

Helping Children Learn®

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL



October 2024

Read aloud regularly to build skills and reading comprehension

Whether your child is just learning to read or is reading whole books with ease, read alouds with you provide skill-boosting benefits. When you read aloud, you can introduce and explain words and ideas that are new to your child. And everything you read together adds to your child's storehouse of knowledge—which helps with comprehension of future reading.

As you read aloud, help your child:

- **Build vocabulary.** Define the words your child doesn't know. Together, think of words that have a similar or opposite meaning.
- **Sharpen listening and thinking skills.** After you read a passage, have your child summarize it. Ask specific questions—*What did the main character do? Where did the action take place? How did the other characters feel about it?*
- **Practice recalling.** Before you start on a new chapter of a book you've been reading together, ask your child to tell you about what was happening in the story when you stopped reading last time.
- **Boost word recognition.** Stop reading from time to time and ask your child to read a sentence or two to you. Help your child sound out unfamiliar words and then read the sentences again.



Support a healthy frame of mind

Mental well-being is important for success in school. It makes it easier for children to cooperate with others, behave appropriately and do their best academically. To support your child's mental well-being:

- **Focus on essentials:** good nutrition, adequate sleep and exercise. These are key to overall wellness.
- **Laugh together.** Encourage family members to share funny stories, memes and jokes.
- **Talk about the good things.** At mealtime, have everyone take turns sharing something positive that happened that day.
- **Practice stress relief.** Teach your child to take deep breaths, go for a walk or listen to relaxing music when feeling anxious or stressed.
- **Stay connected.** Listen when your child shares concerns, and offer reassurance. If you become worried about your elementary schooler, consult a school counselor or pediatrician.

Sleep is crucial for learning

Too little sleep negatively affects your child's ability to plan, solve problems, control mood and behavior, pay attention and retain information. To promote healthy sleep, help your child get plenty of fresh air and exercise during the day. Set a technology curfew one hour before bed. Then, stick to a bedtime schedule that lets your child get nine to 12 hours of sleep each night.

Plan to attend a conference

At a parent-teacher conference, you will get helpful information specifically about your child. For the most benefit:



- **Prepare.** Make a list of things to tell the teacher about your child. Ask your child if there is anything you and the teacher should discuss. Also list your questions—about your child's strengths, weaknesses, friendships, etc.
- **Maximize time.** Arrive on time. Take notes on your child's progress. Make a plan with the teacher to address concerns.
- **Report back** to your child. Share positive comments as well as the teacher's suggestions and how you will carry them out.

Set weekly learning goals

Setting short-term goals and experiencing the thrill of achieving them can help your child stay motivated. Each week, help your child:



1. **Choose one goal** at the beginning of the week, and write it down.
2. **Plan steps to take** to achieve the goal.
3. **Brainstorm solutions** for any snags that crop up along the way.
4. **Evaluate what worked** and what didn't and set a new goal.



How can I help my shy child reach out and make friends?

Q: Shyness is making it difficult for my first grader to make friends at school. What can I do to help?

A: Having friends at school increases students' sense of belonging. It takes self-confidence to make them easily. While you can't change your child's personality, you can help your student build confidence when speaking and working with others.

This kind of self-confidence comes with practice. Help your child:

- **Rehearse things to say.** Say, "Let's pretend you're at recess. Lucas and Jack are playing a fun game you want to join. What could you say?" At first, have your child pretend to be one of the other children, while you pretend to be your child. Then, change roles.
- **Think about what good friends** do and don't do. Read and discuss books about friends together. Thinking about what makes a good friend can help your child identify someone in class who could be one.
- **Get to know a classmate.** Invite one child over to play with your child. Interacting with one person may be more comfortable than a crowd.
- **Meet children with similar interests.** Does your child like art? The outdoors? Look for activities at a community or nature center. Learning about interests with kids who like them too can make it easier to make friends—and build your child's confidence to make friends at school.



Are you helping your child recover after setbacks?

It's natural to want to protect your child from failure. But overcoming setbacks and disappointments teaches students valuable lessons. Are you helping your child learn to cope when problems arise? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

- ___ **1. Do you tell** your child that setbacks are common, and they are usually temporary?
- ___ **2. Do you let** your child try to solve problems rather than jumping in to help right away?
- ___ **3. Do you offer** your child more positive ways to view the situation? "You didn't ace your test, but you earned a higher grade than last time!"
- ___ **4. Do you help** your child brainstorm things to do differently next time?

- ___ **5. Do you talk** about your own mistakes and how you are going to fix them?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are helping your child keep moving forward. For each no, try that idea.

"Challenges are inevitable, defeat is optional."

—Roger Crawford

Show that math matters

To help your child understand why learning math is important, demonstrate how essential it is in everyday life. Involve your child when you:

- **Follow recipes.** Let your child help with measuring and weighing. Talk about fractions, adding and dividing.
- **Go places.** Before leaving, measure the air pressure in your car or bike tires together. Calculate the distance you'll travel, and how long it will take.
- **Shop.** Help your child use a calculator to keep a running tally of purchases and figure out prices after coupon discounts.
- **Save money.** Choose a family goal to save for. How much can you save a week? How long will it take to reach your goal?



Discuss respectful behavior

A positive learning environment is founded on respectful behavior. Explain to your child that for students, this includes:

- **Listening** and paying attention.
- **Raising hands** and waiting to be called on by the teacher.
- **Accepting corrections** and directions from the teacher without creating a fuss.

Prevent procrastination

Your child probably likes some subjects more than others, and that's OK. But it's not OK to put off schoolwork in the less-liked subjects. Remind your child that:

- **Everyone has to do** things they don't like. Give an example from your life.
- **Putting tasks off** makes them seem worse.
- **Finishing tough tasks** feels great!

Source: R. Emmett, *The Procrastinating Child*, Walker Books.

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