

# Helping Children Learn<sup>®</sup>

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

Cherokee Elementary School

Pascagoula, Mississippi



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## Expand world knowledge during Geography Awareness Week

Knowing where a place is on a map gives your child information for understanding more about it. But geography is about much more than maps. It's about how places shape people, and how people shape places.

November 13-17 is Geography Awareness Week. Help your child celebrate and learn about the world's places and people with some of these activities:



- **Locate the news.** When you and your child hear a news story about an unfamiliar place, locate it on a map. Then, together, look up and learn a few facts about the location and the people who live there.
- **Take a virtual trip.** Search online for pictures and information about a country you and your child would like to visit. Together, research cultural, historical and natural things to see and do there.
- **Make community connections.** Help your child discover why your town is located where it is. Who first settled there? When and how did they arrive? How does your location affect what jobs people do there (agriculture, tourism, etc.)? How is your town connected to the rest of the world (by roads, airports, rivers, etc.)?
- **Make maps.** Have your child draw maps of the routes from your home to school, a store or a friend's house. When you travel to those places, follow the maps.



## Show the many purposes of reading

Your example is one of the best teachers around. So, to build your child's enthusiasm for reading, demonstrate the many things *you* gain from doing it. Let your child see you reading often. As you do, explain that you are:

- **Reading to learn.** "I am trying to figure out how to fix this leaky faucet. This article explains what to do."
- **Reading for enjoyment.** Show that reading is a fun activity that's not just for school or work.
- **Reading to pass time.** Bring something to read wherever you go. Any time you and your child have to wait, read aloud together, or share a nugget from a book or article you are reading that might interest your elementary schooler.

## Give your child's social skills room to develop

Sometimes, children need a sympathetic ear more than a solution. In the case of friendship issues, the best way to help is often to take a step back. If your child comes to you with a friend problem, listen closely. Say things like, "That sounds frustrating. What did you do next?" This says that your child can act to affect the outcome. Then give your child a chance to figure out a solution.

## Promote physical activity

Regular exercise helps children stay healthy and do better in school. But research shows that as early as age seven, children's physical activity levels start to decline. To help keep your child fit and learning well:

- **Play active games.**
- **Have contests.** See who can do the most jumping jacks in 30 seconds.
- **Climb stairs.** An average stair is 7.5 inches tall. How high can your child climb?



Source: I. Lounassalo and others, "Distinct trajectories of physical activity and related factors during the life course in the general population: a systematic review," *BMC Public Health*.

## Be clear about cheating

Elementary schoolers are often confused about cheating. They believe it is wrong, but they also think it might be OK in some situations. Make it clear to your child that:

- **Cheating** is *always* wrong.
- **Your love** doesn't depend on grades.
- **It is never OK** to cheat in order to help a friend. Role-play ways your child can say *no*.





## How can I help my child face challenges with confidence?

**Q:** My third grader's response to new challenges is to say "I can't" before even trying. This lack of self-confidence is new this year. What should I do?

**A:** Several factors may be combining to lower your elementary schooler's self-confidence. For example:

- **Your child may be afraid** of making mistakes. Adults tend to point out things kids do wrong more than things they do right. Fault-finding can lead children to doubt their abilities.
- **Your child may feel the need** to be perfect. Children who feel this way may give up rather than attempt to do a task they aren't sure they can do with 100 percent accuracy.
- **Your child may be suffering** from comparisons. Kids who feel they can't measure up—especially when adults compare them to others—often stop trying.
- **You may be "overdoing"** for your child. When parents do tasks kids can do for themselves, the kids get the message that they are not capable.

To provide a self-confidence boost, explain that everyone makes mistakes and they help us learn. Praise the things your child does well. Show that you believe your child is a capable person, and eventually your child will believe it.



## Are you fostering community spirit?

Your child is a member of many groups—your family, the school, the larger community. Are you promoting the attitudes and skills a responsible group member needs? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you talk** with your child about school and family rules and why they are important?
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you teach** your child that it is essential to honor commitments and promises?
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you volunteer** as a family to help others in your community?
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you model** fair play and sportsmanship when you play games or watch sporting events with your child?
- \_\_\_ **5. Do you make** it clear that the person responsible for

your child's behavior is your child?

### How well are you doing?

*More yes answers mean you are teaching your child how to work as part of a group. For each no, try that idea.*

"Alone we can do so little. Together we can do so much."

—Helen Keller

## Encourage positive behavior

A large part of discipline should happen *before* your child misbehaves. Experts agree that to motivate good behavior, it helps to:

- **Create a loving**, respectful relationship with your child.
- **Praise what your child** does right.
- **Prevent repeated misbehavior** by making changes. A child who is always cranky and slow in the morning, for example, may need an earlier bedtime.

## Support science success

Boosting your child's scientific know-how isn't complicated. Here are two easy ways to build science skills:

- 1. Use science tools** together. Measure things with rulers. Use the scale at the market to weigh produce. Consult a compass to find out what direction you are walking in.



- 2. Encourage questions** and look for answers. If your child asks, "What makes rain fall out of clouds?" say, "Let's find out!" Then help your student find the answer online or at the library.

Source: M.E. Ennes and others, "Children and Parents' Perceptions of Access to Science Tools at Home and Their Role in Science Self-efficacy," *Research in Science Education*, Springer.

## Model values in action

When it comes to values and attitudes, you are your child's role model. Show your child what these school success traits look like:

- **Honesty.** Tell your child the truth. Admit your mistakes.
- **Dependability.** Live up to commitments to your child and others.
- **Fairness.** Get all sides of a story before passing judgment.

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