Encouraging your child to write at home for at least 15 minutes each day will build his writing skills and ability to express himself. And research shows that writing by hand, rather than on a keyboard, can also improve his reading fluency.

To add writing time to your child's day, ask him to:



- **Help you write.** When you write a letter, make a grocery list or decide on the dinner menu, dictate it to your child and have him write it down.
- **Copy.** Encourage your child to write down the words to favorite songs, or copy down quotations or poems he likes.
- **Record.** When you take your child out, ask him to bring a notebook. In it, he can describe what he sees and experiences. Views from the car window or the sights and sounds of a walk in nature are great places to start.
- **Keep a journal.** Suggest that your child write about things that happen to him and how he feels about them.

Source: B. MacKenzie, "How to Teach Handwriting—and Why It Matters," Edutopia, [niswc.com/hand-write](http://niswc.com/hand-write).



## A buddy system can enrich study time

In a class, your child can learn a lot by listening to other students. At home, having a study buddy can be an effective way for her to master challenging material and learn about working with others.

A study buddy can be a classmate, friend or sibling your child meets with in person, over the phone or via video chat. Your child and her buddy can help each other practice math facts or prepare for presentations. They can test each other to see what they know—and don't know.

To make sure your child gets the most out of studying with a buddy, help her:

- **Choose someone** responsible who is focused on learning.
- **Understand the purpose.** Both kids should agree that studying is the goal—not socializing or playing games.
- **Create a schedule** of meetings.
- **Decide what** the buddies will cover in each study session—and stick to it!

## Take stock of your child's school participation

The halfway point of the school year is approaching, so it's a good time to check on your child's engagement and schoolwork. How many in-person or remote classes has he missed this year? How many assignments? If you're not sure, contact the school to find out. It's not too late to get your child back on track for a successful year.

## Help your child discover the pleasure of giving

Will your family be exchanging gifts this month? Giving will have more meaning for your child if she puts her time and love into the gifts she gives. Your child could:

- **Draw a picture** or write a poem about a special person.
- **Create a playlist** with a bunch of her favorite songs to share.
- **Record herself** reading a book for a younger sibling to listen to.
- **Decorate a homemade frame** for a photo of herself with a loved one.



## Be specific about cheating

Elementary schoolers are often confused about cheating. Although they believe it is wrong, they also think it might be OK in some situations. Talk to your child about cheating. Tell him that:

- **Cheating** is lying and it's *always* wrong.
- **You care** more that he is working hard and being honest than you do about his grades.
- **It's never OK** to cheat because a friend asks him to. Role-play ways your child can say *no* in those situations.



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## My child is better at starting than finishing. What helps?

**Q:** My daughter is always enthusiastic about starting a new project. But she usually loses interest half-way through. Then she wants to switch gears and start on something else. What should I do?

**A:** Some children are always on the lookout for variety and excitement. For them, starting is always more fun than finishing. But in school—and life—there are many things that have to be done even when they aren't exciting.



The key is to channel your child's energy productively without dampening her enthusiasm. Help her organize her efforts. When she starts a project:

- **Help her think** about everything she'll need to do. Be sure to remind her of details that tend to slip her mind. When are you available to help her get the supplies she needs? Will anything need time to grow or dry?
- **Show her how** to break the project down into parts. Since your child's attention span is short, seeing a long project as a series of small ones can help. Set a deadline for each step and write it on the calendar.
- **Sustain her interest** by having her plan little rewards she can give herself when she completes a "boring" part of the assignment. "When I finish my bibliography, I can take 10 minutes and call my friend."

## Parent Quiz

### Are you showing that math counts?

Research shows that parents' attitudes about math affect how well their children do in the subject. Are you modeling a positive attitude about math for your child? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

1. **Do you tell** your child you know he can do well in math, and encourage him to give it his best effort?
2. **Do you avoid** saying negative things like "I never liked math when I was in school"?
3. **Do you play** games for fun with your child that involve math skills like keeping score?
4. **Do you talk** about the math skills you use in your life? "I'm calculating the room's area to figure out how much carpet we need."

5. **Do you create** opportunities for your child to use "grown-up" math, such as doubling a recipe?

#### How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are teaching your child to value math. For each no, try that idea.

"A good example has twice the value of good advice."

—attributed to Albert Schweitzer

## Use summaries to boost reading comprehension

One way to make sure your child has understood a reading assignment is to have her summarize it. Choose a summary format that fits the content. You might ask her to:

- **Summarize the three** most important points in her own words.
- **Describe the people** or characters and what's important about each.
- **Explain what happened** and why.

It's OK if she needs to reread the material. Knowing she'll have to summarize it will make her read it more carefully. Over time, she'll get the knack of summarizing—and a better understanding of what she reads.

## Cheer your student on!

What can you do when your child is trying to learn something and you aren't sure how to help? Be a cheerleader! Encourage your child with phrases like:



- *You're making great progress! Keep at it, I know you will get it.*
- *It will get better when you get the hang of it.*
- *If it doesn't work that way, try another way.*

## Character is built, not born

Your child's character is a work in progress. Help him strengthen the traits that support school success. Here are four to focus on:

1. **Responsibility.** Teach him that he has control over his choices and actions.
2. **Flexibility.** Model listening, negotiation and compromise for your child.
3. **Empathy.** Ask your child to imagine how others might feel.
4. **Respect.** Discuss what respectful behavior looks like, at home and in class.

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Coldwater Schools



## Provide practice to help your child master math fundamentals

As students progress through the grades, the math they learn builds on the math that came before. That's why mastering basic math skills in elementary school is so important.

Regular practice is essential. It reinforces your child's knowledge and establishes positive math habits that will help her learn more.

To help your child build a solid math foundation:

- **Review math facts often.** Help your child make a set of flash cards with the facts she needs to know ( $6 \times 7$ ,  $12 - 5$  etc.). Pull them out frequently for short practice sessions. She has mastered a fact when she can give the correct answer in less than three seconds.
- **Show her how to find answers,** rather than just giving them to her. For example, if she doesn't know what  $3 \times 5$  equals, she can draw three parallel horizontal lines, and cross them with five vertical lines. Then she can count the intersections to get the answer.
- **Emphasize neatness.** Messy writing is the cause of many math errors. Using graph paper can help your child line numbers up neatly.
- **Encourage her to do a little extra.** If the teacher assigns ten problems, tackling 12 will give her more practice.
- **Have fun with "mental math."** See if your child can figure out a problem without writing anything down. Practice mental estimating, too.



## Boost your child's motivation to learn

Motivation to learn is like the engine in a car. Without it, your child won't get very far. To fuel your elementary schooler's motivation:

- **Let him see** that you always want to learn. Look up answers to questions. Try new things. Show curiosity.
- **Discuss interesting things** you learn with him. Talk about exciting new ideas or scientific discoveries.
- **Show interest** in his schoolwork. Ask questions to learn and share—not just to quiz him.
- **Demonstrate a positive** attitude about challenges. Help your child see that problems can be solved. If he is struggling in school, ask the teacher what you and your child can do at home to improve things.
- **Tell him that you know** he has the ability to learn. Your confidence in him can help him have more confidence in himself.

## Stop food-allergy bullying

In a recent survey of children with food allergies, 31 percent reported being teased or bullied about their allergies by peers. But only 12 percent of their parents said they knew about the bullying. If your child has a food allergy, ask about her experiences. Alert the school to bullying so it can be stopped.

Source: F. Cooke and others, "Food Allergy-Related Bullying Among Children and Adolescents," *Journal of Pediatric Psychology*, Society of Pediatric Psychology.

## Build research skills with an online scavenger hunt

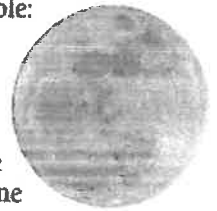
For fun improving research skills, give your child a list of questions that have only one correct answer. For example:

How many people have walked on the moon?

What is the current temperature in the capital of Iowa?

See how quickly he can find the answers online (without asking Siri or Alexa).

Show him how he can use multiple key words to make his searches more effective.



## Foster wise decision-making

Giving your child opportunities to make decisions and helping her think them through is the best way to ensure that she will make wise choices when it counts. When offering choices:



- **Set boundaries.** All of the options you offer should be acceptable.
- **Discuss possible outcomes.** Talk about what could happen as a result of each of your child's options.
- **Help your child think** about what she's learned from past decisions.
- **Gradually increase** the number of decisions you let your child make.

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## How can I make the move up to middle school easier?

**Q:** My fifth grader is getting anxious about going to middle school next year. Most of his friends will be going to another school. What can I do in the coming months to help?

**A:** The move to middle school involves lots of change—from one teacher to many, from being in the highest grade in the school to the lowest, and sometimes, from having an established group of friends to not knowing many people. It's not surprising your child is nervous!



To build his confidence in his ability to navigate the changes:

- **Make your child feel competent.** Discuss the things that make him a good friend. Help him practice his organizational skills. If the middle school has lockers, get him a combination lock and let him practice unlocking and locking it.
- **Ask if you and your child can tour** the school this spring while classes are in session. Just walking around will give him a better idea of what to expect. Pick up a map of the hallways if one is available.
- **Point out that everyone** in his grade will be starting fresh and looking for new friends. And he'll still have chances to see old friends, too.
- **Find out about school activities** that start in the summer, such as orientation days or sports or band practice. If your child participates, he can make some new friends before the school year starts.

### Parent Quiz

## Are you helping your child read fluently?

Students who read aloud with *fluency* are more likely to have a strong understanding of the text. Fluent reading is smooth, accurate and expressive. Are you helping your child develop reading fluency? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you make** time for your child to read to you, on top of the time you read to her?
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you allow** your child to choose what to read aloud, even if she's read it before?
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you wait** until your child has finished reading to correct misread words, rather than interrupting?
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you tell** your child how to pronounce a word if she asks, then encourage her to keep reading?

- \_\_\_ **5. Do you talk** with your child about the book when she has finished reading?

### How well are you doing?

*More yes answers mean you are fostering fluency. For each no, try that idea.*

*"Fluency is a wonderful bridge to comprehension and to a life-long love of reading."*

*—Marianne Wolf*

## Offer encouragement that supports self-reliance

You want your child to recognize and feel good about his strengths and accomplishments, without needing praise from someone else. To offer positive encouragement:

- **Focus on** your child's effort and progress. "You have really gotten the hang of subtraction. It must be really satisfying to see your effort pay off."
- **Describe** rather than giving your opinions. "Look at how *organized* and *detailed* your science report is!" not "This is great!"
- **Don't wait** for your child to do well. "That didn't work out the way you planned, did it? I know you'll try again. What could you do differently next time?"

## Be an attentive listener

To help your child feel comfortable talking to you about challenges or situations she may be facing at school, show her that you are a caring listener. Make it a point to:

- **Tell your child** that you want to hear what she has to say.
- **Set a time** when your child can have your full attention if you can't listen in the moment.
- **Listen without interrupting** and restate what your child says to confirm your understanding.

## Promote problem-solving and writing with a letter

Does your child have a regular task that never gets done—at least, not without a lot of nagging? Ask him to write you a letter explaining why ... and what he thinks would solve the problem. This will force him to think logically about what he's doing—and give him a chance to write persuasively.



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