

Helping Children Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School



December 2023

St. Anthony's School
Mrs. Maravillas, Principal

Help your elementary schooler prepare to do well on tests

"We will have a test on this next week." When teachers announce a test several days in advance, they expect students to use the time to prepare for it. But how should your child get ready?

Help your elementary schooler:

- **Clarify what the test** will cover. If your child is unsure about the topics that will be on the test, suggest asking the teacher. Your child can also ask about the format (fill in the blanks, multiple choice, short answer, etc.).
- **Create a study plan.** Studying works best when it's done repeatedly in short sessions spread out over time. Help your child block out study time on a calendar.
- **Practice recalling the material.** Your child could work with flash cards or think of questions the teacher might ask and then answer them. You could quiz each other on the material.
- **Arrive at school on time every day.** Students who are absent or arrive late will not get the benefit of in-class review sessions. On test day, arriving on time will help your child stay relaxed.
- **Keep up healthy habits.** In addition to studying, your child needs enough rest and nutrition to perform well on tests. Maintaining a regular bedtime and making sure your child eats breakfast will help.



Conduct a daily review

Reviewing your child's schoolwork and talking about it together every day is important in every grade. It sends the message that learning is important. When you review:

- **Ask questions.** Which work did your child most enjoy doing? Was it easy or challenging?
- **Praise effort.** Compliment work that is neat, complete and accurate.

Help your child be a giver

Children love *receiving* gifts. If your family celebrates a holiday with gifts, help your child experience the pleasure that also comes from *giving* them. Explain that the most meaningful gifts are made with love. Your child could:

- **Make and decorate a list,** such as "My 10 Favorite Things about Grandpa."
- **Bake cookies** and deliver them to someone who may not receive many homemade gifts.
- **Create a calendar** for 2024, including artwork geared to the seasons.



Let your child practice making choices

Making lots of little decisions now will ensure your child has the skills to make more important ones later, about school and life. To help:

- **Show that you trust** your child with decisions. Regularly offer choices you believe your child can handle. Set guidelines, then accept your child's decision.
- **Ask questions.** If your child has a big project due soon and wants to go to a friend's house, look at a calendar together. Ask, "Do you have enough free nights left to finish your work?" "Would you have more fun together if your project were already finished?"
- **Ask if your child** wants help deciding before giving advice. If not, help your child learn from the consequences of a poor choice.
- **Do activities together** that involve decision-making. Play board games, discuss book characters' choices, and hold friendly family debates.

Sources: W. Stixrud, Ph.D. and N. Johnson, "Teach Your Kids How to Make Their Own Decisions," *Our Children*, National PTA; "Teaching Youth Decision-Making Skills through Activities," Rachel's Challenge.

Check up on attendance

How has your child's attendance been so far this year? If you are unsure, contact the school to find out. Students who miss too much school are at risk academically. That's because:



- **Absences add up** to lost learning.
- **Missing school** becomes a habit.
- **Students who are** frequently absent in the early grades are less likely to do well in middle and high school.

It's not too late to get your student back on track for a strong year—and school career.



Should I get my child tested for reading disorders?

Q: My second grader has been having trouble reading, but I haven't been too worried. Yesterday, the teacher called to suggest some testing. I don't want my child to be labeled as having learning issues. Will my student outgrow reading problems if we just wait?

A: The teacher has your child's best interests at heart. The earlier reading issues are addressed, the better. Second grade is an important year. By third and fourth grade, schools expect that instead of *learning to read*, students can shift to *reading to learn*. Figuring out what may be causing difficulties now will help your child be ready.

Research shows most struggling readers can make significant gains if they get effective help early enough. The testing will help identify if your child has specific learning challenges. If they are found, the school can design a program to address them and help your student read better.

The longer you wait, the harder it will be for your elementary schooler to master reading and the longer it will take. By then, your child may have missed important learning in subjects like math, science and social studies.

The goal of these tests is to help your child. The results will help you and the school work together to meet your child's needs.



Are you modeling listening skills?

Attentive listening helps students get the most from their class time. Are you showing your child how to be a good listener? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

1. **Do you concentrate** on listening when your child is talking? If you're busy, do you suggest a time when you can give your full attention?
2. **Do you listen** patiently? It can take children time to find the words they want to say.
3. **Do you hear** your child out without interrupting? Do you ask your child not to interrupt you?
4. **Do you "listen"** to your child's body language and behavior?

5. **Do you resist** jumping in with answers when your child is thinking something through?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are demonstrating attentive listening for your child. For each no, try that idea.

"Children will listen to you after they feel listened to."

—Jane Nelsen

Ask for a reading summary

Summarizing boosts reading comprehension. After your child has finished reading, say you'd like to know what the material was about and what your child learned. Ask your student to write down the main points.

Suggest that your child think about the answers to questions like *Who, What, When, Where, Why* and *How*. It's OK if your child has to reread the material to answer them—more carefully this time. Over time, kids get the knack of summarizing—and a better understanding of what they read.

Grow learning motivation

Having a desire to learn makes a big difference to your child's success in school. To encourage inner motivation:

- **Say often** that you know your child has what it takes to achieve in school.
- **Encourage curiosity.** Welcome questions and look together for answers.
- **Phrase corrections** in a positive way. "You spelled everything right except these two words. I bet you can learn them, too."
- **Extend learning.** Build on school lessons by visiting educational places. Help your child do a science experiment or plant a windowsill garden.



Use report cards to review progress and plan ahead

A report card can't tell you everything about how your elementary schooler is doing, but the teachers spend a lot of time making sure that it shows a snapshot of where your student is now. Read report cards carefully and calmly discuss progress, accomplishments and goals for improvement with your child. If you or your child have any questions about a report card, contact the teacher.

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P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474

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