

Helping Children Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

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Improve conversations with your child about the school day

Talking with your child about school every day shows her that you think her education is important. And discussing what she's learning and doing is a great way for you to get a sense of her strengths and areas she might need help with.

But if all you hear when you ask your child how school is going is "fine," try these conversation strategies:

- **Talk about your own day first.** Give your child the kinds of details you'd like to hear from her. For example: "I did a lot of different things today. I had a meeting with my boss in the morning. I took Grandma to her doctor's appointment this afternoon. Afterward, we stopped at the store to pick up some milk and vegetables." Then ask her to tell you about her day.
- **Ask specific, open-ended questions.** "Is your schoolwork too hard, too easy or just right?" "What did you do today in class that made you feel good?" "What was the funniest thing that happened today?"
- **Look over your child's schoolwork.** Did the teacher return a worksheet or drawing? Make several observations about what you see—what you remember liking about the subject, what it reminds you of, etc. Then say, "Tell me about what you learned about this."



Respond to cheating by addressing the reasons why it happens

When elementary schoolers cheat in school, understanding the reasons why is an essential part of stopping the behavior. Here are four common reasons:

1. **They are afraid** of what their parents will do if they earn a poor grade. Make it clear that a low grade would not be the end of your love for your child. Say that you would be more concerned about the situation than angry.
2. **They have high** expectations for their own academic achievement. Remind your child that a grade on a test or assignment doesn't reflect a person's worth or intelligence.
3. **They think cheating** is no big deal. For many children, the line between right and wrong is still a bit blurry. Tell your child that cheating is *always* wrong. Cheaters rob themselves of learning, and they are unfair to honest students.
4. **They were asked to.** Help your child role-play turning down a request to cheat.

Source: A. Morin, "How to Discipline Your Child for Cheating in School," Verywell Family.

Celebrate accomplishments

He did it! Your child raised his math grade this quarter. Or he finally finished reading a book series. The good feelings that come with reaching a challenging goal are great motivators. To encourage them, help your child celebrate his hard work and accomplishment. Post a picture of him with his report card or book in a place of honor, or serve a victory dinner of his favorite foods.

Strengthen study skills

Study skills are increasingly vital as students reach upper grades. Help your child practice:

- **Taking notes.** When she reads at home, have your child write down key words, facts and main points.
- **Planning study time.** Have her make a to-do list before a test: Review, draw diagrams, solve sample problems, etc. Then help her schedule time for each task.



Highlight character heroes

You are your child's primary role model. But you don't have to be the only one! Draw on other people to provide examples of positive traits and actions. Point to:



- **Relatives, friends** or celebrities who show respect, responsibility, honesty or other desirable behavior.
- **Your heroes.** Talk with your child about people such as John Lewis, Lin-Manuel Miranda, Corrie ten Boom and John Glenn and why you admire them.

Explain to your child that heroes aren't always famous. They can be familiar people like a grandmother who worked to put a child through college. Encourage your child to find or draw pictures of his heroes.



How can I help my child learn to be more patient?

Q: My son wants everything now. He complains loudly when he has to wait. His teacher says his impatience is becoming a problem in class. What can I do about this?

A: It takes patience to wait for a turn to speak, to read all the way to the end of a long book, or to understand something that isn't immediately clear. Helping your child develop more patience will make learning easier for him—and his classmates.

To strengthen patience:

- **Acknowledge the challenge.** Let your child know you understand how hard it can be to wait for something. Then explain that everyone has to learn patience, and that you will help him with this skill.
- **Set an example.** When you're stuck in traffic, for example, stay calm. Say something like, "Let's use this waiting time to make up a story."
- **Provide practice.** When your child asks for something, say, "In a minute." Enjoy activities together that require patience, such as putting together puzzles and baking.
- **Share strategies to use** while waiting, such as observing things around you and reading to pass the time until another activity.
- **Notice and praise success.** "You waited patiently while I listened to your brother. Now I am going to listen carefully to you."



Is your child spending leisure time wisely?

All work and no play is a dull way to live. But all play and no work leaves your child unprepared for life. Are you helping your child use time out of school in productive ways? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

1. **Do you set** limits on recreational screen time?
2. **Do you make** reading together a regular family activity?
3. **Do you ensure** that your child takes part in daily physical activity?
4. **Do you help** your child find out more about topics that interest her?
5. **Do you ask** your child to help you with tasks you are doing around your home?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are encouraging your child to spend free time in positive ways. For each no, try that idea.

"The bad news is time flies. The good news is you're the pilot."
—Michael Altschuler

Promote persistence when the going gets tough

Schoolwork can be challenging, and there may be times your child will feel like giving up. To encourage her to persevere:

1. **Discuss past successes.** Has she overcome obstacles like this before? How did she do it?
2. **Set a realistic short-term goal.** Learning the two times table is a key step toward mastering multiplication.
3. **Recognize improvement.** Trying hard and learning from mistakes are major accomplishments!

Use family meetings to teach leadership skills

Leadership develops important school skills like communication and problem-solving. But kids need to learn that good leaders aren't bossy—they make people *want* to work together. Family meetings are a great way to help your child consider other people's points of view as you work toward shared goals. Let your child take a turn chairing the meetings and making sure everyone gets a chance to be heard.



Make responsibility easier

Elementary students are still learning how to be responsible. To help your child understand and carry out responsibilities:

- **Use checklists.** Write down what your child is expected to do: chores, self-care responsibilities, tasks for school. Let him check items off as he completes them.
- **Designate places** where he should store his things when he's not using them.
- **Show him how** to track assignments and commitments on his own calendar.

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