

# Elementary School Parents

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James Russell Lowell Elementary

*make the difference!*



## Five things families can do to help students thrive in school

Every family—and every child—is different, but there are ways all families can set children up for success. Studies show that students are more likely to achieve in elementary school and beyond when their families provide a supportive environment.

To set your child up for a great school year:

1. **Set the bar high.** Insist on your child's personal best, but don't demand perfect grades. Praise effort and progress—even if your child falls short.
2. **Assign chores.** Children who have household responsibilities learn how to be responsible. Make a short list of weekly tasks and expect your child to complete them.

3. **Teach social skills.** A productive learning environment hinges on students' ability to get along with others. Promote cooperation and courtesy.

4. **Nurture your relationship.** Make time to have fun together. Share a hobby. Play catch in the yard. Express your love by being attentive and supportive.

5. **Take care of yourself.** If you're always stressed, your child will be, too. Carve out time to relax, exercise or curl up with a good book. A calm, peaceful home starts with you.

Source: R. Gillett and R. Premack, "Science says parents of successful kids have these 11 things in common," *Business Insider*.

## Teach your child how to be conscientious



*Conscientiousness* is a student's ability to set and meet goals, make informed choices, and fulfill responsibility to others.

While this trait should naturally develop as your child grows, studies show there's an easy activity that can hone it. And believe it or not, it's schoolwork!

Here's how to help your child strengthen conscientiousness with assignments:

- **Remind your child not to rush.** Students should take their time and complete tasks carefully.
- **Ask your child to check work.** After finishing an assignment, have your child spend a few minutes going back to confirm answers are correct.
- **Cheer your child on.** Is that art project challenging? Is that math assignment taking a long time? Encourage your child to keep at it and not give up! Conscientious students do their best to meet deadlines even when the going gets tough.

Source: R. Göllner and others, "Is doing your homework associated with becoming more conscientious?" *Journal of Research in Personality*, Elsevier Inc.

# It's time to get your family back in the school groove



The start of a new school year is a fresh start for families and students.

Here are some practical ideas to help you and your family gear up for a productive year of learning:

- **Make a weekly schedule.** Include time for schoolwork, play, activities and family.
- **Establish a family reading time** where everyone reads for at least 30 minutes.
- **Keep a family calendar.** Mark each family member's activities in a different color.
- **Reestablish bedtimes** and wake times for weekdays. Allow plenty of time to get ready in the morning.
- **Scale back passive screen watching.** Set a weekly limit for watching TV, movies and videos.

- **Create flexible learning spaces.** Allow your child to work where most comfortable—whether that's at the kitchen table or on the couch. Just make sure that the space has adequate lighting and is as distraction-free as possible.
- **Collect important contact information** for teachers. Update your work, medical and emergency contact numbers with the school.

**“I hope you realize that every day is a fresh start for you. That every sunrise is a new chapter in your life waiting to be written.”**

—Juansen Dizon

# Communication is the key to a strong family-school team



Research shows that family engagement in education has a positive effect on students' academic success. When

teachers and families work together, the results can be powerful. To foster effective two-way communication:

- **Set the tone.** It's natural to have questions for your child's teachers. When you ask them, show support for your child and the class. Encourage the teacher to keep you informed.
- **Be positive.** Talk with the teacher about your child's strengths. But also prepare to hear about weaknesses and how to address them. You and the teacher both want your child to do well. Addressing

struggles is the only way to find solutions.

- **Role-play.** Some parents are nervous about talking with the teacher. If this describes you, consider practicing with a friend. If you aren't comfortable speaking English, have an interpreter join you. Still worried? Using email may put you at ease.
- **Choose words carefully.** It's more effective to make polite requests than demands. A helpful tip is to use the word *we* instead of *you*. “How can we stay in touch to help Jordan?” works better than “Call me immediately if Jordan is falling behind.” You and the teacher are teammates, and effective teamwork is a win for your child.

# Are you helping your child have healthy habits?



Healthy habits make it easier for students to concentrate and learn during the day. Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions

below to see if you are promoting wellness for your child:

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you enforce** a regular bedtime? Elementary school kids need at least nine hours of sleep each night to function at their best.
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you make sure** your child eats breakfast every morning? Kids' brains need fuel to learn.
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you encourage** your child to get moving every day? Studies show that exercise improves kids' memory and focus.
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you remind** your child to wash hands frequently? Hand washing reduces the spread of illness.
- \_\_\_ **5. Do you make sure** your child understands rules about safely interacting with others?

## How well are you doing?

More *yes* answers mean you are instilling physical habits that support learning. For *no* answers, try those ideas.

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# Show your child that reading is enjoyable and rewarding



Strong reading skills make it easier to learn every school subject. But literacy experts say that to build reading abilities, children

must *want* to read. Unfortunately, many kids just aren't interested.

To inspire your child to read:

- **Listen to audiobooks.** This is an effective way to show a reluctant reader how interesting books can be. Download audiobooks from the library, or record yourself reading aloud. Your child can follow along with the book while listening.
- **Follow current events.** Is there a developing news story that interests your child? Read the latest reports together each night.
- **Sign your child up for a pen pal.** Kids love receiving mail and learning about life in other countries. Ask your child's teacher or a librarian about how to get involved.
- **Take a virtual field trip.** Challenge your child to research online about attractions in your area, such as museums. Then ask your student to be your tour guide through their websites and share interesting facts.
- **Give reading coupons.** Show your child that you think reading is special by giving reading coupons. Some might be for 30 minutes of reading with you. Others might be good for a new book. Reading coupons also make great rewards for good behavior.

# Brainstorming is the solution for your child's writer's block



Some students don't like to write because they think it's boring. Others find it too challenging. They get frustrated trying

to think of ideas.

You can't force a child to *love* writing. But you can turn a reluctant writer around with brainstorming.

Brainstorming is fun and boosts creativity. It reduces stress and can help your child break through writer's block.

Brainstorming also teaches other skills that help with writing. By creating lists, for example, your child learns to break down complex ideas into smaller components. Brainstorming can help your child figure out a topic for a paper or think of ideas for a short story.

The next time writer's block hits, have your child:

- **Make lists.** Here are a few topics to get started: *Things I love. My favorite animals, places, toys or food. Things I know a lot about. Scary characters. Things adults say.*
- **Imagine.** Ask your child some questions that will spark new ways to think about people, events and scenes. "What would it feel like to be a car, a house or a dog? What would life be like if you had four hands?"
- **Use visual images.** Have your child look at a picture and write down what it brings to mind. Or, your child can take a walk and make notes about observations.
- **Think about actions** to add to ideas: What will happen next? How quickly?

**Source:** D.B. Reeves, Ph.D., *Reason to Write: Help Your Child in School and in Life Through Better Reasoning and Clear Communication—Elementary School Edition*, Kaplan Publishing.

**Q:** My fifth grader suffers from some serious self-doubt. "I can't do anything right!" is my child's current mantra. How can I help my child see the smart and capable person that I see?

## Questions & Answers

**A:** As children get older and school becomes more challenging, self-doubt and insecurity can rear their ugly heads. Some students feel immense pressure to measure up, and it can be scary when they feel like they're falling short.

Although you probably can't make insecurity go away altogether, you can do things to help your child feel smart and competent. Here's how:

- **Find the right outlets.** Let your child experience success by recommending activities where success is the most likely outcome. If sports are your child's thing, encourage practice to perfect certain skills. If your child enjoys reading, suggest starting a book club with friends.
- **Assign responsibilities.** Your child may gripe about having to put away laundry, but that's OK. Completing chores is an effective way to make your child feel valued, because doing them helps the whole family. It can make your child more responsible, too.
- **Acknowledge accomplishments.** Did your child just do something wonderful? Offer your congratulations. Talk about your child's achievement, whether it was earning a good grade on a quiz or setting a beautiful table for dinner.

With a little help from you, your elementary schooler will begin to see the same resourceful person you see!

# It Matters: Motivation

## Learning goals keep students motivated



This school year, challenge your child to set some learning goals. When students set goals, they learn

to focus their time and resources more efficiently.

To get started:

1. **Start a conversation.** Tell your child something you've decided to change. "I'm going to get more exercise and cut back on my screen time." This shows your child that a goal is really just a promise you make to yourself.
2. **Brainstorm ideas.** Are there things your child struggled with last year? Talk about making improvements. "You've had trouble completing your assignments on time. What could you do to fix that?" Starting schoolwork earlier, revamping a study routine and organizing work spaces are three examples of things your child could think about doing.
3. **Define the goal.** Make your child's idea concrete by turning it into a goal. What specific steps does your child need to take to revamp a study routine? When a goal is measurable, it is easier to achieve. "I resolve to spend at least 15 minutes studying each subject every day."
4. **Be supportive.** Goals have a way of fading away. So offer support if you child starts to slip. "I know it's hard to stick to a study routine, but you can do it!" Say that falling short once in a while doesn't mean your child can't get back on track.

## Start off the school year with a positive attitude about learning

Children's attitudes about school affect their desire to learn. The start of a new school year is the perfect time to bolster your child's enthusiasm for education. Here's how:

- **Be a role model.** If you have a positive attitude about school, your child is more likely to feel the same way. In addition to reinforcing the value of education, make it a point to attend parent-teacher conferences and school meetings for families. Supervise your child's work time when possible and show interest in learning.
- **Compliment success.** When your child works hard, be sure to speak up. This reinforces the connection between effort and the good feeling of success.



- **Link lessons to real life.** For example, math skills can help your child calculate batting averages in baseball. A new vocabulary word may show up in a favorite book. Participating in a group project builds teamwork.

## Paying students for grades is not an effective motivator



There are just some things that money can't buy—including intelligence and academic success. Here's why using money as a reward for good grades may not be a good idea:

- **It places the emphasis** on the wrong thing. When students are promised money for certain grades, they will be working for the money rather than working to learn. Some kids may find that they want the money so badly that they are willing to cheat to get it.
- **It doesn't help** students learn the satisfaction of doing a job well.

They need to learn the joy and pride that come just from doing something to the best of their ability. That is the reward students should be striving for.

- **It focuses on the outcome** rather than the effort. Students need to learn the importance of trying their best and sticking with challenging subjects. Putting all their attention on a reward at the end of the process will make it harder for them to learn that lesson. So what should you do? Let your child know that school is important. Celebrate successes, and keep your money in your pocket!