

Helping Children Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School



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Beach Elementary School
Pascagoula, Mississippi

Start your student on the path to learning independence

Parents often want to know the best ways to help their children with schoolwork. One of the most important things you can do is to teach your child to become an independent learner.

Elementary schoolers are often assigned to solve problems and find and study facts. As they do this work, they practice their skills and reinforce their knowledge. To support your child's effort, first have him:

- 1. Try to answer** all the questions by himself. He should start with the ones he knows the answers to, and skip over any that give him problems.
- 2. Go back and think** again about the questions he couldn't answer the first time around.



Only after he does this should your child ask you for help. If he does, remember that your goal is not just for him to put down the right answer. You want him to learn how to get the right answer for himself.

So if your child asks you how to spell *constitution*, don't rattle off the spelling. Instead, ask, "Where could you find that?" Point him to a dictionary or his social studies packet. Demonstrating how to find information not only helps him learn facts now, it also prepares him to learn more in the future.



Set up a system of routines to help your child get organized for school

The responsibilities of school this year will be easier for your child—and your family—to manage when you establish some basic routines and habits.

Start the year off on the right foot with these strategies:

- **Prepare in advance.** Use time in the evening to help your child prepare for the next day. You can review school communications, help your child collect and organize materials she needs for school, and agree on outfits.
- **Create a morning checklist.** Doing the same things in the same order each morning makes it less likely that your child will forget a step.
- **Schedule daily study time.** Pick a time when your child will have the most energy and motivation to do schoolwork.
- **Help your child** use tools like calendars and reminder lists to make sure she has what she needs when and where she needs it.

Attendance is essential

Learning loss during the pandemic is a top concern for families and schools. Teachers will do everything possible this year to help students learn and master the skills they need. Your help ensuring your child's daily attendance is critical—whether learning is in person or online. Contact your child's teacher or the school counselor if you need help resolving attendance issues.

Read and talk about words

Reading aloud to your child exposes him to vocabulary he might not get otherwise. This helps strengthen his reading comprehension. When you read aloud:

- **Define unfamiliar words.** Can your child think of words with similar meanings?
- **Give examples** of how a word's meaning can change depending on how it is used. *Sign* can be a noun (*stop sign*) or a verb (*sign your name*).



Tap out sounds of science

Experiencing science with their senses can boost students' interest in it. Here's a teacher-recommended way to help your child *hear* some science:



- 1. Find a few long, flat surfaces** around your home—a wall, a railing, the floor. Ask your child to guess which material will conduct sound the best.
- 2. Have her put** her ear on one surface.
- 3. Tap a coin steadily** on the surface as you move farther away from your child.
- 4. Repeat** with the other surfaces.

Did you get farther apart on one surface than another before the tapping sound grew faint? Which one transmitted sound best?

Source: P. Barnes, "Low-Tech Scientific Exploration for Students at Home," Edutopia.



How can I make it easier for my child to make friends?

Q: My first grader is very shy and doesn't make friends easily. I want her to have school friends so she'll like school. How can I help her feel more comfortable doing that?

A: Some children have lots of social self-confidence. Others do not. Pandemic precautions may make approaching classmates seem more intimidating. While you can't change your child's personality, you can build her confidence when interacting with others.

To help your child practice social skills:

- **Rehearse things to say.** Say, "Let's pretend you're at recess. Arely and Emily are playing a game you'd like to join. What could you say?" At first, pretend to be your child and let her pretend to be another child. Then switch roles. If your child is learning virtually, role-play things she could say to classmates during an online break. "I like your unicorn shirt. Do you like ponies, too?"
- **Read about friends** together. Talk about what good friends do—and don't do. As your child thinks about what makes a good friend, she can start to look for someone in her class who seems to fit the bill.
- **Use her interests.** Does your child like art? Sports? Look for in-person or online activities, classes or teams that may be available in your area. Practicing skills she enjoys with kids who enjoy them too can make it easier to make friends. Success will give her confidence she can apply in school.



Are you instilling resilience in your child?

Some parents want to protect their children so they never have to experience difficulties or failure. But overcoming challenges teaches valuable lessons. Are you helping your child develop resilience? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

- 1. Do you discuss** the fact that unexpected things happen? Do you talk about positive ways to react when they do?
- 2. Do you allow** your child time to solve some problems himself before offering help?
- 3. Do you provide** perspective when your child is disappointed? "You didn't get an A, but you earned a higher grade than last time!"
- 4. Do you encourage** your child to think about what to do differently next time?
- 5. Do you model** resilience when things go wrong for you?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are helping your child cope with setbacks and move forward. For each no, try that idea.

"Challenges are what makes life interesting and overcoming them is what makes life meaningful."

—Joshua J. Marine

10 things to do together when you have 10 minutes

Engaging often in your child's education is important. But it doesn't always have to take a lot of time. In 10 minutes you can:

- 1. Listen** and respond when your child talks about school.
- 2. Help** your child study spelling or math facts.
- 3. Share** a favorite poem or song.
- 4. Look up** a word in the dictionary.
- 5. Talk** about the daily news.
- 6. Find** places in the news on a map.
- 7. Review** your child's assignments.
- 8. Practice** a tongue twister.
- 9. Observe** an animal or bird in nature.
- 10. Make up** a silly story.



Stick to a sleep schedule

Lack of sleep affects your child's ability to plan, solve problems, control mood and behavior, focus and pay attention, and retain information—all vital school skills.

Elementary students need nine to 12 hours of sleep each night to do their best. Now is the time to establish an evening routine that helps your child relax and get to sleep in time to get the rest needed to learn.

Source: "Healthy Sleep Habits: How Many Hours Does Your Child Need?" American Academy of Pediatrics.

Expect respectful behavior

It's true no matter what format classes take: Respectful behavior helps teachers teach and students learn. Talk with your child about the importance of:

- **Speaking politely**—raising a hand to be called on and listening to others.
- **Following directions**—paying attention, turning in work on time.
- **Accepting feedback** in a positive way.

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