

Helping Children Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

Shelby County School District

Special Services Center



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Practice skills that help students in the upper grades and beyond

In the upper grades of elementary school, students are learning and developing the skills that will help them handle more challenging content and the responsibility for learning it. To reinforce these skills at home, help your child learn to:

- **Manage time.** Recommend productive ways to use small amounts of time. In the 10 minutes before dinner is ready, your child could practice recalling multiplication facts. On the drive to basketball practice, your child could make a supply list for a project.
- **Stay organized.** Emphasize the importance of writing school assignments and events, such as Spirit Week, in a planner, and reviewing it every day. Suggest ways to organize school papers so your child can find them easily, then schedule a weekly school bag and study space tidy-up.
- **Take notes.** Your student can practice this while reading at home. Have your child identify and write down key words and information, then summarize the essential points in the chapter or passage.
- **Think ahead.** Help your child plan and schedule time to complete projects and study for tests. Start by having your child brainstorm lists of everything that will need to be completed. Then together, mark times on the calendar when your child will complete each task.



Exercise strengthens learning ability

Making sure your child gets plenty of daily exercise is important to support learning as well as health. Studies show that adding daily aerobic activities can improve children's impulse control, working memory and mental flexibility. These cognitive abilities all boost school performance.

- To raise your child's activity level:
- **Exercise together.** Bundle up and head to the park for a brisk walk on a Sunday afternoon. Or, pretend to be mountaineers and reach and climb on the stairs.
 - **Suggest active games** when your child's friends come to play, such as tag, jumping rope, Simon Says or Red Light, Green Light.
 - **Pause screen time.** Have your child take fitness breaks when watching TV or videos. How many sit-ups can your child do while an ad plays?
 - **Let your child see** that you also exercise daily to stay fit.

Source: T. Ishihara and others, "Baseline Cognitive Performance Moderates the Effects of Physical Activity on Executive Functions in Children," *Journal of Clinical Medicine*, MDPI.

Rally cooperation at home

To foster a willingness to cooperate in your child, try these strategies teachers use to keep a class full of students on task:

- **Add excitement** to ordinary tasks. Put on some music and clean up to the beat.
- **Use silent signals.** Flick the lights on an off to give a five-minute warning before bedtime.
- **Ask your child** to do meaningful tasks that benefit your family.

Make a game of research

Elementary schoolers may be comfortable with computers, but they still need help developing online research skills. Here's a family contest that can make it fun:



- **Choose a famous** person or event from history.
- **Brainstorm key words** together that could make searching for information about the person or event more effective.
- **Give everyone** 15 minutes to search online for interesting facts.
- **Share what you each learned** and vote on the fact that surprised, fascinated or intrigued family members the most.

Unlock geography's secrets

No subject is more "real-world relevant" than geography. To begin to orient your child in geography, talk about direction. Take a local map outside together. Use it to show your child which way is *north*, *south*, *east* and *west*, as well as *northeast*, *northwest*, *southeast* and *southwest*. Then, take turns describing where things in your town are in relation to other things. "The library is *southeast* of the fire station." "My school is *north* of my house."





How much help should I be giving with schoolwork?

Q: My child asks me so many questions whenever there's schoolwork to do at home. I'm worried that I help too much. Where should I draw the line?

A: Whether the topic is ancient Greece or the times tables, your child is not only learning facts, but is also learning *how* to learn. To promote both kinds of learning:

- **Make a rule** that your elementary schooler has to *try* every assignment question before asking you questions. Suggest starting with the easiest ones first to boost your child's confidence.
- **Let your child ask for help** when really stuck. Then, keep this goal in mind: Students don't simply need correct answers. They need to learn *how* to figure out what the answers should be.
- **Offer guidance** instead of solutions whenever possible. For example, if your child asks how to spell something, suggest getting out a dictionary. Show your child how to look words up.
- **Review your child's work** together. Don't let your student just hand it to you and walk away. Praise progress and correct work, then address trouble spots by asking questions. "Can you see anything in question four that needs to be fixed?"
- **Contact the teacher** to ask about other ways to support and encourage independent learning.



Are you staying in touch with the school?

Two-way communication between families and schools strengthens the teamwork that helps students succeed. Are you communicating in ways that support your child's learning? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

1. **Have you met** with your child's teacher at least once this year?
2. **Do you read** the information that the school sends home and ask questions if anything is unclear?
3. **Do you talk** with your child each day about school and what the class is doing?
4. **Do you ask** for the teacher's point of view if something your child says concerns you?
5. **Do you review** your child's schoolwork? If your student

is struggling, do you ask the teacher how to help?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are working with the school to help your child learn. For each no, try that idea.

"In many ways, effective communication begins with mutual respect, communication that inspires, encourages others to do their best."
—Zig Ziglar

Clowning isn't really funny

Constantly disrupting class with jokes, silliness and body sounds can negatively affect students' learning and relationships with classmates. If your child is clowning around:

- **Look for the reason.** Sometimes kids want attention or to impress other kids. Or, they may want to cover up academic shortcomings.
- **Talk with the teacher** about what may help. A child who needs help settling down after recess might be assigned to hand out worksheets, for example.
- **Talk with your child** about when it's OK to be silly and when being funny is actually being disrespectful.

Source: L.A. Barnett, "The Education of Playful Boys: Class Clowns in the Classroom," *Frontiers in Psychology*, Frontiers.

Family meals feed success

Research shows that eating meals with family does more than help children learn healthy eating habits. It can also relieve stress and help prevent mental disorders, and build communication skills.

To maximize results, turn off distracting digital devices. Include your child in mealtime conversation and avoid arguing or criticizing. It's OK to be flexible about which meals to enjoy together, but try to gather around the table at least a few times a week.



Source: E.J. Curran, "Science-Based Benefits of Family Mealtime," *Parents*.

Offer a daily morale boost

Children who succeed in school believe in themselves. They know their families believe in them, too. Each day, praise at least one thing your child has done well. Talk about what your elementary schooler did to achieve a positive outcome. And try to forget at least one of your child's mistakes.

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