ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Helping Children Learn®

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

March 2024

Charles City Public Schools

Help your child think about how to learn and solve problems



Students learn more and stay more motivated to persist with schoolwork when they think about *how* they learn. Educators call this *metacognition*. When your child faces obstacles, one effective way to offer support is to talk about how your student thinks about and approaches problems.

When your child hits a snag with schoolwork:

- **Discuss ways to think** about it. Effective thinkers have a plan before they take action. They know if they need more information in order to proceed. And if they get new information later, they adapt their plan.
- **Point out your child's strengths** as a problem solver. "Remember that when you make a plan, things seem to fall into place."
- **Help your child draw** on past knowledge to address current problems. Your student may not have had an assignment just like this one, but your child has probably worked on other challenging tasks. Ask, "What did you learn then about ways to work through tough problems?"
- **Talk about what persistence** can do. "It's not that I'm so smart," Albert Einstein once said, "It's that I stick with a problem longer." Talk about the progress your child has already made, and offer assurance that by continuing to try, your child *can* reach the goal.

Source: A.L. Costa, *Developing Minds: A Resource Book for Teaching Thinking*, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Give learning a boost by guiding play

Play supports children's physical, academic and social development. While free play is important, play that's guided by an adult can better help your child learn specific skills or concepts. To guide your child's play:

- **Mix play** and everyday activities. Let your child play with measuring cups and spoons while you cook. Then, ask how many teaspoons of water will fill a tablespoon or how many ¼ cups of sugar will fit in one cup. On a walk outside, make up a story together about an animal or bird you see—using descriptive words and lots of details.
- **Place learning materials** with your child's toys. Provide a note pad and pen so your child can write prescriptions for stuffed animals while playing vet. Encourage engineering experiments by adding varied materials to your block bin (cardboard tubes, egg cartons, cut-up pool noodles, etc.).

Source: C.A. Wright and others, "Playful Learning and Joyful Parenting," The LEGO Foundation.

Keep tests in perspective



Standardized tests can make kids—and families—nervous. The teacher can tell you what the tests measure, but it's important to remember that one test doesn't represent a student's total abilities. Help your child stay calm and positive before a test. If anxiety rises, have your child take deep breaths and say, "I can do this!"

Boost reading for meaning

To improve your child's ability to understand meaning when reading fiction, talk about the material together. Ask your student to:



- **Discuss plot movers.** What problems did the characters face? Why did things turn out the way they did?
- **Find links.** What has your child learned or experienced that relates to the story?
- **Make choices.** Would your child make the same decisions a character did? How might other choices change the story?
- **Think about the author's point.** Did the story have a message?

Source: "Reading Comprehension and Higher Order Thinking Skills," K-12 Reader.

Discuss conflict resolution

Conflicts—from misunderstandings with teachers to disagreements with friends or family—are a part of all children's lives. To help resolve them, teach your child to:

- **Listen to the other person** and try to understand their point of view.
- **Take time to calm down** and think before acting.
- **Consider compromises.**
- **Ask for help** when needed.
- **Be willing to apologize** when at fault.

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Q&A What can I do to help my child stop procrastinating?

Q: My fifth grader puts everything off. In the morning, my child is late getting ready. Schoolwork and long-term projects turn into panicked mad rushes at the last minute. How can I help my child learn to manage time better?



A: Elementary schoolers are just beginning to learn time management—and it doesn't come naturally to many of them. But with your support, your child can to learn to plan ahead.

Help your child establish regular routines for:

- **Getting organized.** Have your child do backpack, bedroom and study area tidy-ups. An organized space can make organized thinking easier.
- **Prioritizing.** Help your child make a to-do list with three headings: Must Do, Would Be Nice to Do and Could Skip This. Make it clear that items on the Must-Do list (such as schoolwork) have to come first.
- **Scheduling.** After setting priorities, figure out together when your child can do those Must Dos. Some children can draw up a schedule for the whole week and stick to it. Others need to make a daily schedule to stay on track. Make sure there is some time in the schedule for fun!
- **Sticking to the schedule.** This is the hardest step. Daily study times and morning and evening routines can help. Praise your child for sticking with them.

Parent Quiz Are you reinforcing learning skills?

One of the best ways to help your child do well in school is to reinforce school skills at home. Are you helping your child apply things learned in class to daily life? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

___**1. Do you ask** your child to explain concepts that the class is learning about? Do you listen and ask questions?

___**2. Do you encourage** your child to help you solve problems around the house?

___**3. Do you help** your child apply school skills in hands-on ways, such as by writing stories or calculating averages?

___**4. Do you encourage** your child's interest in "grown-up" things, such as ways to save money on household costs?

___**5. Do you look** up answers together when questions arise?

How well are you doing?

More yes *answers mean you are reinforcing and building on your child's knowledge. For each* no *try that idea.*

"For the things we have to learn before we can do them, we learn by doing them."
—Aristotle

Get ready for the big move

If your child will be heading to middle school in the fall, start preparing for the exciting transition now. To help:

- **Read the middle school website** together. Sign up to receive school communications so you and your child will know what's going on.
- **Foster school spirit.** Talk about your child's interests and new ways to pursue them in middle school.
- **Encourage school success habits,** such as fulfilling responsibilities, taking notes and making study plans.
- **Look for mentors.** Do neighbors and friends have children in the middle school? See if your child can talk to their students about what it's like.

Spring into gardening fun



Spring is just around the corner. For some seasonal fun that also teaches responsibility, allow your child to pick out some quick growing seeds, such as radishes or marigolds.

Help your elementary schooler plant the seeds in potting soil and place the pots in a sunny spot. Then, make your child responsible for the watering and care of the plants.

Make rules memorable

Creating catchy phrases that link rules with their consequences can help your child remember them. For example:

- **If you leave it out, you go without** (belongings not put away properly go into time-out for a week).
- **If you hit, you sit** (in time-out).
- **If you partake,** you take part (in meal prep or clean up).

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