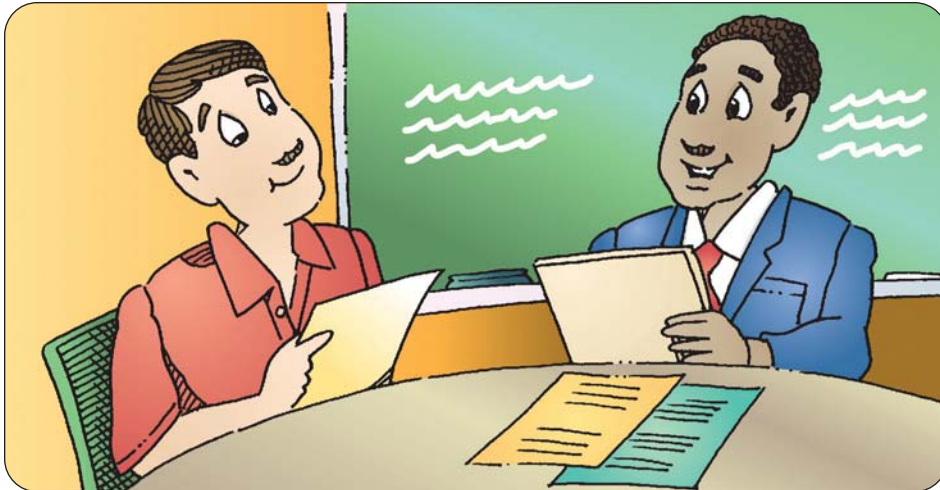


# Elementary School Parents<sup>®</sup>

Central Alberta Regional Consortium  
c/o River Glen School, Red Deer, AB

March 2008  
Vol. 19, No. 7

*make the difference!*



## Follow five steps for successful parent-teacher conferences

**M**any schools schedule a spring parent-teacher conference. Sometimes teachers ask for a conference if they have a concern about a child's progress. These one-on-one meetings can be a great way to find out how your child is doing. But you'll get more out of the conference if you do some preparation.

Here are five steps you can take to maximize your time with the teacher:

- 1. Communicate beforehand.** If you haven't seen the teacher since Parents' Night, send a brief email or note to give her an update on how you think school is going for your child.
- 2. Talk to your child first.** In some schools, children take part in conferences. If this is not the practice at your school, you should still talk with your child beforehand. Ask

him how he thinks he's doing. What does he think the teacher will tell you? Does he have any questions he'd like answered?

- 3. Write things down.** Jot down notes on what your child says so you can bring them up during the conference. Write down any questions you have. Your notes will help you remember important points.
- 4. Make a plan.** If the teacher raises concerns, don't leave without a written plan. What steps should you take to address the problem?
- 5. Stay in touch.** If you are working on a particular issue, meet again in a few weeks. That way, you can both see how your plan is working.

Source: Thomas Crumpler and others, *Interactive Assessment: Teachers, Parents and Students as Partners*, ISBN: 1-929-02449-5 (Christopher-Gordon Publishers, 1-800-934-8322, [www.christopher-gordon.com](http://www.christopher-gordon.com)).

## Use 'teachable moments' to explain respect



Teaching your child respectful behavior isn't like teaching her how to ride a bike. You can't have

her practice once or twice and expect the lesson to sink in.

Instead, look for moments when good—or bad—behavior is on display. By talking about what you see, your child will learn a powerful lesson. Talk about respect as you:

- **Watch a sporting event.** If a baseball manager disagrees with an umpire's call, what does he do? If he runs onto the field screaming, ask your child, "What would happen if you did that to your teacher? What do you think would happen if I acted like that at work?"
- **Watch television.** Many TV shows today confuse *humor* with *disrespect*. If you hear a put-down or disrespectful comment on a show, talk about it with your child. What are more respectful ways to talk with people?

Source: Margaret Sagarese and Charlene Giannetti, "Character Education Begins at Home," *OurChildren Magazine*, October 2004 (National PTA, 1-800-307-4782, [www.pta.org](http://www.pta.org)).

## Boost problem-solving skills by giving children a 'destination'



If you're driving on a crowded road, you can sometimes choose another route. After all, it doesn't matter *how* you get there—just that you arrive at your destination.

Keep that in mind the next time your kids face a problem. Many parents try to draw kids an exact road map of how to solve their problems. "First do this and then do that."

Instead, give your kids the destination. "You need to decide how to stop fighting over that game. Let me know when you have a solution." Then let them work it out.

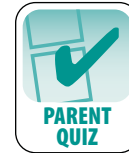
Odds are, they won't choose exactly the solution you might have thought up. But they'll learn how to listen and work things out. And they might find something that works.

"Peyton gets even-numbered days. Madelyn gets odd-numbered days," they could say. If that gets them to the "destination" you laid out—no fighting—then let that solution stand.

Step in if the squabbling starts. "This isn't working. I'll put the game away until you have a new plan."

Source: Jane Nelsen and others, *Positive Discipline A-Z*, ISBN: 978-0-307-34557-8 (Three Rivers Press, a Division of Random House, 1-800-733-3000, [www.randomhouse.com/crown/trp](http://www.randomhouse.com/crown/trp)).

## Have you made your home a learning place?



Learning opportunities are everywhere. Are you making the most of everyday experiences that can build school

success? Answer *yes* or *no* to each statement below to find out:

\_\_\_ 1. We have a regular place for homework, such as the kitchen table. Nearby, we keep pens, pencils, paper and a dictionary.

\_\_\_ 2. I let my child cook with me to practice basic math skills. If the recipe calls for  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup of sugar and we are making a double recipe, I ask my child to figure out much sugar we need to add.

\_\_\_ 3. We learn about geography when reading the newspaper. We try to find the countries we read about on a globe or in an atlas.

\_\_\_ 4. We practice fractions in the kitchen—by folding napkins, slicing apples and dividing a pizza.

\_\_\_ 5. We read every night before bed. Sometimes, I stop the story and let my child guess how it might end.

### How well are you doing?

If you answered mostly *yes*, you have created a learning environment for your child. Mostly *nos*? Try those ideas in the quiz to make the most of learning opportunities at home.

## Find appealing reading material to motivate your bored reader



Some kids can't wait to get back to their latest book. If a book isn't handy, these kids will read magazines or even cereal boxes!

Then there are the bored readers. They are much choosier. If the first page of a book doesn't grab their interest, they'll put it down.

To find more appealing books, ask yourself a few questions:

- What are three things that interest my child?
- What are three activities he and his friends are involved in?
- What are three adult activities he might like to try some day?
- What were the last three books or magazines that he seemed to enjoy?

Suppose your child loves sports. There are a variety of sports books that might be of some interest. You could also look for how-to books with tips on improving his game.

Or, you could find a biography of one of his favorite sports figures.

If he is also interested in history, you could look for a book on the history of the sport. Or look for a novel about his favorite sport. Adult sports writers like John Feinstein have also written fun kids' books with sports themes.

Source: Paul Kropp, *Raising a Reader: Make Your Child a Reader for Life*, ISBN: 0-385-47913-1 (Doubleday, 1-800-733-3000, [www.randomhouse.com/doubleday](http://www.randomhouse.com/doubleday)).

Elementary School  
**Parents**  
make the difference!

Practical Ideas for Parents to Help Their Children. ISSN: 1523-1275

For subscription information call or write:  
The Parent Institute®, 1-800-756-5525,  
P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474.  
Fax: 1-800-216-3667.

Or visit our website: [www.parent-institute.com](http://www.parent-institute.com).

Published monthly September through May by The Parent Institute®, a division of NIS, Inc., an independent, private agency. Equal opportunity employer. Copyright © 2008 NIS, Inc.

Publisher: John H. Wherry, Ed.D. *Managing Editor*: Pat Hodgdon. *Editor*: Rebecca Miyares. *Writers*: Kristen Amundson & Luann Fulbright. *Illustrator*: Joe Mignella.

### Have an idea to share?

The editors of *Parents make the difference!* pay \$25 for each original idea published (in English, please), and you will receive credit in the article.

Send ideas to *Parents make the difference!* Editorial Staff, P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474 (or [www.parent-institute.com/ideas/pmd](http://www.parent-institute.com/ideas/pmd)). Materials sent cannot be returned.

# Show your child the many ways to make a difference in the world



Your child learns most powerfully from your example. If you reach out to make the world part of your neighborhood, you will raise a child who grows up to care for our planet and the people in it.

Talk with your child about the things you do for people in your neighborhood. You may help an elderly neighbor with errands. You may watch a child while a parent is away.

Now ask, "What would we do if we thought of the whole world as our neighborhood?" Make a list of things

you can do right away—recycling or using less water, for example.

Then think about things that take more time and planning. You might collect books to give to children in a hospital. You might help raise money to donate to a worthy cause.

Then start doing some of the things on your list. You'll teach your child that even small actions make a difference and make our world a better neighborhood to live in.

Source: Bernie Siegel, *Love, Magic & Mudpies: Raising Your Kids to Feel Loved, Be Kind and Make a Difference*, ISBN: 1-594-86554-X (Rodale Press, 1-800-848-4735, www.rodale.com).

# Help your child analyze and overcome typical math errors



Good teachers try to assess why students are making errors in math. But few have the time to do this for every child with every new math concept they teach.

It helps when parents also know the typical errors children make and ways to correct them. If your child:

- **Forgot a step in computation**, have her make a checklist for monitoring math work. List the steps in the sequence required to do a problem. Then check each step off the list as she does it.
- **Aligned digits incorrectly**, have her turn her ruled paper horizontally to create columns for math.
- **Used the wrong information** to solve a problem when doing applied or word problems, have her circle essential information.
- **Chose the wrong operation**, ask her to explain the steps she's taking and why. Suggest she draw or diagram the problem before she attempts to solve it.
- **Failed to recognize** reasonable answers, ask her to see if an answer "makes sense" by putting it into a real-life, meaningful example. For example,  $2 + X = 5$ . She might say, "If I have two cookies and I want to give one to each of my five friends, how many more cookies do I need (X)?"
- **Forgot to write down** carried over numbers, suggest she circle these numbers as she calculates.
- **Confused or misread** plus, minus, times or division signs, she can circle the signs to bring greater attention to them.
- **Got the wrong answer** because of incorrect math facts, use games and flash cards for repeated drills for addition, subtraction and multiplication. Record math facts and then replay them. See if she can guess an answer before hearing the correct response.

Source: "Strategies for Math: Helpful Tips on Learning," Regents Center for Learning Disorders at Georgia State University, [www2.gsu.edu/~wwwrld/Resources/strategiesmath.htm](http://www2.gsu.edu/~wwwrld/Resources/strategiesmath.htm).

**Q:** The teacher called me to say that my fourth grader cheated on a test. I'm very upset and I don't know what to do. What's your advice for a parent in a situation like this?

## Questions & Answers

**A:** You may feel tempted to defend your child to the teacher. Don't. Just take the teacher's word for it. But do ask if there is a time when you, the teacher and your child can sit down together to talk.

Ask your child why he felt he needed to cheat. Ask the teacher how he cheated. The answers to these questions can give you a much better idea of what may be going on.

It's possible that your child:

- **Can't do the work.** Does he need special help? Can you work with him at home? Does he have other learning problems? Ask the teacher for suggestions on ways you can help.
- **Doesn't have enough time.** Take a close look at your child's schedule. Is he rushing from one activity to the next? You may need to adjust his schedule to allow more time for reading, homework and studying.
- **Feels pressured.** Is your child afraid of how you will react if he brings home a bad grade? Be sure he knows that you love him no matter what grades he gets. You want him to *do his best*, not *be the best*.
- **Just wanted to see** if he could get away with it. Cheating is a serious issue that can affect your child's future. Let him know that you will not tolerate cheating and establish firm consequences.

—Kristen Amundson,  
The Parent Institute

# It Matters: Test Preparation

## Is your child physically ready to take the test?



Recent studies of elementary-age children have shown: The more fit they are, the better they do in school!

Fit children have more “brain power” than their less active classmates. They have greater attention and memory skills. They’re faster when completing tasks and they make fewer errors.

While your child’s fitness should be a year-round concern, she can do some things to boost her fitness level on test days. Encourage her to:

- **Get a good night’s sleep** before the test. Staying up all night studying increases anxiety, which interferes with clear thinking.
- **Eat for success.** A hearty breakfast with seven to 10 grams of fiber will keep your child from getting jittery from a sugar high or, later, bottoming out when her insulin goes up.
- **Relax.** If your child is too nervous, she’ll forget what she knows. She can stretch and breathe deeply to focus her mind.
- **Wear comfortable clothes.** Pants shouldn’t be so tight they keep your child from breathing fully. Her brain needs oxygen.
- **Drink plenty of water.** This is another way to keep her brain alert.

Don’t forget to give your child a big hug on test day. This will increase her sense of well-being and energy.

Sources: “Testing Taking Tips for Families,” Practical Parenting Partnerships, [www.pppctr.org/maptesttaking.asp](http://www.pppctr.org/maptesttaking.asp); Jennifer Warner, “Fit Children May Make Better Students,” WebMD, [www.webmd.com/content/article/95/103479.htm](http://www.webmd.com/content/article/95/103479.htm).

## Create a ‘pre-test organizer’ to help your child have test success

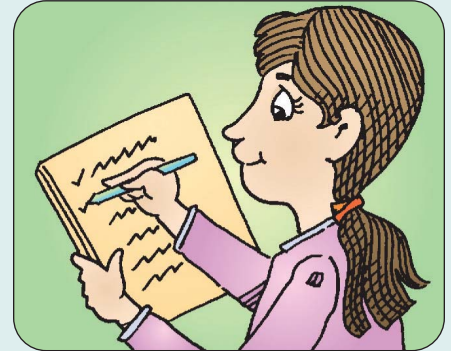
To ace a test, your child can’t wait until the last minute to study for it. Ideally, she should start at least a week ahead of time.

Creating her own “pre-test organizer” will help your child remember and review what she needs to.

To make the organizer, print or type needed information on one or two sheets of paper. Leave blank spaces as needed. Then make copies your child can fill out as she prepares for each test.

Include:

- **Subject and test date.**
- **A checklist of materials** needed to study—textbook, class notes, homework, old tests.
- **Test format.** True/false questions, multiple choice, essay or other.



- **Days and times to study.**
- **Day, time and place** for study buddy/group meetings.
- **Specific material to review.** List topics and amount of review needed (heavy/light). Add a box after each topic to check off after she’s studied the material.

Source: Ronald W. Fry, *Ace Any Test*, ISBN: 1-56414-460-7 (Career Press, 1-800-227-3371, [www.careerpress.com](http://www.careerpress.com)).

## Teach your child how to become a more confident test-taker



Test anxiety often comes from self-doubt. If your child doesn’t think he will succeed, he probably won’t.

You can help your child become more confident before a test if you:

- **Take off the pressure.** Tell your child, “Tests show the teacher what you’ve learned so far, and what you need help with.”
- **Avoid last-minute panic.** Your child should begin to review and study days before the test.
- **Teach efficient studying.** Help your child focus on the material he hasn’t yet mastered.

- **Help your child connect** new material to what he already knows.
- **Encourage positive self-talk.** When your child gets stuck during a test, he can say, “I know this. The answer will come to me.”
- **Remind your child** of his strengths—what he’s good at.
- **Help your child visualize** success. Have him close his eyes and picture himself knowing the answers.

Source: Stacy DeBroff, *The Mom Book Goes to School: Insider Tips to Ensure Your Child Thrives in Elementary and Middle School*, ISBN: 0-7432-5754-5 (Free Press, 1-800-456-6798, [www.simonsays.com](http://www.simonsays.com)).