

# Helping Children Learn<sup>®</sup>

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

Sierra Charter School



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## Communicate directions, discipline with four effective strategies

Communication between you and your child supports learning. For example, having daily conversations about what your child is doing and thinking in class shows her that you care about her and that her education is a priority.



But when it comes to telling children what to do, many parents find themselves talking on and on—while their children listen less and less. When communicating about tasks, rules and discipline, experts recommend that parents:

- 1. Make infrequent requests.** As much as possible, help your child develop routines for doing things like schoolwork and chores.
- 2. Speak at a normal volume.** Your child will not hear you any more clearly if you yell. In fact, she is more likely to tune you out.
- 3. Keep it short.** When you give directions, limit the number of words you use. Instead of saying, "Alice, you know there's no TV until your work is done. I need you to finish your math. And you really should take a shower" try, "It's time for math. Then a shower—and then you can have TV."
- 4. Focus on the positive.** Roughly 85 percent your discipline should encourage the behavior you want to see. That leaves just 15 percent of the time for correcting negative behavior.



## Plan ways to make reading a fun and frequent summer activity

Maintaining your child's reading skills and habits over the summer is an important way to make sure he will be prepared for the next school year. To avoid a reading setback this summer:

- **Discuss your child's** interests. Is there something he'd like to learn about when he has more time over break? Maybe he wants to know how power plants work, or how to identify snakes.
- **Pair fiction and nonfiction.** If your child reads a story about knights, he might enjoy reading an article about the sport of jousting as it's practiced today.
- **Be creative** about reading materials. All kinds of reading—joke books, hobby magazines, graphic novels, cookbooks—can help your child practice reading skills.
- **Look for reading contests** locally and online that your child can participate in. Ask a librarian for a list.

Source: "Summer Reading," Reading Rockets, [nswc.com/summerreading](http://nswc.com/summerreading).

## Issue a writing challenge

Books all start in the same way—inside a writer's head. Raise this idea with your child. Say, "I bet you could write a book! You'd have the whole summer to do it." To get her thinking, have her pretend to be different characters. Then interview her. "What do you look like? What do you like to do?" Have her set aside regular writing time. Later she can design a cover and "publish" her book by making copies for friends.



## Respectful students make it easier to teach and learn

In today's society, children see examples of disrespect everywhere. So it's vital to instill the importance of behaving respectfully in your child. To promote respect:

- **Name it** when you see others showing it.
- **Praise it** when your child shows it.
- **Correct** disrespect privately. "Remember what we said about interrupting?"
- **Pass compliments** along. If someone tells you your child was polite, let him know how proud you are of his behavior.

## Head outdoors for math

Grab some chalk and enjoy some math activities on the sidewalk with your child!

- **Puddle watch.** After a rain, have your child trace around two puddles, one in the sun and one in the shade. Every hour, have her chart how much each puddle has changed and compare the rate of change.
- **Add it up.** Draw a large three by three grid. In each square, write a number from one to nine. Take turns tossing two stones into the grid and adding the two numbers. Write the answers down. After five rounds, who has the highest score?





## Can anxiety about middle school cause bad behavior?

**Q:** My 11-year-old's behavior has been fine until this spring. Now he's acting out in class and with the family. I know he's anxious about going to middle school next fall. Could that be why? What can I do?

**A:** Anxious children tend to act out with the people they feel the closest to—usually parents and teachers.

The middle school transition can indeed bring out anxiety. Your child may have many worries: Will he be able to handle the work? See his friends? Will the virus still be changing how school works? If these fears are behind your child's behavior change, getting them out in the open will be a first step in dealing with them. Here's how:

- **Start the conversation.** See if you can get him to express his fears out loud. A low-key approach usually works best. You might say, "I bet you're wondering about who will be in your classes next year."
- **Discuss his concerns** with his teacher. Perhaps the teacher can lead a few class discussions about life in middle school. She may also be able to suggest a middle schooler your child could talk to about what it's like.
- **Remind him that he has coped** with the past year's changes, and you will help him cope next year. Then say that being worried is not an excuse to misbehave. He still needs to follow the school and family rules.



## Are you connecting history to life?

One of the best ways to ignite children's interest in learning history is to make them feel connected to it. Sharing family information can do that. Are you teaching your child how she fits into history? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you show** your child old family photos and talk about the people in them?
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you look** at maps with your child to find the countries her ancestors came from and the routes they traveled?
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you encourage** your child to ask older relatives questions about their lives?
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you ask** your child to help you make scrapbooks to preserve family history?
- \_\_\_ **5. Do you cook** family recipes with your child?

### How well are you doing?

*More yes answers mean you are giving your child roots in family history. For each no, try that idea.*

"... the attraction of history is in our human nature. What makes us tick? Why do we do what we do? How much is luck the deciding factor?"  
—David McCullough

## Don't let up on attendance

Studies show that students who miss just 10 percent of the school year in the early grades are still behind their peers when they reach high school. That's one reason attendance is critical right through the last day of school.

Teachers are still teaching new content. By taking part in class every day, your child won't miss anything. And she'll learn to be dependable—a quality that will help her throughout her school career.

Source: A. Ansari, R.C. Pianta, "School absenteeism in the first decade of education and outcomes in adolescence," *Journal of School Psychology*, Elsevier.

## Reflect on the year's course

When people think of the 2020-2021 school year, many will remember its challenges. But don't lose sight of your child's successes! Sit down together and talk about:

- **Things that went well.** Did he persist despite difficulties? What new skills did he build? Celebrate his accomplishments!
- **Learning goals** for the summer. Ask the teacher what your child should work on to start the next year strong.

## Plan for family adventure

To prevent boredom and promote learning over the summer, plan some local family field trips. Consider outdoor sites such as:

- **A garden center** or nursery. Observe workers planting, watering and pruning. Learn about natural pest controls, such as ladybugs and praying mantises.
- **An airport.** See if your child can spot the control tower or planes taking off and landing.
- **A historic battlefield.** Before you go, read about the battle together.
- **A state or national park.** Bring a nature guide and maybe some binoculars and check out the hiking trails.



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