

Helping Children Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School



ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

October 2021

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.



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).

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.

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.



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:

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| <p>___ 1. Have you talked with your child's teacher at least once this year?</p> <p>___ 2. Do you review information you receive from the school and ask questions if something is unclear?</p> <p>___ 3. Do you make timely attendance a priority, and help your child start each day well-rested and ready to learn?</p> <p>___ 4. Do you discuss why school matters with your child, and let her know you think she'll be a successful student?</p> | <p>___ 5. Do you monitor your child's effort and progress and ask the teacher how to help?</p> <p>How well are you doing?</p> <p><i>More yes answers mean you are building an important bridge between home and school. For each no, try that idea.</i></p> |
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"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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