

Elementary School Parents

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make the difference!



Use conversations to boost your child's thinking skills

In elementary school, teachers expect students to think about what they've read and then draw conclusions. To give your child the practice she needs to develop this ability:

- **Ask questions** that require her to think. If you watch a TV show together, talk about it afterward. "Why do you think the character did that?" or "Do you think things like that happen in real life?"
- **Share your thoughts** when you are making up your mind. You might say, "I am still not sure who I'll vote for in the mayoral election." Then talk about the strengths of the people running for that office. Your child may have some great insights.
- **Set aside time to read together**—and then talk about what you've read. Some families make one meal a week their "reading dinner." Everyone brings a book to the table. After a few minutes of reading, family members talk about what they've read and ask questions about what everyone else has read.
- **Make the most of car time.** Parents know that the best talks often take place in the car. So ask your child about what's going on in her life. Listen to her answers.
- **Keep a shared journal.** Try reading the same book. Take turns writing notes to each other about your reactions to what you've read.

Help your child have some fun with fractions



Understanding fractions can be a challenge for some children. To help your child learn

fractions, have fun with hands-on activities like these:

- **Take a fraction walk.** Have your child count how many cars you pass. Then figure how many (what fraction) of them are a certain color. Take turns choosing a color and seeing who has the largest fraction.
- **Measure up.** Give your child measuring spoons and cups. Have him pour one cup of water into one glass. Then have him guess: How many half cups will it take to fill another glass the same size? How many quarter cups or third cups?
- **Change that recipe.** Ask your child to rewrite the amount of each ingredient to double a recipe or cut it in half.
- **Eat your fractions.** Give your child 12, 24 or 36 pieces of cereal. Let him divide them into halves, fourths, etc. Or, share a pizza and ask some questions. If the pizza is cut into 12 slices, how many slices equal one-half or one-third of the pizza?

Performing chores can build responsibility and confidence



Research from a 75-year Harvard study shows that children who are given chores become more independent adults.

However, many kids aren't required to do as much today as they were in the past. They may be missing out on regular opportunities to develop positive character traits that could help them in school.

To make chores a beneficial part of your child's schedule:

- **Choose carefully.** Pick jobs that are challenging yet manageable for your child. Give your child clear, step-by-step instructions and a few chances to do the task with you before going solo.
- **Schedule chore time.** Write it down on your family calendar and post it where everyone will see.

- **Limit rewards.** If you give your child an allowance, separate it from chores. Everyone in your family should be *expected* to pitch in. Make comments like, "It helps keep our house tidy when you collect the trash! Thank you!"
- **Make work fun.** Chores should not be intolerable or feel like punishments. Turn cleaning into a game by setting a timer to "beat the clock." Or listen to music or an audiobook.

Source: B. Murphy Jr., "Kids Who Do Chores Are More Successful Adults," Inc.

"It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men."

Frederick Douglass

Talk to your elementary schooler about cheating and why it's wrong



Many parents think cheating doesn't happen in elementary school. But cheating often begins during competitive elementary school games.

Around third grade, when many students begin receiving letter grades and taking standardized tests, academic cheating often rears its head.

To help prevent cheating, talk regularly with your child about why it is wrong. Also keep in mind that:

- **Cheating is more tempting** to elementary schoolers than preschoolers, and the pressure increases in middle school.
- **Young kids are confused** about cheating. Although they believe

it is wrong, they also think it might be OK on some occasions. Let your child know that cheating is always wrong.

- **Peer pressure influences** cheating. When a classmate suggests cheating (asking to copy a homework assignment, for example), it can be difficult to say *no*. Role-play effective responses with your child.
- **Cheating is an ethical issue** that affects more than academics. Model honorable behavior in your daily life and interactions.
- **Too much pressure from parents** increases the risk of cheating. Let your child know that working hard and being honest is more important than getting a certain grade.

Are you helping your child beat test anxiety?



Some kids get butterflies in their stomachs before tests. But others go into full-blown panic. Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions

below to see if you are helping your child overcome test anxiety:

- ___ **1. Do you help** your child create a study plan to prepare for the test?
- ___ **2. Do you talk** with your child about *your* expectations? Remind her that your love for her does not depend on a test score.
- ___ **3. Do you practice** calming techniques with your child? Deep breathing, counting backwards from 100—find things that work for her.
- ___ **4. Do you encourage** your child to talk to her teacher about her fears? The teacher may be able to reassure her that she is, indeed, well-prepared.
- ___ **5. Do you encourage** positive self-talk? When your child gets stuck during a test, she can say, "I know this. The answer will come to me."

How well are you doing?

Mostly *yes* answers mean you are teaching your child to conquer anxiety. For *no* answers, try those ideas.

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Positivity is key when talking to your child about grades



If your child's grades are lower than you expected, it's only natural to be disappointed—especially if you know she isn't working up to her potential.

The most important thing to remember is to keep your emotions in check. Getting angry or showing your disappointment won't help. Instead, look for ways to encourage your child to do the best she can:

- **Ask her to talk** about her grades. Does she think they accurately reflect her work? What does *she* think is going on? Does she complete her in-class assignments? Is she turning in her homework on time? Does she understand the lessons? Does she think there is anything she could do differently?

- **Talk with her teacher.** Is your child having any issues at school? Discuss ways you can work together to boost your child's performance. What resources are available to help?
- **Enforce a regular study time.** During that time, the TV should be off and digital devices should be used only for studying. Set a timer for 20 minutes, then let your child take a short break before getting back to work.
- **Offer support.** Provide help when necessary, but don't just give your child the answers. Instead, act as a coach and show your child how she can find the answers on her own. Always let your child take responsibility for completing her work.

Research shows that goofing off builds your child's brain



Kids missed out on a lot during the pandemic. As a result, many families are enrolling their children in a variety of extracurricular

activities this school year. But signing up for too many structured activities could rob your child of an important chance for some "goofing off" time.

Studies show that even when kids' brains are in a "resting" state—that is, not being fed a formal stream of instruction—they're still active. It's just that they're learning in a different way. So, just because your child may not *look* busy, it doesn't mean his brain isn't busy!

To provide some brain-boosting downtime for your child:

- **Let him be bored sometimes.** Don't race to solve your child's

every "There's nothing to do!" whimper. Instead, challenge him to figure out how to fill the time himself. Who knows? It might be just the spark his brain needs to come up with something innovative!

- **Turn off digital devices.** It's easy to hand your child a smartphone or tablet to occupy his downtime. But consistently doing so robs his brain of a chance to actively acquire information (instead of being "fed" information by a screen). What if he looked out the car window, not at an app, during your next drive? What might his mind take in?

Source: L. Waters, Ph.D., "How Goofing Off Helps Kids Learn," *The Atlantic*.

Q: My son is quite overweight. I have talked with his doctor, and we are working on improving our diet at home. But meanwhile, his grades are dropping and he has almost no friends. What can I do to help my child?

Questions & Answers

A: Your son is not alone. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, more than one-third of children under the age of 18 are overweight.

Studies show that overweight kids often do poorly in school. Many overweight children don't speak up in class because they are afraid the other kids will make fun of them. They may also lack confidence in their abilities.

Kids who are overweight are also more likely to spend time by themselves. And when they're alone, they're often less active than other children.

First, help your son focus on the right thing. He shouldn't worry about the number on the scale. Instead, he should concentrate on establishing habits that will help him feel healthy and strong.

Next, make fitness a family priority. Plan frequent family walks. Look for things you can do on the weekends. Go to a park and kick a ball around.

Follow the guidelines your son's doctor sets for his diet. But don't turn yourself into the "food police." Instead, make healthy changes for the whole family, like drinking water instead of soda or juice.

Finally, talk with your child's teacher. Ask her to support your son in school. She may also have ideas about students your son could spend time with.

It Matters: The Home School Team

Set the stage for effective communication



Parent-school communication is critical to students' success. Whether your child is a stellar student,

an average student or has special needs, it's important to establish a positive relationship with her teachers.

Teachers need families to:

- **Stay in touch with school staff.** Attend meetings and follow up to see how things are going. Always contact the teacher if you have concerns.
- **Arrive prepared.** Before meetings, write down notes so you are sure to remember everything you want to say and ask.
- **Be optimistic.** Remind yourself that you and the school have the same goal: your child's success. A positive attitude makes conversations more productive.
- **Listen attentively.** Keep an open mind as you focus on the teacher's view, which may be different from yours. Ask for clarification about anything you find confusing.
- **Remain calm.** It's natural for parents to feel defensive about their children. If you accidentally say something you regret, just apologize and refocus on solutions.
- **Offer suggestions.** You know your child best. Explain factors the teacher may not know about and what you think would help your child most.
- **Never give up.** If an initial meeting doesn't get results, try again. You could also ask for another staff member to join you.

Family engagement supports students' academic success

Getting involved with your child's education doesn't just feel rewarding. It *is* rewarding! Hundreds of studies link family engagement—at home and at school—to student success.

Family engagement raises students' chances of earning higher grades, getting along with others, finishing homework, graduating from high school, and more!

To benefit your child the most, be sure to:

- **Start early and stay involved.** When families get involved early on, kids benefit more. And research shows family engagement should continue through middle and high school.
- **Explore your options.** Involvement can be as simple as asking, "What did you learn at school today?" or as complex as running a fundraiser. Ask about the school's



needs and match them to your time and talents.

- **Be confident.** No matter how you get involved, remember that it makes a difference. All primary caregivers—mothers, fathers, grandparents and others—have valuable contributions to make.

Ask these questions at your next parent-teacher conference



Parent-teacher conferences can help you learn more about your child's strengths and weaknesses. They can also give you a better idea about the year ahead.

Ask your child's teacher:

- **What will you cover** in this grade or subject this year?
- **What are your expectations** for homework?
- **How are my child's work habits?** Does he use class time well?

- **Does my child get along well** with the other students?
- **Has my child missed** any classes other than the ones I contacted the school about?
- **Are my child's reading and math** skills at the level you would expect for this grade?
- **Is my child** in different groups for different subjects?
- **Does my child qualify** for any special programs?
- **What can I do at home** to support my child's learning?