

Helping Children Learn®

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School



ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

January 2025

Use encouraging words to boost your child's motivation to learn

Positive words from you can affect your child's motivation to learn. And experts agree that it is better to go beyond simple praise, like saying "Great job," to offering encouragement, such as "You have really learned a lot about this. Tell me some more!"

What's the difference between the two?

Simple praise:

- **Is results oriented.** "You got a 99 on your test! That's great!"
- **Uses words that express** your opinion, such as *good*, *terrific* and *wonderful*.
- **Is usually given** when your child does what's expected.

Encouragement:

- **Acknowledges effort and progress.** "Look at that project. I can see how much thought and care you put into it. It must feel good to know you really worked hard."
- **Describes specific aspects** of your child's work. "You picked up *without being asked*. Look at that *clean* floor!"
- **Doesn't depend on performance.** "That didn't go the way you planned, but I know you'll try again. What could you do differently?"

The big difference is that encouragement leads children to form their own positive opinions about themselves and their work, rather than depending on praise from other people.



Test-taking strategies improve results

Your child needs two kinds of knowledge for success on tests. One is knowledge of the subject matter. But it is also important for your child to know the test-taking strategies that help students earn every point they deserve.

Review these strategies together:

- **Write down memorized facts** and formulas as soon as the test starts. Your child can refer to them later when answering questions.
- **Read the directions** carefully. If something is confusing, your child should ask the teacher.
- **Read all the questions** before starting to answer. Then, your child can calculate how much time to spend on each.
- **Cross out options** on multiple choice questions that can't be right and choose among the rest. On *true/false* questions, remember that if any part of the answer is false, the whole answer is false.
- **Leave time to double-check** answers before turning in the test.

Hand over responsibilities

Are you still packing your child's lunch? How about making the bed? If so, pass the duties on to your child. Most elementary schoolers are capable of handling such tasks. Don't pile on too many chores, but expect your child to regularly complete self-care tasks. This fosters feelings of capable independence along with responsibility.

Nurture a love of reading

Students who like to read do more of it. In the process, they build reading skills and overall learning power. To encourage reading enjoyment:

- **Make reading** an event. Choose books together at the library, then go for a tasty snack and read them.
- **Branch out.** Read a variety of kinds of books together. If your child usually reads fiction, try a biography. Or, help your child find a new book series to start.
- **Inspire curiosity.** Ask your child an interesting question. "How did our town get its name?" Help your child find out by reading.



Teach lessons about money

When children learn about money, they build math skills and life skills at the same time. To foster financial literacy:

- **Consider giving** your child a small amount of money. Managing their own money builds children's respect for it. Have your child keep a record of purchases and calculate how much is left.
- **Demonstrate what budgeting** looks like. Say things like, "I'd love to order pizza tonight, but it will have to wait. Payday isn't until Friday."





What can I do to increase my child's patience?

Q: My kindergartner hates to wait and doesn't do it quietly. The teacher says this impatience is becoming a distraction at school. How can I help my child develop more patience?

A: Many parts of learning in school involve patience: waiting for a turn to speak, reading all the way to the end of a book to find out what happens, trying to understand a concept that isn't immediately clear.



To help your elementary schooler develop more patience:

- **Be understanding.** Say that you know waiting patiently isn't always easy. Explain that it is something everyone has to learn, and you will help.
- **Do activities together** that require patience, such as playing board games, putting together jigsaw puzzles, baking and planting seeds.
- **Help your child save** up money to buy a desired item, rather than just providing it right away.
- **Be a role model.** Show how you make waiting more pleasant. While waiting in traffic, say something like, "Let's use this time to make up a story." Read to pass time between activities. Observe things around you.
- **Offer practice.** When your child asks for something, say, "In a minute." If you are busy, use a hand signal that means, "When I'm finished."



Are you enriching read-aloud time?

When you have fun reading aloud together every day, your child strengthens reading skills and learns to associate reading with pleasurable times with you. Are you making the most of read-aloud time? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

- ___ **1. Do you read** aloud together for at least 20 minutes a day?
- ___ **2. Do you encourage** your child to pick some cozy or fun places to read?
- ___ **3. Do you take** turns being the reader? Alternate reading sentences or paragraphs, or take on different characters when reading dialogue.
- ___ **4. Do you pause** to discuss what you're reading or let your child ask questions?
- ___ **5. Do you end** the day's reading at an exciting place, so

your child will want to read again the next day?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are reading with your child in productive ways. For each no, try that idea.

"I think that when you can escape into a book it trains your imagination to think big and to think that more can exist than what you see."
—Taylor Swift

Investigate science at home

You don't need fancy equipment to help your child learn about science. Just point out the science that's all around you, in things like:

- **Food.** Which cereals get soggy in milk? Does cheese get moldy faster on the counter or in the refrigerator? Help your child experiment to find out.
- **The night sky.** Observe the changes in the moon and stars over several months.
- **Household items.** Give your child something to take apart—a ball-point pen, a candle, an old toy. Can your child figure out how it works?



Improve talks about school

If conversations with your child about school are going nowhere, try this: Instead of asking lots of questions as soon as your child gets home, share a few things about your own day first. Then, ask open-ended questions about your child's day: "What was the most surprising thing that happened today at school?"

This works when discussing schoolwork, too. Talk about what you notice first (but don't point out mistakes). Then, ask your child to tell you more about it.

Make expectations work

It's important to set realistic expectations for your child. If they are too high or too low, your child may do poorly. For success:

- **Check with the teacher** if you aren't sure about your child's abilities.
- **Be consistent.** Don't lower expectations to make your child happy. Don't raise them because you've had a bad day.
- **Celebrate progress** your child makes along the way.

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