

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

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Choose your words carefully if you want to motivate your child

Sometimes the words you use can send a message to your child that's quite different from the one you intended.

For instance, suppose your child is doing a chore around your house. It's taking much longer than it would take you. Finally, you say, "Here, let me do that."

You may think you just simply finished a task for your child. But what you really communicated was, "I don't think you can handle that."

Sometimes, the words parents say to motivate their children actually turn out to have the opposite effect.

Here are some things you might say to your child that will motivate him to keep trying, or to do his best.

When you say:

- "Why don't you give this a try?" your child will hear, "I think you can do this by yourself."

- "What would happen if you added more water?" your child will hear, "You can solve problems." But if you say, "That's too dry," your child will hear, "You aren't doing it right."
- "I never thought of trying it that way," your child will hear, "You made a good decision." But if you say, "I don't do it that way," your child will hear, "You are doing it wrong."

Use this approach when your child is doing school work. If he's stuck on a tough math problem, ask, "Have you ever solved a problem like this before? How did you solve it then?"

Keep focusing on the things your child *can* do. The more you encourage your child, the more likely he is to stay motivated.

Source: Lynn Lott and Riki Intner, *Chores Without Wars*, ISBN: 0-761-51252-7 (Prima Publishing, 1-800-733-3000, www.randomhouse.com/index.pperl).

Be specific when talking about respect



The best way to get your child to show respect is not by talking about an abstract idea that may be hard for her to understand. Instead, try talking about very specific actions she can take to show her respect.

For example, when your child interrupts, you might say, "When someone else is talking, it's respectful to listen until the person is finished. Then you can take your turn."

You can also ask if your child can come up with specific behaviors that would show respect. "What can you do to show your teacher respect?" Your child could raise her hand, complete homework on time and pay attention in class.

Later, when your child has done something respectful, help her make the link. "I loved the way you showed respect when Mr. Jones called. You carefully wrote down the message so I knew when to call him back."

Source: Paula Denton, "The Power of our Words," *Educational Leadership*, September 2008 (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1-800-933-2723, www.ascd.org).

Help a disorganized child take responsibility for belongings



You bought her a special notebook to write down her school assignments. She left it at soccer practice. She has a spelling test tomorrow—but her spelling list is at school.

Some kids never seem to learn how to take responsibility for their things. Here are some ways you can help:

- **Ask your child to help** develop a plan. Talk with her about what she would need to get more organized. You might say, “You’re having trouble getting home with all your school work. Can you come up with a plan that would help you remember? Why don’t you think about it until dinner? Bring your plan to the table and we’ll talk about it.”

- **Once she has a plan** in place, let her try to make it work. That means you won’t rescue her. If she leaves her spelling list at school, don’t go back to get it. Let her face one bad grade on a test.
- **Offer suggestions** of how to make changes, but let her be responsible. “How about if we tried placing a box here by the door. Then you can put everything that needs to go to school in the box. What do you think of that?”

Source: Elizabeth M. Ellis, *Raising a Responsible Child*, ISBN: 1-559-72301-7 (Birch Lane Press, Carol Publishing Group).

“A word of praise is a ‘verbal trophy’ for a child.”

—Author unknown

Volunteer at your child’s school during National Volunteer Week



April 19–25 is National Volunteer Week. Research shows that school volunteers can make a school better for all the students. But did you know that the work you do can also help you?

Here are some ways volunteers say they have been helped:

- **They learn to get along.** You may have to deal with differences or motivate others. Whether you’re dealing with your six-year-old or your boss, those are excellent skills to have!
- **You can do your job better.** As a volunteer, you can choose a task that will help you on the job. Whether you want to improve your computer skills or learn how

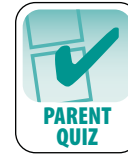
to manage a budget, you can probably do that while helping out your child’s school at the same time.

- **You can find a job** if you don’t have one. People who are looking for work say their volunteer jobs have helped them prepare for the job market.

Send in a note to school with your child this week and ask the teacher if you can do anything to help. Whether it’s cutting out things at home or coming into the school to file papers, you and your child’s school will reap the benefits.

Source: “National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating,” Canadian Center for Philanthropy, www.givingandvolunteering.ca/pdf/factsheets/Benefits_of_Volunteering.pdf.

Are you effective in setting limits for your child?



When parents enforce limits, their children rarely thank them! But limits help those same children behave better at

home and at school. Are you effective in setting and enforcing limits for your child? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

___1. **I curb my limits.** I don’t overwhelm my child with too many limits.

___2. **I make sure limits are clear.** When my child understands limits, he is more likely to stick to them.

___3. **I’m consistent.** If something is off limits today, it’s off limits tomorrow.

___4. **I involve my child** in setting limits and establishing consequences for violating limits.

___5. **I let my child know** the “why” behind the limits I set.

How well are you doing?

Each *yes* answer means you are effectively helping your child understand the boundaries you set for acceptable behavior. For each *no* answer, try that idea.

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Positive discipline begins with effective communication



“You’re not listening to me.” It’s frustrating when children don’t do what parents say. But the problem isn’t always “not listening.” Too often, parents aren’t communicating well. Even parents with the best intentions may lecture or criticize—making kids feel and behave worse. It’s better to:

- **Listen to your child’s ideas.** Replace lectures with helpful discussions and questions. (“Why do you think that happened?” “What would you do next time?”)
- **Accept that no one is perfect.** Mistakes are not something to hide. Instead, your family can use them as opportunities to learn and grow.
- **Be confident in your child’s skills.** When a minor problem arises, for example, say, “I believe you can handle this. I’m here to help if you need it.”

- **Repeat what your child says.** Make sure you understood. “So Sean didn’t pick you to be on his team, and you yelled at him.”
- **Imagine how your child feels.** Put it into words. “Sean is your friend, but what he did made you feel left out and angry.”
- **Stay respectful**—even if your child does not. If he says something dramatic (“I hate you!”), remain calm and understanding (“You’re furious about what I did”).
- **Limit how much you say.** Listen without interrupting. When you speak, make your point brief and clear.
- **Show that you love your child,** no matter what. Just saying it isn’t enough. Prove it by communicating in loving, effective ways.

Source: Jane Nelsen, Ed.D., “Why Children Don’t Listen,” ParentInvolvementMatters.org, www.parentinvolvementmatters.org/articles/positive-discipline-jane-nelsen.html.

A ‘fist list’ can help your child remember key math concepts



April is Mathematics Awareness Month. A “fist list” is a fun way to help your child remember a key math concept or skill.

- Have your child:
- **Trace an outline of his hand** on a piece of paper. In the palm of the hand, have him write the math idea or skill he needs to remember. For example, he might write “Adding three-digit numbers.”
 - **Think about all the things** he needs to remember. Here are some he might come up with. “Work from right to left.” “Start in the ones column.” “If the sum is higher than nine, carry a “one” into the tens column.” “Then add the numbers in the tens column.” “Carry numbers higher than nine into the hundreds column.”
 - **Choose the five best tips** and write them on the fingers of the hand he has drawn. He can refer to the “fist list” when he does homework and review it before taking a test. With just a few key ideas, it will be easy for him to remember how to solve the problem.

Source: Harvey F. Silver, John R. Brunsting, Terry Walsh, *Math Tools, Grades 3–12*, ISBN: 9781-4129-5782-3 (Corwin Press, a Sage Publications Company, 1-800-233-9936, www.corwinpress.com).

Q: My second grader has tantrums when she doesn’t get her way. I admit that I sometimes give in rather than having to deal with her behavior. She’s acting the same way in school, and her teacher has asked for my help in getting her to control herself. What can I do?

Questions & Answers

A: Two-year-old tantrums are hard enough to deal with. But eight-year-olds need to learn how to get themselves under control. Here are some ideas:

- **Keep a record** of your child’s tantrums for a week or so. Record what happened just before the tantrum. This will help you begin to see patterns. What happens when she falls apart? How many times do you give in to a tantrum?
 - **Create a plan of action** to change her behavior. Parents are sometimes tempted to ignore a child who is throwing a tantrum. Unfortunately, that may just lead her to act out even more.
 - **Set clear boundaries.** Suppose she often has a tantrum if you don’t let her watch TV. Say calmly, “It is not time to turn on the TV. It’s time for reading.” She’s not likely to stop her tantrum right away. Keep talking with her. “I know that you are upset. But this is the rule.”
 - **Tell her she can control** her behavior, too. “You’ll feel so much better when you are in control.” Then praise her when she does calm down.
- Whatever you do, *don’t give in*. Her success in school and with other children depends on learning how to control that temper.

—Kristen Amundson,
The Parent Institute

It Matters: Spending Time Together

Play fun games with your child, build fitness



It's spring and it's the perfect time to play some active games outdoors with your child and a few of his friends.

Teach your child:

- **Duck, Duck, Goose.** Gather a group and sit in a circle. Choose one person to be "it." That player walks around the circle, tapping people's heads and saying, "Duck" with each tap. Before long, the player says "Goose," and the "Goose" must chase "it" around the circle. If "it" makes it to the empty seat without being caught, "Goose" becomes "it."
- **Red Light, Green Light.** The "it" player is a "stoplight" who turns away from other players, who are in a line about 15 feet away. When the "stoplight" says "green," players move toward him. When the "stoplight" says "red," he gets to turn around and make sure everyone stops. Any player who moves is out. If a player touches the stoplight, he is "it" next.
- **Mother May I?** All players stand the same distance from the "it" player (called "Mother"). "Mother" calls out someone's name with an instruction. ("Lauren, take six baby steps forward," or "Jack, take three bunny hops.") The player who is called must say, "Mother may I?" The answer can be "Yes, you may," or "No, you may not." If a player forgets to ask "Mother may I?", he returns to the starting point. Whoever touches "Mother" first gets to be "it."

Use strategies to maximize the time you spend with your child

Busy parents feel pressured to make the most of time with their children. But this is hard when so many things can interfere. To make time together more frequent and meaningful:

- **Limit TV viewing.** Simply turning on the TV can lead to hours of wasted time. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends no more than two hours per day.
- **Volunteer.** If your child is involved in a club, team or other group activity, offer to help out. Then nothing will prevent this time together.
- **Get moving.** It's important to squeeze exercise into your routine. Do some activities as a family, such as go for walks, play tag or kick a soccer ball.



- **Put family time on the calendar.** Treat it like an appointment. Also schedule one-on-one activities that appeal to each child.
- **Set the table for dinner.** Sit-down meals help kids and parents focus on each other.

Source: Thomas R. Lee, "How To Spend Quality Time With Your Children," Utah State University, www.newswise.com/articles/view/516482.

Reading is a productive way to spend time with your child



Reading is one of the most productive ways to spend time with your child. It's also an opportunity to be creative. To

keep your child fascinated by books:

- **Put on a show.** Use different voices for each character and act out parts.
- **Talk with the "audience."** Ask questions that will capture your child's interest. "Did you agree with what she did?" "What do you think will happen next?"
- **Give an encore performance.** Your child may want to hear

stories again and again, and that's good. The more your child listens to a book, the more she can learn from it.

- **Admire other performers.** Listen to professional storytellers. Visit the library and check out some audio books for ideas. Your child might play an instrument while you read, for example, providing a "soundtrack."
- **Keep coming back.** Make reading part of your daily routine. Choose the time when your child is most receptive. Say how much you enjoy this time together.