



Discourage multitasking to boost concentration

Look around your home during study time. Is your child singing to music? Are you answering your child's questions while checking your email?

Multitasking has become a way of life, but not necessarily a good one. In fact, while multitasking, the brain doesn't really concentrate on several tasks at once. Instead, it moves quickly from one thing to another—not giving anything its full attention.

To prevent multitasking mistakes:

- **Eliminate distractions.** Research shows that multitasking with technology (texting, listening to music, watching videos, etc.) negatively impacts studying, completing assignments, learning

and grades. Choose a quiet place for your child to study—as free of distractions as possible.

- **Think about the time of day** when your child's attention and motivation seem to be at their prime. Then, have your child schedule challenging work that requires a lot of focus during that time.
- **Set an example.** If you give your undivided attention when your child is talking or asking for help, you'll demonstrate how to focus.
- **Limit multitasking** to activities that don't require much concentration. For example, your child can listen to music while cleaning a room.

Source: C. Kubu, Ph.D. and A. Machado, MD, "The Science Is Clear: Why Multitasking Doesn't Work," Cleveland Clinic.

Word games strengthen writing skills



If your child has trouble forming and punctuating sentences, encourage practice by

turning writing into a game.

Here are two games to play to exercise writing skills:

1. **Fill-in-the-Blanks.** Review the different parts of speech and write a story with missing words. For example: "The girl stepped on a ___ (noun)." Take turns filling in the blanks. You can help by saying things like, "A noun is a person, place or thing. I'll choose the word *pie!*" Make the words as silly as you'd like. Then read the story aloud.
2. **Punctuation Point.** Write a short story without punctuation. Then read it together. It's challenging! This illustrates how important punctuation is for writing to be clear.

Now edit the story, adding punctuation that makes it easy (or funny) to read. Suggest that your child write a story for you to punctuate. Discuss why you chose—or didn't choose—certain punctuation marks.

Talk to your child about showing respect for teachers, classmates



Respectful behavior is vital for education. When students show respect for teachers and classmates, they help create the positive academic environment all children need to be successful learners.

Encourage your child to:

- **Address the teacher** by name. Simply saying “Good morning, Mrs. Jones” is an easy way to show respect.
- **Be courteous.** Your child should say *please* and *thank you* to the teacher and classmates.
- **Raise a hand.** When students avoid interrupting and wait to be called on, they demonstrate respect for others.
- **Do what’s expected.** Everyone in the class has a job to do. If the teacher doesn’t plan any lessons, no

one can learn anything. If students don’t do their jobs—completing assignments, listening to others—it makes it more difficult to learn.

- **Listen to the teacher’s comments.** Teachers want students to learn and improve. That means they have to point out mistakes. Students do much better in school when they can recognize and accept constructive feedback.

“Respect for ourselves guides our morals; respect for others guides our manners.”

—Laurence Sterne

Strengthen your elementary schooler’s math fluency



Being fluent in math is similar to being fluent in a language: You just know that $2 + 2 = 4$, just as you know that “Hello” is a

greeting.

This kind of instant recall is important in math because it helps your child solve bigger problems more efficiently.

To develop math fluency:

- **Provide counters.** Hands-on experiences help your child “see” math facts and put them into long-term memory. Let your child add and subtract with small objects like pennies, buttons, dry beans, etc. Your child can put a handful of pennies in a cup, dump them out, and add those that land on “heads” plus those that land on “tails.” Or your child can attempt to toss 10 beans into the cup, count the ones that didn’t go in, and subtract that number from 10 to figure out how many landed in the cup.
- **Play games** like a math-facts version of War. Remove face cards from a deck, and deal the rest facedown. Each player flips over two cards. For “Addition War,” each player adds the numbers on their cards, and the player with the largest sum takes all the cards. To play “Subtraction War,” each player subtracts their smaller number from their larger one, and the player with the largest difference keeps the cards.
- **Make fact practice a daily habit.** Pick a Number of the Day, such as the date. Then take turns saying addition or subtraction facts that equal that number. On the 15th, your child might think of $20 - 5$, $7 + 8$ and $10 + 5$.

Do you help your child deal with disappointment?



Sooner or later all children face disappointments. Are you helping your child learn to deal with them?

Answer *yes* or *no* to each

question below to find out:

___1. **Do you help** your child understand what can’t be changed and what can? For example, “You can’t change the fact that it is raining, but you can change your plans.”

___2. **Do you encourage** your child to choose a positive response when the unexpected happens?

___3. **Do you point out** what your child can learn from mistakes? “Next time, you can start studying a few days earlier and earn a better grade.”

___4. **Do you have** this rule: You can feel disappointed, but you can’t sulk? Your child is entitled to have feelings, but sulking isn’t productive.

___5. **Do you help** your child figure out solutions independently—instead of trying to fix the problems yourself?

How well are you doing?

If you answered mostly *yes*, you’re demonstrating how to cope when things don’t go your child’s way. For *no* answers, try those ideas.

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Focus on kindness to nurture your child's academic success



According to some researchers, kids whose families value kindness over achievement tend to do better in school

than kids from families where academic success matters above all else.

In fact, putting pressure on your child to score high marks can have the opposite effect. It can cause grades and self-esteem to suffer, and lead to depression and anxiety. But when families promote kindness, students tend to perform better in school. This may be because they feel more secure and know their family's approval doesn't hinge on good grades.

To show your child how much you value kindness:

- **Model acts of kindness.** Hold the door open for someone. Help a neighbor carry groceries. Give up

your seat on a bus to someone who needs it more than you. These may seem like small things, but they make a big impression on kids.

- **Praise positive behavior.** When you notice your child doing something nice or loving, say something. There's no need to go overboard—a simple pat on the back will remind your child how much you value kindness.
- **Promote healthy relationships.** Encourage your child to connect with teachers and classmates. The more support students get from those around them, the less likely they are to depend on things like grades and awards to feel good about themselves.

Source: L. Ciciolla and others, "When Mothers and Fathers Are Seen as Disproportionately Valuing Achievements," *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, Springer US.

Plan fun activities to keep your child learning over winter break



Your child looks at the calendar and imagines the joy of having free time for the entire winter school break. You look at the

same blank squares on the calendar and have a mild moment of panic.

To keep from hearing "I'm bored" during your child's time off from school, make time for some of these fun activities that promote learning:

- **Help your child focus on others.** This is the season for the "I wants." Insist that your family take part in an activity that will help those less fortunate.
- **Prepare food together.** Nearly every culture has some special foods associated with the holiday season. With your child, prepare foods you

remember from your childhood. Share your memories. Or do some research and cook a dish you've never tried.

- **Select a movie** that is based on a book. After you and your child finish reading the book, watch the movie together. Discuss how the two are alike and how they are different.
- **Encourage your child** to learn more about the past and family history by talking with aunts, uncles, grandparents—even you. Together, brainstorm a list of questions to ask, such as, "What was school like for you when you were my age?" and "What trends were popular?" Your child can record the conversations, write them down, or just listen.

Q: I used to think that *fun* and *games* went together—boy was I wrong! What's fun about my younger child running out of the room in tears after losing, or my older child cheating when my back is turned? Is there some way to teach sportsmanship?

Questions & Answers

A: Children can be competitive. However, they need to learn to compete fairly. Try these simple guidelines:

- **Talk about the importance** of being a good sport. Let your kids know that you expect them to be humble when they win and gracious when they lose.
- **Establish a quitting time** in advance. Set an alarm before you start. When the bell rings, the game is over.
- **Minimize mistakes.** Be gentle when you correct your kids for a wrong move or a mistake.
- **Be prepared for cheating.** Start each game by reviewing the rules. The first time a child tries to cheat, simply repeat the rules. Say nothing more.

The second time, calmly say, "When you don't play by the rules, I get upset and don't enjoy playing. If it happens again, the game is over." If it does happen again, say nothing. Simply put the game away.

- **Beat the bickering.** Call fouls during home play just as the ref does in basketball. Every jibe, poke, put-down or unkind comment results in a foul for that player. Five fouls and the player's out.

Sportsmanship can help your children work with others in school, too. But remember, it takes patience, firm guidelines and time to develop.

It Matters: Responsibility

Completing chores at home boosts success



Children who complete chores tend to have higher self-esteem, be more responsible, and be better equipped to

deal with frustration. But how do you get your elementary schooler to do chores willingly?

Most children love to make a plan and then carry it out. So first, involve your child in brainstorming what needs to be done around the house and when. Then:

- **Give your child a choice.** Together, make a list of age-appropriate chores, such as vacuuming, sweeping, folding laundry, feeding a pet and helping with yard work. Let your child choose which ones to be responsible for.
- **Rotate chores** each week, so no one feels stuck doing a particular chore.
- **Use a chore chart.** Let your child place a star next to chores when they are complete.
- **Demonstrate a positive attitude.** Talk about how good it feels when you finish a chore.
- **Make a game of it.** Set a timer and see if your child can beat the clock. Turn on some music and work to the rhythm of the beat.
- **Curb criticism.** Don't immediately point out errors. Thank your child, then gently explain how to improve—but don't redo the work.
- **Follow chores with fun.** Have a basket of index cards listing fun activities to do after finishing chores. Take turns choosing a card.

Promote independence with a checklist of responsibilities

Whether it's keeping track of assignments or taking care of school property, responsible behavior is a must for school success. And the best way to *teach* your child responsibility is to *give* your child responsibilities.

Sit down together and make a list of tasks your child is ready to handle independently. Then make a checklist of everything you expect your child to do. Agree on small rewards for a job well done, and consequences for times your child shirks responsibility.

Here is a starter checklist of responsibilities you can adapt:

- **Going** to bed on time.
- **Getting** up on time.
- **Fixing** breakfast.
- **Completing** schoolwork.
- **Maintaining** grades.



- **Getting along** with siblings.
- **Keeping** room clean.
- **Reading** at least 15 minutes a day.
- **Taking care** of personal hygiene.
- **Putting dirty clothes** in a hamper.

Overprotective parents hinder children's responsibility



Overprotective parenting makes it difficult for children to learn essential skills—such as communication, negotiation, perseverance, responsibility and decision making.

To avoid the many pitfalls of overprotective parenting:

- **Don't do things** for your child that your child can do independently. Will your child make mistakes? Probably. But there are lessons to learn from those mistakes.
- **Don't come to the rescue** when your child forgets things. For

example, if your child forgets to complete an assignment, don't contact the teacher to ask for an extension. Instead, help your child learn from the consequences.

- **Don't try to negotiate** a better grade for your child. If you or your child are confused about a grade, encourage your child to talk to the teacher about it first.
- **Don't call the parent** of a child your child is complaining about. Give your child a chance to work it out. However, if there is a serious problem, such as bullying in person or online, contact the school immediately.