Elementary School
Parents
make the difference!
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Research reveals the best ways to help kids learn math

It's no surprise that students who don't practice math don't do well in class. But sometimes even when students do the work they may struggle. Research can help make the best use of study time.

A recent meta-analysis (a study of many studies) looked at how to help students learn math. They found that the most effective strategy is *distributed practice.* Instead of studying for an hour one day, your child should break up that time into shorter chunks distributed throughout the week.

Math must be practiced every day. It's a subject that builds on what students already know. Today's assignment will be based on yesterday's lesson.

There are many ways that students can practice math without even realizing they are reviewing. Here are three:

1. **Play games with dice.** Take turns rolling the dice and quickly adding up the sum of two numbers. Later, add subtraction, multiplication, and division to the challenge.
2. **Have fun with the coins** in your pocket. Say, "I have three coins. Together, they are worth seven cents. What are they?"
3. **Pretend your calculator is broken.** Say, "Imagine our calculator has no number 8. Come up with new ways to represent that number." It could be 10-2 or 4 + 4 or 24/3.

All these games will stretch your child's understanding of math. They will also give your child a chance to practice math facts.

Source: G.M. Donoghue and J. Hattie, "A Meta-Analysis of Ten Learning Techniques," *Frontiers in Education,* Frontiers Media S.A.

April activities can boost your child's learning



April may bring showers, but it also brings opportunities to promote responsibility and learning. Try these activities with your child:

- **April 2**—International Children's Book Day. This day is designed to inspire a love of reading. Grab a book and spend some time reading together.
- **April 12**—National Library Workers Day. Have your child make a card to thank the school librarian for helping him in the library.
- **April 15**—National Laundry Day. Teach your child how to do laundry.
- **April 22**—Earth Day. As a family, think of things you can do to protect the earth, such as using less water.
- **April 23**—Shakespeare's birthday. With your child, act out a scene from one of Shakespeare's plays. Or, challenge your child to write a play.
- **April 30**—National Honesty Day. Talk to your child about why it is important to be honest *every* day!

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Elementary school is the perfect time to talk about peer pressure



Most kids face peer pressure when they get to middle or high school. But did you know that even in elementary school, children can feel pressure to fit in and to do what "everyone else" is doing?

Sometimes, that means going along with teasing on the playground. Other times, it means watching a movie at a friend's house that she would never be allowed to watch at home.

Now is the time to teach your child how to handle peer pressure—and how to say *no* to things that don't fit with your family's rules or values. Encourage your child to say and remember these statements:

- **I can say *no*** to things that would put me in danger.
- **I can make** good choices for myself.
- **I can say,** "You're my friend, but I don't choose to do that."
- **It's OK** if I make choices that are not the same as the choices my friends make.

Source: D. Bloch, *The Power of Positive Talk: Words to Help Every Child Succeed,* FreeSpirit Publishers.

"To be yourself in a world that is constantly trying to make you something else is the greatest accomplishment."

—Anonymous

Show your child how to deal with failure in positive ways



Sooner or later, your child will experience a failure or setback. The way you react to it can help shape his character and academic achievement.

To help your child bounce back from setbacks:

- **Remind him** that you love him unconditionally. Your love isn't tied to his performance in school.
- **Focus on the positives.** Mistakes are actually opportunities for learning. Help your child think about what he can do differently in the future.
- **Praise what you can.** "Most of your answers were correct on this test. That's an improvement."
- **Be realistic.** If you know he's doing his best and he still doesn't bring up a grade, don't let him think you are disappointed. Instead, focus on creating a plan for improvement.
- **Move on.** Don't dwell on the failure. When parents spend too much time talking about setbacks, children can have a harder time getting past them.
- **Don't argue** with your child's teachers or coaches to try to get them to change a decision or a grade. Your child needs to learn to respect their decisions.
- **Don't take over.** If your child earned a low grade on a writing assignment, talk about ways to improve, but don't jump in and write the next paper with him.
- **Be a role model.** Handle your own mistakes and failures in positive ways.

Source: D. Walsh, *No: Why Kids—of All Ages—Need to Hear It and Ways Parents Can Say It,* Free Press.

Are you spending meaningful time with your family?



To reach their full potential in school and in life, children need frequent, meaningful, undivided attention from parents. But finding that time can often be difficult.

Are you finding ways to spend quality family time together? Answer *yes* or *no* to each of the questions below to find out:

___**1. Do you strive** to eat dinner as a family regularly?

___**2. Do you balance** your child's structured activities with plenty of time for reading, relaxing and talking with family?

___**3. Do you have** a bedtime routine that includes spending at least five minutes talking with your child?

___**4. Do you schedule** one-on-one time with each of your kids each week?

___**5. Have you designated** screen-free times? Digital devices can cause separation even when family members are together.

How well are you doing?

More *yes* answers mean you're finding ways to make family time a priority. For *no* answers, try those ideas.

Elementary School Parents make the difference!

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Geography comes to life with fun and educational activities



Helping students learn about geography can make it easier for them to relate to the world around them. Here are some educational and fun activities to boost your child's interest in geography:

- **Have your child draw a map** of how to get from your home to school, the grocery store or a friend's home. Then follow the map and see if it's accurate.
- **Walk outside** and identify *north, south, east* and *west*, as well as *northeast, northwest, southeast* and *southwest.* Ask your child to use these words to describe where things in your town are located. "My school is *northeast* of my house."
- **Look for street patterns.** In some towns, streets run north and south, while avenues run east and west. Street names may be alphabetical: Adams St., Bay St., Club St., etc. Help your child recognize the patterns.
- **Encourage your child** to start a collection of objects from countries around the world. Stamps, post cards and coins are all easy items to collect and store.
- **Talk about where your child's** ancestors came from. Find these places on a map. If possible, learn about the routes they traveled when they came to this country.
- **Go through your house** and talk about where things came from. Have your child read labels to see where items were made. A calculator may have come from Taiwan. A box of cereal may have a Michigan or Illinois address. Together, locate these places on a map.

Take advantage of opportunities to strengthen thinking skills



Students boost their thinking skills when they learn how to apply concepts they've learned to various situations. A child who has learned to count, for example, can get out the correct number of plates when setting the table.

Help your child strengthen thinking skills in common elementary school subjects, such as:

- **Language arts.** Before, during and after reading, encourage your child to ask and answer questions that start with *What, Why* and *What if.* "What do you think the character will do?" "Why is the character doing that?" "What if the character had made a different decision?"
- **Math.** Challenge your child to catch mistakes. For example, you might count by twos and say, "2, 4, 6, 7." Can she figure out what's wrong? Do activities together that involve building and sorting. "Let's build a tiny model of our car." "Can you help me reorganize this shelf of canned food?"
- **Science.** Watch nature programs and read books about nature. Encourage your child to use what she learns. "That tree has needles instead of flat leaves. What's that type of tree called?" "The flowers we planted last year grew back. Are they *annuals* or *perennials*?" "Look at that fly. Do flies have four wings or two?"

Q: My son is usually very well behaved. But lately, he has been acting out at home and in class. He's heading to middle school next year and I know he's anxious about that. Could this be why he's causing so much trouble? I'm at a loss about what to do.

Questions & Answers

A: When children are anxious, they tend to act out with the people they feel the closest to—usually parents and teachers. Transitions can be difficult and the move to middle school can seem scary—even if it's still months away.

Your son may have a lot of concerns: Will he still see his friends? Will he be able to handle the schoolwork?

As you suspect, these fears may be causing his misbehavior. Letting him get them out in the open will be a first step in dealing with them.

Here's how to help:

- **Talk with your son.** See if you can get him to express his fears out loud. A low-key approach usually works best. To open up a conversation, you might say, "I bet you're wondering about who will be in your classes next year."
- **Address his concerns.** Once your child begins to talk about his worries, work with his teacher to address them. Perhaps the teacher can lead a few class discussions about life in middle school. Or, if your son knows someone who is already at the school, suggest that he ask the person about what it's really like.
- **Remind your child** that he still needs to follow the rules at home and at school.

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It Matters: Reading

Comprehension may improve with movement



Reading is often thought of as a calm and cozy activity. But research suggests that children can improve their comprehension and memory by moving around and acting out what they've read.

Acting out a phrase or a passage can help children make connections between the words on a page and real actions. Physically crawling, for example, can help a young child understand the word *crawl* better.

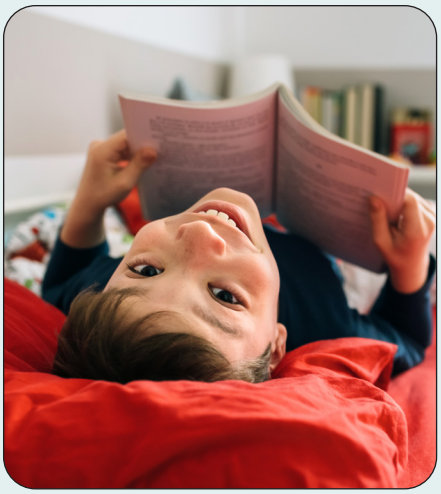
Here are some strategies for you and your child to try after reading a story together:

- **Play dress up.** Dress up as favorite characters. Use props from around the house and reenact exciting scenes. Use words from the story. "I'm climbing to the *peak* of the mountain! The very top!"
- **Put on a play.** Help your child write a short skit based on the story. Gather friends and family to participate or sit in the audience.
- **Do a dramatic reading.** Act out the story as you read it aloud. Take turns or let your child perform the whole thing. Use exaggerated actions and tones to bring the story to life.
- **Plan a puppet show** and act out a few scenes from the story with your child. If you don't have puppets, make some from old socks or small paper bags.

Source: M.P. Kaschak and others, "Enacted Reading Comprehension: Using Bodily Movement to Aid the Comprehension of Abstract Text Content," *PLOS ONE*, Public Library of Science.

Inspire reading by filling your home with reading materials

One of the most effective ways to get children to read is to surround them with a wide variety of reading material. In addition to filling your home with books, magazines and newspapers:



- **Let your child own some books.** It's great to check out books from the library. But owning a few books can foster a sense of pride about reading in your child. You can find great deals on used books at library fundraisers, yard sales and thrift stores.
- **Organize reading materials** in containers, such as baskets or magazine racks. These can fit in small spaces next to beds, couches and tables. They can even go in the car.
- **Create a special reading spot** in your child's bedroom. Provide good lighting. At bedtime, say something like, "You're old enough to stay up 15 minutes longer to read. Or, you can turn off the light at the same time as always. It's up to you." Your child will probably choose to read.

A trip to your local library can help your child love reading



Experts believe *all* children can enjoy reading. It's just a matter of finding the right materials. Before your next library visit, consider these six things:

1. **Company.** Kids who "don't like" to read often take pride in reading to others. Bring along a younger sibling, a grandparent or a favorite stuffed animal.
2. **Your child's hobbies.** Can you find an irresistible book about baseball, video games or cooking? Ask the librarian for suggestions.
3. **Different genres.** Perhaps your child would like to read a mystery, a how-to book or a biography. Consider everything!
4. **Alternatives to books.** Your child might prefer shorter materials, such as articles, comics or recipes. All of these count as reading!
5. **Other media.** Help your child find an audiobook to listen to while doing chores or riding in the car.
6. **Activities.** See if your local library hosts read-aloud times, or has reading-related activities and games for kids on its website.