

Elementary School Parents[®]

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make the difference!



Review your child's activities to avoid overscheduling, stress

She has dance on Tuesday and Thursday. Her computer class is on Monday. Basketball is Wednesday and Saturday.

Her parents may think they're preparing her for success in later life. But this kind of overscheduling can lead to problems.

Brain researchers have learned that too much of anything—even activities like these—can make kids feel stressed out. As a result, they don't do as well in school and are more likely to get sick.

Ask yourself these four questions:

1. **Does my child have time to play** with friends? Do not count practices that are planned and run by adults. Kids need time for relaxation and just "hanging out."
2. **When does my child do** homework? Does she work on math in the car as you drive from

one activity to the next? School work takes concentration, and that takes time.

3. **Why is my child** in these activities? Sometimes, parents are the ones who want their child in a class or a sport.
4. **Does my child get enough sleep?** Kids need between nine and ten hours of sleep each day. Without that sleep, kids don't learn as well. And they may have problems remembering what they have learned.

Remember—school is your child's most important job. If too many activities are getting in the way, ask your child to choose only one or two. She'll be happier and healthier—and she'll do better in school.

Source: Raleigh Philp, *Engaging 'Twins' and Teens*, ISBN: 1-89046-049-4 (Corwin Press, a Sage Publications Company, 1-800-233-9936, www.corwinpress.com).

Why is your child thankful? Put it on paper



The children's book *The Secret of Saying Thanks* ends with this thought: "We don't give thanks

because we're happy. We are happy because we give thanks."

Thinking about the reasons your family is thankful is also a great way to get your child writing. First, brainstorm with your child. What are the reasons he is thankful? Make a list.

Then write each reason on a separate piece of paper. Your child might say, "I am thankful for our dog." Now have him think of other things he could say about your pet. He may love the fact that the dog sleeps on his bed. He may like the dog's curly tail. Ask him to write more reasons he loves his pet. He may also want to draw a picture of the dog.

During the month, repeat this activity with all the reasons you are thankful. Post these illustrated stories for the whole family to read. Send them to friends and family.

Source: Ralph Fletcher and JoAnn Portalupi, *Craft Lessons: Teaching Writing K-8*, ISBN: 9781-5711-0706-0 (Stenhouse Publishers, 1-800-988-9812, www.stenhouse.com).

Does your child show symptoms of an attention deficit disorder?



Josh is in constant motion. "I feel like I have a motor inside me that won't turn off," he says.

Josh may have attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Children with this disorder:

- **Seem to be in constant motion.**
- **Walk, run or climb** when everyone else is sitting down.
- **Talk** even when other people are talking.
- **Get frustrated** with schoolwork or homework.
- **Don't finish things.**
- **Daydream** or seem to be in another world.
- **Have trouble waiting** in line or taking turns.
- **Act without thinking.**
- **Get sidetracked easily.**

All children do some of these things some of the time. But if your child does most of these things nearly all

the time, you should talk to your child's doctor. Ask if your child could have ADHD.

If he does, talk to the school about your child's ADHD. He may need to take medications during the school day. Teachers may also have ideas of how they can help your child stay focused at school.

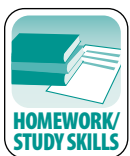
It's important that you, the school, and your doctor work together. Kids with ADHD need to learn how they learn best. They may need to work extra hard. But they *can* be successful in school and in life.

Source: National Institute of Mental Health, "A Look at Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder," www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/a-look-at-attention-deficit-hyperactivity-disorder/summary.shtml.

"All the world is a laboratory to the inquiring mind."

—Martin H. Fischer

Create a 'strategy wheel' to help your child with math homework



When your child gets stuck on a math problem, she probably can't always remember how to get herself back on track.

That's where a strategy wheel can help. It's a poster your child creates that will help her remember all the different things she can do when she's stuck on a math problem.

When your child isn't feeling frustrated, ask her to make a list of all the different things she can do to find the answer to a math problem. Her list could include:

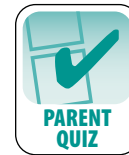
- **Reread the problem.**
- **Draw a diagram.**

- **Restate the problem** in my own words.
- **Guess an answer** and then check it out.
- **Think about how I solved** other problems like this one.

Then have her create a pie chart with her strategies listed. Let her post the chart where she does her math homework. The next time she's stuck, all she needs to do is glance at the wheel and then try one of the strategies.

Source: Diane L. Ronis, *Brain-Compatible Mathematics*, ISBN: 1-41293-938-0 (Corwin Press, a Sage Publications Company, 1-800-233-9936, www.corwinpress.com).

Are you helping your child learn common courtesy?



Treating others with respect, caring about feelings, and cooperating make it easier for people to live and work together.

Are you helping your child be courteous? Answer *yes* or *no* to each question to find out.

___1. **Do you remind your child** to say *please* and *thank you*?

___2. **Do you teach your child** not to interrupt others when they are talking? Do you have a signal that means, "Wait your turn."

___3. **Does everyone in your family** (including parents) say "I'm sorry" if they have made a mistake?

___4. **Have you taught your child** how to act when meeting new people? Does he know how to shake hands and how to introduce himself to others?

___5. **Are you a good role model?** If you show courtesy to others, so will your child.

How well are you doing?

Each *yes* means you are raising a courteous child. For each *no*, try that idea in the quiz.

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The Parent Institute®, 1-800-756-5525,
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Support your beginning reader with three simple strategies



She's just learning to read and she is so proud. But when she reads aloud, it's s-l-o-w. Here are three ways to support your beginning reader:

1. **Help her choose the right book.** Beginning readers should start by reading from books they find easy. Ask your child's teacher or the librarian to help you select books at the right level. Look for books with pictures, or those with just one sentence on a page. As her confidence grows, she can move on to more challenging books.

2. **Take turns.** Read a sentence yourself, touching the words as you read them. Then ask your child to read the same sentence. Or read a sentence and then ask her to read the next sentence.
3. **Bite your tongue** if she reads a word incorrectly. Give her a chance to correct the miscue herself. If she doesn't, ask, "Did that make sense to you?" You can help her sound out the word and then let her reread the sentence.

Source: Nancie Atwell, *The Reading Zone*, ISBN: 9780-4399-2644-7 (Scholastic, Inc., 1-800-246-2986, www.scholastic.com).

Make sure your child is fueled with nutritious foods all day



As if there aren't enough things for parents and kids to argue about, many families add meals to the list. Kids often try

to skip breakfast, while parents insist on nutritious morning fare—for good reason. Breakfast gives kids energy, and skipping it can hurt concentration at school.

To help your child eat well throughout the day:

- **Make breakfast appealing.** If your child doesn't go for classics such as cereal and fruit, get creative. Give her a "frozen banana" (a banana coated in yogurt, rolled in crushed cereal, and then frozen) or a smoothie (blend skim or 1% milk, fruit and ice). Leftovers, such as pasta, are great, too—even cold.
- **Prepare lunches together.** When your child helps pack lunches, she's more likely to eat them. There are lots of ways to make "brown bagging it" more attractive. For example, decorate the

bag. Use cookie cutters on bread. And mix ingredients in new ways, such as putting strawberries in cream cheese.

- **Don't give up on dinner.** If your child resists certain nutritious foods, brainstorm about alternatives. For example, some kids refuse raw carrots but like cooked ones, and vice versa. And if your child turns up her nose at milk, she may love cheese. You can also sneak items (such as pureed spinach or sweet potato) into recipes.
- **Keep offering options.** Your child may try something new if it's presented with a food she loves (especially if it's in a fun pattern, like a rainbow made out of veggies). Remember that it can take several tries for your child to like new foods, so keep trying and don't get discouraged.

Source: "Parenting Corner Q&A: Nutrition," American Academy of Pediatrics, www.aap.org/publiced/BR_WhatsToEat.htm.

Q: I have grown to hate Thursday nights. That's the night before my son has to take a spelling test. No matter how hard he tries, it seems he just can't remember those words. So he's frustrated and angry and I'm stressed out. I don't know what else I can do to help. Do you have any suggestions?

Questions & Answers

A: Memory is a tricky thing. We have a short-term memory that helps us remember the phone number long enough to dial it. But our short-term memory is like a small bucket. There isn't a lot of room to store things.

We also have a long-term memory, which is where our brains store the things we will remember. The key for your son is to learn how to move those spelling words from his short-term memory to his long-term memory.

Actually, it can be fun. He just needs to mix up his study routine with a few different activities.

Most teachers assign spelling words on a Monday, which gives your child four days to study. Have your child:

- **Write each word** five times on Monday.
- **Put the words** in alphabetical order on Tuesday.
- **Use each word in a sentence** on Wednesday. Or create a story using all of the words.
- **Take a practice test** on Thursday. Correct the test and have your child write each word he misses five times. Then give him another test.

With a little practice and dedication, your son will soon be acing those spelling tests!

—Kristen Amundson,
The Parent Institute

It Matters: Discipline

Discipline your child with love, understanding



As children grow older, they naturally want more freedom.

Sometimes they show this by rebelling. They

may talk back, refuse to cooperate or show disrespect in other ways. Although this is frustrating, stay positive and:

- **Keep communicating.** Be patient as you explain rules. Listen to what your child says, and make sure you understand.
- **Be confident.** Your job is to protect your child. It's hard to balance independence and safety, so you can't please him all the time. Inside, though, he's glad you're there for him.
- **Stick with routines.** Your child should study at the same time each day. Also, rethink rules as your child matures and change them as needed. Show your child that responsibility pays off.
- **Be understanding.** Sometimes a child's complaint ("You never let me go anywhere!") reflects a bigger concern ("My friends make fun of me for staying home.").
- **Give specific compliments.** When your child does something right, let him know. ("You did your homework on time today—without any reminders! That's so grown up.")
- **Pick your battles.** Save your disagreements for serious issues. When you must criticize, describe your child's behavior, not his personality.

Source: Eileen Hayes, "Primary School Children: Discipline," BBC Parenting, www.bbc.co.uk/parenting/your_kids/primary_discipline.shtml.

Motivate your child to do well in school with positive discipline

You want to help your child do well in school, but you aren't sure how. Should you reward good grades? Should you cut back on after school activities if grades drop? Consider these tips:

- **Set the stage for success.** Keep school supplies organized. Stick to a homework routine. Give lots of compliments. Encourage fun learning activities, including reading. Talk about school and how it relates to life.
- **Work with your child** and the teacher if your child is struggling in school. Don't punish him by stopping activities he loves. Research shows that non-school activities are linked to success in school. Let him keep one or two.
- **Set up a reward system.** Your child might earn a point for each productive homework session.



He can use points to earn prizes, such as a visit to a museum or bookstore.

- **Be persistent** when concerns arise. There are so many factors that affect grades. Talk with a professional if you're having trouble solving problems.

Source: Cheryl Feuer Gedzelman, "Motivating Children in School: Conquering Spring Fever," *Washington Parent*, May 2008 (Knollwood Publications, Inc., 301-320-2321, www.washingtonparent.com).

Teach your child self-discipline with responsibility, confidence



It takes a mix of traits for children to be "self-disciplined," including responsibility and confidence. To develop

these characteristics:

- **Discuss things** that are important to your child, such as friends and hobbies. Also talk about challenges, including peer pressure.
- **Enforce rules consistently** and explain why they're important. Use discipline to guide (rather than punish) your child.

- **Give your child responsibilities.** She might do chores, save up for a toy or be part of a sports team. These activities teach about following through.
- **Set goals with your child.** What would she like to accomplish? How can she do this? Be specific.
- **Set an example for your child.** If you want her to be honest, for instance, display honesty.

Source: "Positive Parenting Tips for Healthy Child Development," U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, www.cdc.gov/Features/PositiveParenting.