

Helping Children Learn®

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL



October 2022

Focus on your child's progress at a parent-teacher conference

Surveys show that parents value direct communication from school about how their child is doing. One of the best ways to receive specific information about your child is to participate in a parent-teacher conference. When you meet with the teacher, in person or online, you can learn more about your child's work habits, strengths and areas for growth.



To make the most of your meeting:

- **Ask your child some questions beforehand:** *What subjects do you think are the easiest? Which are more challenging? Why? Is there anything you would like me to ask the teacher?*
- **Jot down things** to tell the teacher. You know your child better than anyone else. Sharing your expertise helps the teacher meet your child's needs.
- **Make a list of your questions**, so you won't forget to ask any. They might include: *Are my child's reading and math skills at grade-level? Does my child participate in class and interact with others appropriately? Does my child qualify for any special programs?*
- **Create an action plan.** Ask the teacher how you can reinforce what your child is learning. At home, tell your child about your plan.

Source: "Parents 2021: Going Behind the Headlines: Responding to What Parents, Teachers & Principals Really Want," Learning Heroes.



Help your child see that math success is possible—and worth the effort

When it comes to math, research shows that children's attitudes toward the subject can affect their performance in it. Researchers have found that having a positive attitude about math improves kids' brain function during math tasks—and their results.

To encourage your child to have a positive math mindset:

- **Make it clear** to your child that math skills are not something people are born with. They get smarter at math when they put in effort to learn and practice.
- **Choose your words carefully.** Don't say, "That problem looks hard"—your child may decide to

give up. Instead, talk about how rewarding and fun it feels to figure out challenging math problems.

- **Offer reassurance.** Say "You know more than you think!" Easing nerves boosts your child's chances for success.

Source: E. Digitale, "Positive attitude toward math predicts math achievement in kids," Stanford Medicine.

Protect your child's vision

Having your child's eyesight tested yearly is an important way to prevent vision-related school struggles. You can also:



- **Limit screen time.** High levels have been linked to nearsightedness in children.
- **Encourage outdoor play.** An extra hour or two a day outside can help some kids avoid nearsightedness.

Source: Anglia Ruskin University, "Screen time linked to risk of myopia in young people," *ScienceDaily*; "Outdoor Activity and Myopia Progression in Children," *Ophthalmology*, American Academy of Ophthalmology.

Measure time together

The more children understand about time—how long five minutes really is, how long it takes to walk to the bus stop, etc.—the easier it is for them to manage it responsibly. To promote awareness of time, have your child:

1. **Choose a task** and estimate how many minutes it will take to complete it.
2. **Carry out the task** and track the actual time it takes on a clock or stopwatch.
3. **Compare the estimate** to the real time.

Steer clear of these traps

There are many things families can do to support academic achievement. But to help your child become an independent learner, there are also a few common pitfalls to avoid:



- **Don't rush to the rescue** when your child forgets or neglects to do schoolwork. Instead, help your student learn from the consequences.
- **Don't negotiate with the teacher** for a better grade for your child. Instead, encourage your child to ask the teacher for ideas about how to improve.
- **Don't hold your child back.** Let your student grow by trying new things.



How can I help my child remember things better?

Q: My child studies for tests, but often can't remember the material when it comes time to answer the questions. What can I do to help strengthen my child's memory skills?

A: There are many strategies kids can use to learn and remember facts. Help your child practice:

- **Creating acronyms** and sentences. Your child can make a word or sentence out of the first letters of the terms to be memorized. For example, HOMES stands for the Great Lakes (Huron, Ontario, Michigan, Erie and Superior) and "My Very Elegant Mother Just Served Us Noodles" is for the planets in order of their distance from the Sun (Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune).
- **Personalizing.** Help relate the information to things in your child's life. An important date might also be a relative's birthday.
- **Grouping.** It's easier to memorize several short lists than one long one. Help your child group items by a common characteristic. To remember the 50 states, for example, your student could divide them into geographic regions and memorize one region at a time.
- **Rhyming and singing.** Help your child think up rhymes about facts, or replace lyrics in a familiar song with items to remember.



Are you helping your child set priorities?

Organized students do tasks in order of priority. But determining what that order should be is a challenge for many kids. Are you helping your child learn how to put first things first? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

1. **Do you have** your child write down every assignment, whether it is due tomorrow, next week or next month?
2. **Do you teach** your child to put tasks due tomorrow on the top of the to-do list?
3. **Do you help** your child decide what to do first if multiple things are due at the same time?
4. **Do you encourage** your child to break long-term projects into parts and tackle a small part each day?

5. **Do you establish** rules about tasks your child must finish before relaxing or socializing?

How well are you doing?

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

"People who can focus, get things done. People who can prioritize, get the right things done."
—John Maeda

Offer on-the-job experience

Children learn to be responsible by having responsibilities and seeing them through. Brainstorm with your child about tasks that your child is ready to handle alone. Here is a starter list you can adapt:

- **Get up** on time.
- **Pick up** toys and tidy bedroom.
- **Read** for 20 minutes.
- **Maintain** personal hygiene.
- **Treat** family members kindly.

Together, make a checklist of tasks your child will be responsible for. Write down specific instructions and what will happen if your child shirks a responsibility. Then don't forget to offer praise for a job well done!

Help your child recognize constructive feedback

Teachers want students to learn and succeed in school. In order for this to happen, they have to point out students' mistakes. Children who view this feedback as constructive rather than critical will do better.



Remind your child that no one learns without ever making mistakes. Explain that the teacher does not think your child is a bad student. Rather, the teacher thinks your child is a good student who will use the mistakes as opportunities to learn.

Support a study routine

Help your child establish an effective routine for doing schoolwork at home. Here's how:

- **Choose a time** when your elementary schooler is most alert.
- **Minimize family distractions.** Have everyone read or work quietly at that time.
- **Create a supply kit.** Eliminate hunting by keeping pencils, erasers, scissors, etc. in a box used only during study time.

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