

Helping Children Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School



ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

February 2022

Enjoy learning activities that honor notable February figures

February is filled with birthdays of people you and your child can have fun learning about. Here are just a few heroes, writers, inventors and artists to celebrate together:

- **Langston Hughes** (Feb. 1). Read *Dreams*, a poem by the renowned Harlem Renaissance poet. Ask about your child's dreams for the future.
- **Abraham Lincoln** (Feb. 12). Challenge your child to memorize the 16th president's Gettysburg Address.
- **George Washington Gale Ferris, Jr.** (Feb. 14). Have your child write a poem or story about a ride on this engineer's most famous invention: the Ferris wheel.
- **Nina Simone** (Feb. 21). Listen to the singer's music and learn about her life and work.
- **George Washington** (Feb. 22). What would your child want to do if she were President of the United States?
- **Pierre-Auguste Renoir**. (Feb. 25). Look at the Impressionist artist's paintings in a book or online. Ask your child to paint one of her own.



Plan for responsibility

Some children have a hard time taking responsibility for their schoolwork. To help your child become more responsible:

- **Ask her to make a plan.** "What could you do to help you remember ... ?"
- **Let her try out her plan.** If it doesn't work, let her learn from the consequences.
- **Suggest changes** she could make, but let your child put them into action.

Expect your child's best

Expressing realistic, high expectations for your child increases the chances that she'll meet them. To help her along:



- **Don't show surprise** when your child does well. Instead, act like you never doubted that she would.
- **Accept that she'll** mess up sometimes. Show your love when she does.
- **Empower your child** to take action when something goes wrong. Help her think about what she can learn from it to use in the future.



Try techniques that teachers use to improve cooperation and behavior

Teachers share a lot of the same challenges parents do—getting children to pay attention, complete work and respond to requests, etc. And the solutions they use to keep a class full of kids on task also work for families at home.

- Try these teacher-tested strategies:
- **Focus on the tasks** that you want to be routine. Explain step-by-step what you expect your child to do.
 - **Post a schedule.** Knowing what to do when without being told lets your child feel independent.
 - **Prepare your child** for transitions. Let him know how many minutes he has left before he has to stop and do something else.
 - **Use silent signals.** Flick the light off and on to give a five-minute warning before bedtime.
 - **Give your child** meaningful things to do. Ask him to help the family by doing household chores. Put him in charge of making and updating the grocery list.

Encourage your child to think before writing

Thinking and planning are important parts of the writing process. To help your child organize his thoughts when writing:



- **Suggest** that he talk through his ideas with you before he begins to write.
- **Encourage** him to make an outline. This helps him present his points in an order that makes sense.
- **Help him focus** on what he wants to say when he writes his rough draft. He can correct spelling and grammar later.

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My child believes that faster is better. What should I do?

Q: My son loves to race, in sports and in school. He rushes through his work and doesn't take time to be neat or check his answers. How can I convince him to slow down and work carefully?

A: Your son seems to view school as a competition. But being first isn't what matters when it comes to schoolwork. Accuracy is far more important.

To help your elementary schooler learn to take more care:

- **Consult his teacher.** Say that you would like to work together on a plan to help your child focus on quality work, not speedy work.
- **Talk to your child.** Since he likes competitive sports, you might compare schoolwork to shooting free throws in basketball. It's not speed that matters—it's whether the ball goes in the basket.
- **Review your child's completed assignments.** Let him know you are going to check for neatness and accuracy. If his work is not up to a reasonable standard, you'll ask him to redo it, since he is responsible for the quality of his work. He'll soon figure out that by slowing down, he can do the work right the first time—and that takes less time in the long run.



Are you using report cards effectively?

Your child's report card should be a conversation starter. Whether she does well or worse than you feared, do you talk with your child about what's working, what's not, and how to move forward? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

- ___ **1. Do you show** that you take report cards seriously by making time to discuss them?
- ___ **2. Do you ask** if your child thinks her grades reflect her effort and progress, and why or why not?
- ___ **3. Do you stay** calm and focus your talk on what your child can learn from her grades, rather than criticizing?
- ___ **4. Do you help** your child plan steps to maintain good grades and improve poor ones?

- ___ **5. Do you bring up** questions or concerns with the teacher?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are using report cards as learning tools. For each no, try that idea from the quiz.

"Excellence is the gradual result of always trying to do better."

—Pat Riley

Share household math tasks

Involving your child in everyday math activities helps him understand just how useful math skills can be. Together you can:

- **Start a family project.** Planning to paint a bedroom? Have your child help you measure and figure out how much paint you'll need.
- **Clip coupons.** "If we use this coupon, will the item cost less than the other brands?"
- **Save for a goal.** Help your child choose an item to save for, such as a toy he wants. How much will he need to save each week for how long? Keep track on a chart.



Think about how you talk to your elementary schooler

Whether you are encouraging or correcting your child, the way you speak can affect her response. Consider your:

- **Words.** Be specific.
- **Tone.** Aim to sound confident, rather than stern or unsure.
- **Expression.** A relaxed look encourages cooperation better than an angry one.
- **Body language.** If possible, get on your child's level and face her eye-to-eye.

To encourage skill-building practice, 'gamify' it

Children love games. Making a learning activity into a game is a great way to keep your child interested. After reading together, for example, you could challenge your child to summarize the story using only three sentences. Or take turns making up a new story, sentence by sentence, using the same the characters as the story you read.

Source: M. Sailor and L. Homner, "The Gamification of Learning: A Meta-analysis," *Educational Psychology Review*, Springer.

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