

Helping Children Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School



November 2024

Toutle Lake Elementary School

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Easing your child's anxiety about tests can improve performance

Does the prospect of taking a test give your elementary schooler a stomachache? For an estimated 40 percent of students, self-doubt and anxiety about tests can prevent them from doing their best. When students don't think they will do well on a test, they often don't.



To help your child go into tests with confidence:

- **Offer perspective.** Talk about what tests do—and what they don't. Tests show teachers what students have learned so far, and what they need help with. They don't judge your child's value as a student or a person.
- **Help your child make a plan.** Schedule short study sessions for several days before a test. Cramming the night before is less effective. During each session, help keep the focus on studying material your child hasn't yet mastered, rather than repeatedly reviewing familiar material.
- **Encourage your child to connect** new material to previously learned information. This makes it easier to recall.
- **Suggest things your child can say** to ease anxiety during the test. "I am prepared. I know this. I can remember the answer." Your child can also visualize all the questions answered correctly.

Source: A. Warner, "How To Support a Child With Test Anxiety," U.S. News & World Report.



Build thinking skills with questions

Asking certain kinds of questions is an effective way to help your child build thinking skills. Experts often divide these skills into six categories. Ask questions that encourage your child to:

1. **Recall facts.** Question words like *who*, *what*, *where* and *when* help with this.
2. **Reinforce understanding.** Ask your child to explain or describe newly learned concepts.
3. **Apply knowledge.** Ask questions that let your child use information to think about new situations or predict outcomes.
4. **Analyze data.** Ask how several items can be organized into groups, or have your child compare and contrast groups of things.
5. **Draw conclusions.** Ask your child to give reasons for opinions.
6. **Create solutions** to problems.

Source: "Revised Bloom's Taxonomy—Question Starters," College of Education, Illinois State University.

Promote reading progress

Encouraging and supporting reading is one of the best ways to bolster success in school. In addition to having your child read every day, you can also:

1. **Start a family book club.** Choose a book you'll all read and discuss at dinner.
2. **Let your child see** you reading—for fun, for information, to learn a new skill.
3. **Ask the teacher** about strategies to use at home to strengthen reading skills.

Learn together this month

November is full of opportunities to dive into learning with your child:

- **Nov. 1. Author's Day.** Help your child learn about the author of a favorite book. What else did he or she write?
- **Nov. 5. Election Day** (U.S.). Discuss rights, responsibilities and the importance of voting.
- **Nov. 28. Thanksgiving Day** (U.S.). As a family, list the things you are thankful for.



Help your child be a leader

Whether they are naturally outgoing or shy, all students can develop and benefit from leadership skills. To help:



- **Talk with your child** about the qualities of effective leaders (they can listen, communicate and problem-solve, etc.).
- **Help your child consider** other people's points of view. Leaders make people *want* to work together.
- **Let your child lead** a family meeting.
- **Point to leaders** in the news. Also tell your child what you are doing and why when you act as a leader.



My child is saying “I can’t learn math.” What can I do?

Q: Math is an ongoing challenge for my child, who claims to hate it. I’m sympathetic because I’m not good at math myself. How can I help improve my child’s attitude?

A: Attitude counts in math, and your attitude matters as much as your child’s. Research shows when parents say they didn’t like or do well in math, their kids often have trouble with it as well. But children whose families instill a sense of enjoyment of math tend to perform better.

To encourage an attitude reset:

- **Be positive.** Tell your child that math is important and everyone can learn it. Ask your child to teach new concepts to you.
- **Bust stereotypes.** There is no one type of person who can or can’t do math. In fact, students who are successful with math can go a long way toward breaking stereotypes that others may hold.
- **Point out real-world math.** Talk about ways people use math everywhere you go: making bank deposits, tracking inventory, etc. Discuss exciting careers that use it—like pilot, designer, even social media influencer.
- **“Gamify” math practice.** Games make math fun. Try this card game: Each of you turn over a card then take turns adding, subtracting or multiplying the numbers together.



Are you making the most of resources?

Raising and educating children can be a tough job. But there are some helpful resources available in almost every community. Are you building a support network for yourself? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

- ___ **1. Do you have** friends you can ask questions about raising an elementary schooler? School events are great places to meet families who may have already found answers.
- ___ **2. Do you ask** at school for materials that can help you help your child?
- ___ **3. Do you attend** at least one program for families about supporting students each year?
- ___ **4. Do you meet** with teachers to ask questions and discuss your child’s learning?

- ___ **5. Have you met** the school counselor?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are reaching out for support to help your student thrive. For each no, try that idea.

“We are strong,
each in our purpose,
and we are all more
strong together.”

—Bram Stoker

Healthy food fuels learning

Children don’t learn well when they are hungry. Food provides the power that keeps your child’s brain alert and on task. To fuel your student for a day of learning:

- **Start with breakfast.** Schedule time for your child to eat without rushing. If your child gets breakfast at school, discuss the importance of eating it.
- **Encourage wise lunch choices.** Explain that sugary and high-fat foods make bodies tired—which makes it harder to concentrate.
- **Keep after-school snacks healthy.** Offer items such as cut up veggies, fruit, cheese and whole grain crackers.

Source: “Breakfast for Learning: Why the Morning Meal Matters,” HealthyChildren.Org, American Academy of Pediatrics,

There’s no need to cheat

Some students cheat in school because they worry about what their families will do if they bring home a bad grade. Make it clear that what matters to you is that your child is trying hard and learning. Say that you would be more concerned about a bad grade than angry, and would want to find solutions.

Practice boosts persistence

Perseverance helps students keep going when learning isn’t easy. Research shows that practice helps children learn it. In one study, kids were given a puzzle to solve. Some were allowed to keep trying, while others got 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 had been helped. In the face of a challenge, give your child a chance to practice trying before you jump in.



Source: M.W. Berger, “Children persist less when parents take over,” *Penn Today*, University of Pennsylvania.

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Published in English and Spanish, September through May.

Publisher: Doris McLaughlin.

Publisher Emeritus: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.

Editor: Alison McLean.

Translations Editor: Victoria Gaviola.

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