

Helping Children Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

Valinda School of Academics



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Make a difference to your child and the school by volunteering

When families volunteer to help the school, learning improves for all the students. Every family can help in useful ways, and it's never too late to begin.

National Volunteer Week is April 20-26—and it's an ideal time to give volunteering at school a try. Here are six reasons to get involved now:

1. It benefits your child.

Whether you volunteer in your student's classroom, elsewhere at school or from home, you are showing that you think your child's education is important. Children whose families are engaged with school do better.

2. You can get to know teachers and other school staff. And you will know who to ask for help if your child needs it.

3. You can get to know other families who are volunteering, too. They can be valuable sources of information and advice.

4. The school benefits. When you volunteer, you free up school staff to spend more time with students who need it—which improves outcomes.

5. It's easy. Many schools offer training to volunteers. And if you aren't available during school hours, there are jobs that can be done at home at night or on weekends.

6. It's fun! You will meet interesting students and adults. You may learn new skills. And you'll know you have done something really worthwhile.



Provide practice making decisions

Children learn to make well-reasoned decisions by making lots of choices and learning from the results. Offering opportunities to make small decisions now helps ensure that your child will make wise choices when it counts.

The choices you offer your elementary schooler should be age-appropriate, and within boundaries you set. For example, young children can decide which healthy items they want to pack for lunch, or which of two shirts to wear. Older children can decide whether to read or do a math assignment first (but cannot decide to watch a video before getting down to work).

When your child needs to make a decision about what to do in a particular situation, discuss the potential consequences of each option.

If your child makes a poor decision, talk about why it didn't work out. Ask, "What would you do differently next time?" Your elementary schooler will be able to draw on this experience when faced with a future decision.

Know when to negotiate

It's bedtime, but your child begs, "Ten more minutes, please!" Do you wonder if it's OK to negotiate? The short answer is *yes*, but not on the spot. Once in a while, sit down together to discuss family rules. Listen to and consider your child's opinions. Then, make the final decisions—and stick to them.

Source: "The Art of Negotiating with Kids," PBS Parents.

Make a math tips poster

Help your child create a visible reminder of the many ways to get unstuck when a math problem is confusing. On a piece of poster-board, have your child list strategies such as:

- **Reread** the instructions.
- **Draw** a diagram.
- **Look** at a sample problem in my book or handout.
- **Think** about how I solved other problems like this one.
- **Estimate** an answer and check it out.



One glance at the poster will give your child ways to keep trying instead of staying stuck.

Source: D. Ronis, *Brain-Compatible Mathematics*, Skyhorse.

Attendance is a school skill

Children who are frequently absent from school lose essential learning time. They miss things they can't make up, like discussions and demonstrations in fundamentals like math and reading. Make on-time attendance a priority for your child. To make it easier:

- **Prep for school** the night before.
- **Maintain a bedtime** that lets your child wake up easily, rested and ready to learn.
- **Design a morning routine** that allows time to get ready without rushing.





How can I instill a habit of timeliness in my child?

Q: I can sometimes be a bit of a procrastinator, and I don't want my child to start doing this, too. How can I help my child develop more positive study habits?

A: You can help your child stay on top of school responsibilities by creating a routine that doesn't allow for putting off tasks. Include these key elements:

- **A consistent study time.** Consider your child's views when choosing a study time. Some kids prefer to dive in right after school so the rest of the day is free. Others have more energy after a break. If no work is due the next day, have your child use the time to read or review.
- **A system.** Encourage your child to create daily to-do lists and cross off completed tasks. Explain that doing tough jobs first can make other work seem easy. If big projects are overwhelming, help your child divide them into smaller, less intimidating parts.
- **Organization.** Have a designated spot for school supplies. Teach your child to put everything away neatly after using it. Being able to find things helps avoid unnecessary delays.



Next, model the habits you want your child to form. When you dread doing something, admit it sometimes. "Ugh. I don't want to pay the bills." Then, do it anyway! Say, "That wasn't too bad, and it feels great to be responsible."



Are you fostering motivation?

Intrinsic motivation—a desire to work toward success—comes from inside. But you can encourage this feeling in your child. Are you doing what you can to inspire your child to action? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

- ___ **1. Do you teach** your child to set goals?
- ___ **2. Do you help** your child make progress charts of steps to take to achieve goals?
- ___ **3. Do you offer** praise when your child works hard?
- ___ **4. Do you teach** your child that learning from mistakes is a key step in the process of getting smarter?
- ___ **5. Do you say** often that you know your child can succeed in school?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are taking steps to raise a motivated student. For each no, try that idea.

"The only thing standing between you and outrageous success is continuous progress."

—Dan Waldschmidt

Be a reading role model

Research shows that having a reading role model at home is an important factor in whether children see reading as something that is "cool" and worth doing. To be a model for your child:

- **Show that you value** reading by doing it every day.
- **Tell your child why** you are reading: for information, for pleasure, to double-check something you think you know, etc.
- **Talk about unfamiliar words** you read. Look up their definitions together.
- **Share interesting things** you read with your child.

Source: A. Cole and others, "Role models and their influence on children and young people's reading," National Literacy Trust.

Help 'flip' negative feelings

All children feel worried or upset sometimes. To help your elementary schooler manage these feelings in healthy ways:

- **Help your child** put feelings into words. "It sounds like you're worried no one will sit with you at lunch tomorrow."
- **"Flip" the thought.** Talk about ways to think about the issue that are more helpful. Your child might think, "I can ask my reading buddy to have lunch with me."



Be specific about respect

One of the best ways to teach respectful behavior toward others at home and at school is to talk about specific actions your child should take in particular situations. For example, if your child interrupts you when you are speaking, you might say, "When someone else is talking, it's respectful to listen until the person is finished. Then, you can have your turn."

Source: P. Denton, *The Power of Our Words: Teacher Language that Helps Children Learn*, Center for Responsive Schools, Inc.

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P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474

1-800-756-5525 • www.parent-institute.com