

Elementary School Parents[®] *make the difference!*



Give your elementary schooler the time to think analytically

Analytical thinking—the ability to go beyond basic knowledge and consider “the bigger picture”—is a crucial skill for school success. The better students are able to think analytically, the more deeply they grasp new concepts and ideas.

To support complex thinking:

- **Let your child figure things out.** Give your child time to work through problems independently. If your child has forgotten how to do an assignment, don't say it's OK not to do it. Instead, ask, “How could you find out?” Could your child call a classmate? Look over at a previous assignment for clues? Give your child space to come up with a plan.

- **Discuss current events.** Print out an article on a topic with many sides and chat about it over dinner. Find out what your child thinks about the issue, but don't stop there. After listening to your child's opinion, say, “I can see how you feel about this. But why do you think other people might feel differently?”
- **Encourage reflection.** Once your child completes a big project for school, talk about it. Ask, “How difficult was it to finish? What did you learn about how to do projects? Regardless of how the project went, reflecting on the process will help your child sharpen thinking skills.

Remember the three keys to discipline



Families and educators agree that discipline helps students learn and contributes to a

positive learning environment. The main goal of discipline is to help children learn from poor choices and make better choices in the future—and the best place to learn it is at home.

To help your child learn from discipline:

1. **Remain calm.** Giving in to an urge to yell at your child teaches that it's OK to lose control when upset.
2. **Be consistent.** It doesn't take long for your child to learn whether you really intend to enforce rules. Give in just once to letting your child skip chores and you'll have a battle every day. Set rules and consequences you can consistently enforce.
3. **Focus on behavior.** Instead of criticizing your child, describe your child's behavior: “It was your sister's turn to use the computer and you wouldn't quit playing your game.” Then, offer a reminder of the rule and of the consequence.

Use historical fiction to bring the past alive for your child



History is fascinating. But reading about it in school books can make it seem dull to students. That's where historical fiction can help.

The best historical fiction brings a past time to life. It shares the details about what people wore, what they ate and how they really lived. It gives the reader a glimpse of historic events.

To boost interest in history with historical fiction:

- **Look for titles** that present history accurately and avoid myths or stereotypes. You can search online or ask a librarian to help you identify some books to get started.
- **Select a book** that contains some illustrations or photos. When it

comes to historical fiction, images really are worth a thousand words.

- **Read the book** aloud if it's above your child's reading level.
- **Have your child read** several books about the same period. People of different ages or backgrounds can see the same event or period of history differently.

Source: E. Codell, *How to Get Your Child to Love Reading*, Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill.

“Those who do not remember the past are condemned to repeat it.”

—George Santayana

Add meaning to geography with fun and educational activities



Helping kids 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 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.
- **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 items your child can collect and learn about.
- **Talk about** where relatives live. How many ways are there to get there from your home?
- **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.

Are you teaching your child to use time wisely?



The second half of the school year is well-underway, so now is a good time to take a few minutes to think about

whether you're helping your child use time wisely.

Answer *yes* or *no* to each of the questions below:

___ **1. Have you reviewed** your child's study habits and made adjustments as necessary?

___ **2. Do you use** your family calendar to record dates for tests, projects and family commitments?

___ **3. Do you try** to keep a balance between your child's schoolwork and the rest of your lives? Elementary schoolers need plenty of time for exercise, family and sleeping.

___ **4. Do you help** your child break down big assignments into smaller chunks?

___ **5. Do you make** sure that your child has some time each day for pleasure reading or relaxation?

How well are you doing?

Each *yes* means you are helping your child learn to use time wisely. For *no* answers, try those ideas in the quiz.

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Practical Ideas for Parents
to Help Their Children.

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Building your child's social skills can give learning a big boost



Students learn much more in school than academics. In every class, kids practice an important skill—getting along with others.

Research shows that problems with social skills can interfere with learning and make it difficult for kids to succeed in school and in life.

To reinforce social skills:

- **Be a role model.** Children notice how family members interact with others. Do you introduce yourself to new people? Stay connected with friends? Support people you care about? Let your child see you being a good friend.
- **Read stories.** There are many books about friendship. After reading, talk about the story.

- **Role-play.** Kids need help practicing manners. With your child, pretend you're meeting new people. "Hi, I'm Charlie. Nice to meet you!" Also focus on sharing and kindness.
- **Socialize.** Give your child plenty of opportunities to spend time and interact with other kids. Head to a local playground. Participate in children's events at your local library. Sign up for a free class for kids at a community center.
- **Relax.** Children don't need lots of friends. Just one good buddy is fine, as long as your child cooperates well with others. If you have any concerns, talk with the teacher and work together on solutions.

Source: K. Steedly, Ph.D. and others, "Social Skills and Academic Achievement," *Evidence of Education*, National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities.

Boost your child's skills and creativity this Valentine's Day



Valentine's Day offers a great opportunity for building school skills while spreading love.

Here are some engaging activities to try with everyone in your family:

- **Write appreciation notes.** Have family members write individual notes to one another outlining all of the things they love about each person.
- **Make a heart collage.** Gather materials with different textures and cut out different sizes of hearts. Have family members glue them on paper to create beautiful pieces of art.
- **Discover the origin** of Valentine's Day. Challenge family members to collect interesting facts and share them during a family meal.
- **Read books together** about Valentine's Day and love. Ask your child's teacher or the librarian for suggestions.
- **Play an estimation game.** Fill a jar with pieces of valentine candy or small heart-shaped items. Ask family members to guess the number of items in the jar. The winner gets to keep the contents.
- **Learn how to say "I love you"** in different languages. Have family members search online and write down translations in as many languages as they can find.
- **Bake some cookie valentines.** Heart-shaped cookies are fun to make and give! Let your child help with the measuring and baking. Then, together, decorate them any way you wish.

Q: My child has struggled with math this year and now "hates" the subject. I can't really blame my child, because I'm not good at math either. How can I encourage a better attitude?

Questions & Answers

A: Parents' attitudes about math have a lot to do with how well their children do in math. Kids whose parents say they didn't like math when they were in school often struggle with math as well. Likewise, children whose parents instill a sense of enjoyment about math tend to perform better.

To help your child develop a positive attitude about math:

- **Set the tone.** Let your child know you believe *everyone* can be successful in math. Say this often enough and your child will start to believe it!
- **Avoid stereotypes.** Gender and background don't determine how well a child can do in any school subject. In fact, students who are successful in math can go a long way toward breaking the baseless stereotypes that others may hold.
- **Talk about careers.** Young children may decide that being an Avenger is a great career choice. Expand your child's horizons. Talk about people who use math in their jobs—an airline pilot, a weather forecaster, an architect, an astronaut, a researcher, an accountant, etc.
- **Connect math** to the real world. When you and your child go to the store, bank, restaurant, etc., point out all of the ways people use math. At dinner, challenge family members to tell one way they used math that day.

It Matters: Test Success

Focus on fitness to boost test performance



Studies show that children who are fit are more alert than their less active classmates. Fitness is also

linked to improved performance in math, memory, attention and speed completing tasks.

While physical fitness should be a year-round concern, your child can do some things to boost test-taking fitness. Encourage your child to:

- **Get a good night's sleep** before the test. Staying up late studying increases anxiety, which interferes with clear thinking.
- **Eat for success.** Aim for a breakfast high in fiber and low in added sugar. A hard-boiled egg and a banana is a fast and easy breakfast option.
- **Move around** before the test. Physical activity increases the flow of oxygen to the brain and boosts performance.
- **Relax.** Nervous students tend to forget what they know. Demonstrate deep breathing exercises to help focus the mind.
- **Wear comfortable clothes.** Pants shouldn't be so tight they distract your child or impede breathing. Your child should also dress in layers to avoid getting too hot or too cold.
- **Drink plenty of water** to keep the brain alert.

Don't forget to hug your child on test day. This will increase a sense of well-being and boost energy.

Source: L. Chaddock-Heyman and others, "The Role of Aerobic Fitness in Cortical Thickness and Mathematics Achievement in Preadolescent Children," *PLoS ONE*.

Show your child how to become a more confident test-taker

Test anxiety often comes from self-doubt. And it can affect test outcomes. When students don't think they will succeed, they can't do their best.

To build your child's confidence:

- **Remove the pressure.** Tell your child that tests simply show the teacher what students have learned so far, and what they may need help with.
- **Avoid last-minute panic.** Your child should begin to study days before the test.
- **Teach efficient studying.** The focus should be on any material your child has yet to master.
- **Encourage positive self-talk.** Your child can say things like,



"I know this material and I am prepared to do well."

- **Help your child visualize success.** With eyes closed, your child should imagine taking the test and knowing all of the answers.

Improve your child's recall by making facts meaningful



Studies show that when new information is linked to something memorable, it's easier for students to retain.

When learning a new word, for example, the brain can digest the information in two ways: by repeating the sound of the word, or by focusing on its meaning. Although both approaches work, emphasizing meaning leads to better long-term recall.

To help your elementary schooler absorb new facts:

- **Create a story.** Your child might struggle to remember the first three U.S. presidents, but what if you turned the information into a wild tale? "One day, George

Washington went to the park. He met John Adams by the swings. Then, the two bumped into Thomas Jefferson on the slide." This puts the presidents in a context your child will understand.

- **Focus on the bigger picture.** Rather than having your child repeat the fact that "Jupiter is the largest planet," tie it to something broader. "Everything about our solar system's biggest planet is big. Jupiter's 'big red spot' is even bigger than Earth." Small facts stick better when they are illustrated in a wider way.

Source: J.A. Meltzer and others, "Electrophysiological signatures of phonological and semantic maintenance in sentence repetition," *NeuroImage*, Elsevier.