

Helping Children Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

Student Support Services

St Clair County Board of Education



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Ask questions that help your child practice a variety of thinking skills

In order to master school subjects, students need to be able to think about the material in lots of different ways—sometimes at the same time. When you talk with your child about what he's learning, ask questions that encourage him to:



- **Recall** specific facts. "When did our state become a state?" or "How many continents are there?" Words that will help with this include *who*, *when*, *what*, *where* and even *list*.
- **Understand**. Ask your child to describe or explain what he knows about a topic. "Can you explain what happens in the water cycle?"
- **Apply** knowledge. Ask questions that let your child use what he's learned to think about new situations or predict outcomes. "If water evaporates in the sun, what do you think would happen to it in the oven?"
- **Analyze**. Talk about how things are organized. Many things can be divided into groups, for example. Have your child compare and contrast groups of things. "How are fish and humans different? How are they alike?"
- **Evaluate**. Ask your child to draw his own conclusions. "What do you think was most important to the American colonists? Why?"
- **Create**. Ask your child to design his own way to solve a problem. Use words such as *invent* and *what if*.

Source: "Revised Bloom's Taxonomy—Question Starters," College of Education, Illinois State University.



Emphasize the power of reading

Reading is a powerful skill. Understanding its many uses and connections to things in her life and in the world will help your child appreciate its value. Teach your child that reading gives her the power to:

- **Obtain needed information.** Have your child read a recipe to you as you cook. Read a manual aloud that explains how to put something together. Challenge her to read to find answers to questions, such as "How can I get a grass stain out of your shirt?"
- **Communicate.** Talk about the ways people use reading and writing to communicate with others—
- through signs, mail, email, texts and notes. Suggest that your child exchange letters with a friend. Have her make posters to promote a cause she cares about.
- **Enjoy herself.** Help your child plan a relaxing end-of-the-day reading routine. Then help her find books that will give her a good laugh or take her on an exciting adventure.

Make every minute count

Time management skills become more essential as students get older and have more homework. Help your child:

- **Stick to a regular study time** (but don't let schoolwork be the last thing he does before bed).
- **Prioritize assignments.** What's due first? Is he more efficient when he starts with the easiest or the toughest task?

Play Where in the World?

To have some fun with maps and make geography relevant for your child:



- **Look for labels** on things around your home to see where they were made. Cereal from Michigan? TV from Taiwan? Together, find the places on a map.
- **Locate the places** where her ancestors came from on the map. If possible, help your child learn about the routes family members traveled to get here. Where do relatives live now? Again, check the map.

Recommit to attendance

If your child misses just one day a week of school, he'll miss more than two years of class time before he graduates! Absent students also miss things they often can't make up, like discussions and demonstrations. To keep your child from missing out:



- **Track** your child's absences.
- **Take** appropriate health precautions to make sure your child stays well.
- **Don't let your child** miss school to catch up on sleep.
- **Seek help** for family struggles that make attendance a challenge. Ask the school counselor about resources.



Perfectionism is hurting my child. What should I do?

Q: When my fourth grader makes a mistake, you'd think the world was ending. She's really very capable, but I can't make her see that. How can I help her stop being so hard on herself?

A: Many children fear mistakes. They see each mistake as proof that they're not good enough. Not only does this damage their self-esteem, it takes away their courage to try new things.

To address your child's perfectionism:

- **Make it clear that no one is perfect**, and you don't expect her to be. Pay more attention to what your child does right than what she does wrong, and avoid comparing her to anyone else.
- **Establish a family ritual** that whenever family members give themselves a put-down which focuses on a weakness, they must give themselves two "put-ups" which focus on their strengths.
- **Talk about mistakes.** Begin by mentioning a mistake you made. Describe what you did, how you felt, and how others reacted. Kids need to learn that most people don't take much notice of someone else's errors.
- **Expand the discussion** to include exploring solutions: "Here's what I can do so that I don't make this same mistake again" Emphasize that mistakes are a normal and correctable part of the learning process.



Are you raising a self-reliant learner?

Every child asks for help with schoolwork once in a while. But if your child asks every day, he may need to work on self-reliance. Are you encouraging your child try to solve problems independently? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

- ___ **1. Do you say** that you think your child can figure things out if he tries?
- ___ **2. Do you ask** questions rather than offering easy answers? "What did you learn about that in class?"
- ___ **3. Do you help** him think about ways to break problems down into smaller pieces?
- ___ **4. Do you remind** your child of times he has stuck with a problem and solved it?
- ___ **5. Do you congratulate** your child when he solves a

problem, even if it's not the way you would have done it?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are helping your child become an independent learner. For each no, try that idea.

"Start where you are. Use what you have. Do what you can."

—Arthur Ashe

Resolve to make the most of family reading time

Your child is more likely to see himself as a reader if everyone around him is reading, too. To make this a great year for family reading, resolve to:

- **Review favorite** books or stories from the past year. Have everyone choose a few favorites and talk about what they liked about them.
- **Up your game.** How much time does your family spend reading together? Could you add another hour each week?
- **Branch out.** In addition to books, your family can read plays, poetry, newspapers, cookbooks, catalogs and circulars—anything and everything!



Keep screens in their place

Recreational screen media may have a place in your child's life, but it shouldn't be in her bedroom. Research shows that kids with screen devices in their rooms spend less time reading, do less well in school and are more likely to be obese. Limit recreational screen use to areas where you can supervise.

Source: D. Gentile and others, "Bedroom media: One risk factor for development," *Developmental Psychology*.

Hit restart on goal-setting

If your child set some goals earlier in the school year but didn't really follow through, January is the perfect time to start again. To make this the year your child meets her goals, encourage her to:

- **Talk about her goals** with others. This builds commitment.
- **Plan in detail** what she'll do to meet her goals. Help her choose realistic steps.
- **Cheer herself on!** Positive self-talk is a proven motivator.

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