

Elementary School Parents[®] *make the difference!*

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Teach your child how to take responsibility for assignments

He shows you the paper he's planning to hand in tomorrow. It's filled with misspelled words and unclear writing. What is your role here? Do you let your child take responsibility for the paper and turn it in as is? Or do you clean it up before it goes to the teacher?

Here are some dos and don'ts on how you can help with writing assignments. Do:

- **Help your child brainstorm** about what to write.
- **Encourage your child** to write a rough draft.
- **Answer questions** about how to spell words. Write them down so he can copy them, or help him sound them out.
- **Let your child find errors.** Say, "I see a place in the first three lines where a sentence should end. Can you find it and fix it?"

- **Praise your child** for using interesting words. Say, "I love that you say the snow *creaked* under his shoes."
- **Encourage your child** to write a neat final copy.

Here's what not to do:

- **Don't choose a topic** for your child.
- **Don't do all of the proofreading** for your child.
- **Don't write or type** your child's paper, no matter how messy you may think it is.
- **Don't be afraid** to tell your child there are some things you can't help with. Say, "Josh, I don't think Ms. Jones wants to see what I think about this subject. She wants to know what *you* think."

Source: Harvey S. Wiener, *Any Child Can Write*, ISBN: 0-195-15316-2 (Oxford University Press, 1-800-445-9714, www.oup.com/us).

Make school attendance a major priority



With school vacation coming up, you may be planning to take your child out of school for an

extra day or two. You'll just ask the teacher for advance homework. Missing a few days won't really matter, will it?

Actually, those few days of absence can matter a lot. Think about the things your child may be missing that can't be made up with homework.

The class discussion about the book they are reading can't be captured in homework. Neither can the science demonstration or the group project for history. In some subjects, like math, missing even a few days is a problem because learning builds on what students already know.

Extra homework will not make up for the things your child misses when she's out of school. So instead of taking your child out of school, make an extra effort to improve her attendance this month.

Source: Jennifer Railsback, "Increasing Attendance: Strategies from Research and Practice" (Northwest Regional Education Laboratory, www.nwrel.org/request/2004june/warm.html).

Open the lines of communication by reading children's books



Some children seem to want to talk about any problem they face.

Others clam up in the face of trouble.

That's where a good children's book can really help open up communication. If you and your child read a book with a situation like the one your child is facing, it can often make it easier for you to talk with your child. Here's why:

- **Stories help children see** others who are facing the same issue. That helps reassure them that they are not alone. Often, just seeing that someone else has faced the same issue can give a child confidence.
- **Books also help children see** how the person in the story felt, what she said, and what she did. That opens the door for a talk between you and your child. You can talk

about how the character felt and then ask, "Did you ever have those feelings?"

- **Stories also encourage** your child to think about how the character solved the problem in the story. Did it work? What could the character have done differently?

A children's librarian can help you find books about situations your child may be facing. You can ask your child's teacher for recommendations, too.

Source: Cheryl Coon, "Children's Books: A Secret Ally for Parents and Teachers," *Our Children Magazine* (National PTA, 1-800-307-4782, www.pta.org).

"The habits we form from childhood make no small difference, but rather they make all the difference."

—Aristotle

Help your child learn to admit mistakes and make amends



What are the three hardest words to say? They may be, "I was wrong."

But helping children learn to own up to the

things they have done wrong is a way to help them develop into mature adults. Here are some tips:

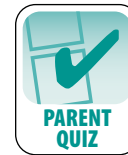
- **Think about why** your child might not admit she's wrong. Is she afraid to tell the truth? Does she want to blame someone else?
- **Think about how** you can change your behavior if your child is afraid of your reaction. Stay calm even if you have to give yourself a "time out" before dealing with the situation.

- **Help her put herself** in someone else's shoes. "How do you think your sister felt when you took her doll away?" This is called *empathy*, and it is a behavior kids have to work to develop.

- **Help your child think** about a way to make amends. If she sent a mean email about someone in her class, she needs to send another one saying she made the story up.
- **Remember that apologies** don't mean a lot if your child's behavior doesn't change.

Source: Naomi Drew, *The Kids' Guide to Working Out Conflicts*, ISBN: 1-575-42150-X (Free Spirit Publishing, 1-800-735-7323, www.freespirit.com).

Are you helping your child read with fluency?



Studies show that kids who read aloud with *fluency* are most likely to have a greater understanding of what they've read. Your child reads with fluency if he reads aloud smoothly and with expression.

Are you helping your child improve his reading fluency? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

- ___ **1. Do you set aside time** for your child to read to you in addition to the time you spend reading to him?
- ___ **2. Do you let your child pick** the books he wants to read? Even if you think it's too easy, nothing succeeds like success.
- ___ **3. Do you try not to interrupt** if he pronounces a word incorrectly?
- ___ **4. If your child asks for help** pronouncing a word, do you give it, then let him keep reading?
- ___ **5. Do you talk about a book** after your child is finished reading? Reading is for fun and for enjoyment.

How well are you doing?

Each *yes* means you're helping your child learn to read aloud. For each *no* answer, try those ideas.

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Reinforce six important reading skills with some colored cereal



Here's a fun way to reinforce six important reading skills. These skills will help your child understand and remember more of what she reads following a reading assignment.

You'll need a cup of colored cereal (or candy) in six colors. Have your child close her eyes and pick a piece of cereal. For each color, have her do one of the following tasks:

1. **Blue**—tell a word or words that are important in the reading.
2. **Green**—ask a question about what she just read. Then look for the answer.

3. **Orange**—restate what she just read in her own words.
4. **Yellow**—make a prediction. What does she think will come next?
5. **Brown**—draw a picture or sketch of something important in the reading.
6. **Red**—relate something she read to something in her own life.

Your child will enjoy drawing out different colors. She may not even notice that she's actually practicing her reading skills!

Source: Barbara R. Blackburn, *Classroom Instruction from A to Z*, ISBN: 9781-5966-7038-9 (Eye on Education, 1-888-299-5350, www.eyeoneducation.com).

Q: My son is in second grade. I know he's having trouble reading, but I haven't been too worried about it. Yesterday, his teacher called. She wants to do some extra testing. I don't want my son to be identified as a problem. Won't he grow out of these reading problems if we just wait?

Questions & Answers

A: The teacher has your son's best interests at heart. She knows that the earlier you start addressing your son's reading problems, the better.

Second grade is an important year. By next year, schools expect that instead of helping children learn to read, they can start reading to learn. Action this year is critical.

If you talk to parents who did wait for a child to "grow out of" his reading problems, you hear the same story. They wish they had acted sooner.

The National Institutes of Health research shows that 95 percent of poor readers can be brought up to grade level if they get effective help early enough. The testing your son's teacher wants to do will help her identify his specific learning problems. That way, the school can design a program to help him make progress.

The longer you wait, the harder it will be. By then, your son may have missed important learning in other subjects like math, science and social studies.

So be grateful the teacher has taken such an interest in your son. Work with her to get your son the testing. Then together, you can help your son make progress.

—Kristen Amundson,
The Parent Institute

Regular exercise is connected to school success for children



Research shows that children's physical fitness leads to many benefits. Regular activity is linked to higher self-esteem and attentiveness in school. It also lowers the chance of health problems such as type 2 diabetes. To motivate your child to get—and stay—active:

- **Set the tone.** Instead of saying, "It's time to exercise," plan an activity your child will like. If she loves basketball, for example, have her meet some friends at the court to play.
- **Limit screen time.** When your child watches TV or plays video games, encourage her to take active breaks. Remember that TV, computer and video game use should not exceed two hours a day.
- **Offer suggestions.** When your child has a friend over, play games that involve movement, such as tag, soccer and jumping rope.

Indoors, try games such as "Simon Says" and "Red Light, Green Light."

- **Plan family outings.** Perhaps you have a tradition of going for a walk on Sunday afternoons. Or maybe you'd like to do something new, such as swimming at an indoor pool or snowshoeing. Whatever activity you choose, get your family moving together.
- **Be creative.** You can find lots of ways to sneak in exercise. During chore time, play music or race to finish a job. While doing errands, park away from a store and walk. Or stop at a playground on the way home.
- **Set an example.** You don't have to hit the gym every day, but if your child sees you staying fit (stretching, biking, walking with a neighbor, enjoying a sport, etc.), you'll be a good role model.

Source: "Motivating Kids to Get Fit," PBS Parents, www.pbs.org/parents/special/article-motivatetomove.html.

It Matters: Study Skills

Tests don't have to be stressful for your child



Parents can ease the natural stress that may occur before and after testing. You can help your child prevent test

anxiety if you:

- **Build self-esteem.** The goal is for your child to begin tests with confidence, not fear of failure. So give him opportunities for success in many other areas.
- **Communicate with teachers.** Stay up-to-date on your child's progress at school. If he needs extra help, the teacher can suggest at-home learning activities. Ask how you can help.
- **Build your child's vocabulary.** Talking, reading and word games help your child learn new words. You never know when one might pop up on a test.
- **Encourage preparation.** Plan several study sessions before the test. Provide a study spot where your child can concentrate.
- **Give test tips.** It's important to read instructions carefully. If something is confusing, ask the teacher for help. Don't get stuck on one question. Mark it, finish easier sections and then return to the trouble spot.
- **Don't pressure your child.** If he worries too much, his performance may suffer. Emphasize your unconditional love. When the test is returned, talk about it. What can he learn from it? Compliment his hard work.

Source: "Helping Your Child With Test-Taking—Helping Your Child Succeed in School," U.S. Department of Education, www.ed.gov/parents/academic/help/succeed/part9.html.

Prepare your child for demands of middle school studying now

Long before your child enters middle school, her teachers will start preparing her for its challenges. You can help at home by encouraging your child to:

- **Manage time.** In addition to having a regular homework time, your child might find short periods when she can be productive. While waiting in line, for example, she might study flash cards.
- **Get organized.** Different systems work for different kids. One common method is to use a folder for "finished work." Include whatever the teacher needs to see the next day. Also use an assignment notebook for planning new tasks.
- **Take notes.** Your child may not practice this skill at school, but she can try it at home while reading. Help her write down key words and information. Then

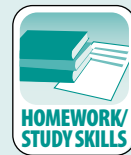


have her highlight essential points in her notes.

- **Plan ahead.** Don't wait until the last minute to study. Have her divide studying into smaller tasks—take notes, review and then do practice problems. Help her make a study schedule and stick to it.

Source: Linda Streen, "Study Skills for Middle School and Beyond," GreatSchools, www.greatschools.net/cgi-bin/showarticle/700/.

Use long-term projects to teach responsibility & planning skills



When your child is assigned a long-term project, your role as a "homework helper" changes. This is a great

opportunity to teach about responsibility and time management:

- **Discuss the goal.** If your child has to create an "All About Me" poster, ask your child questions to help with specifics. "What hobbies do you enjoy?" "What could you use to show them?"
- **Make a plan.** Big projects require many steps over several days.

Together, write each one down. For instance, "Buy poster board." "Take photos of you singing, drawing and playing soccer." "Glue photos on poster board." "Write captions."

- **Take action.** Collect necessary supplies and get to work. Make sure each step has a due date so your child has time to finish. Build in some "wiggle room" just in case.

Source: Drew and Cynthia Johnson, *Homework Heroes*, ISBN: 0-7432-2258-x (Simon & Schuster Inc., 1-800-943-9831, www.simonsays.com).