

Elementary School Parents[®]

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make the difference!



Women's History Month is a great time to read a biography

It's Women's History Month, and that means it's the perfect time for your child to read a biography about a famous woman.

Help your child select a biography she will enjoy by talking with her about subjects that interest her:

- **Is she a sports fan?** She might like to read about Wilma Rudolph, a three-time Olympic gold medal winner.
- **Is she interested in science?** Perhaps she'd like to learn about Marie Curie, the only person to win a Nobel Prize in two different sciences.
- **Is she interested in politics?** She might like to read about Victoria Woodhull, who in 1870 became the first woman to run for president!

Whatever your child's interests, there is sure to be a biography she can

read. Ask the librarian for help if you don't see a book that catches her interest right away.

Whether you read the book with your child or let her read it on her own, don't stop there. Once finished, have your child:

- **Write a persuasive letter.** Since some famous people get their pictures on a cereal box, have your child write a letter to a cereal company suggesting why a particular person should be honored.
- **Write a personal letter.** Have your child tell the person what she learned by reading about her life.
- **Find out "the rest of the story."** After reading the biography, encourage your child to do additional research on the person.

Source: "Awesome Women," Teaching PreK-8, www.teachingk-8.com, www.teachingk8.com/archives/todays_classroom_activities/national_womens_history_month_activities.html.

Use report card as springboard for discussions



Maybe the report card is all A's. Maybe it's worse than you had feared. Whatever

the report card says, it can be a great chance to talk with your child about school and study habits. Lisa Huffman, a professor at Ball State University, offers these tips for parents:

- **Take the report card seriously.** Set aside time to talk about it. Does your child agree with the grades? Why or why not?
- **Don't lose your temper.** If you are too angry to talk with your child at first, wait until you are calmer.
- **Make a plan.** Tutoring or extra study time can help a struggling student.
- **Look at your child's work regularly.** Report cards won't be a surprise if you check homework each day.
- **Contact your child's teacher** with concerns. Together, you can work out a way to help your child improve.

Source: Lisa Huffman, "How to Handle Report Cards—The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly," Ball State University, www.newswise.com/articles/view/510639.

Attendance—it's the little things that make the biggest difference



If your child misses just one day a week, he'll miss more than two and a half years of class time before he graduates! That means he'll have lost valuable time learning important subjects like math and reading.

What can you do to make your child's attendance more regular? Often, it's the little things that make the difference. If he hasn't finished his book report, he may not want to go to school the next day. If he can't find his math book, he might be late and miss the bus.

So help your child get organized. Write down due dates for big projects on the family calendar. Don't let him

wait until the night before to read the book and write the book report.

Set up a "launch pad" by the door. Each night make sure your child places everything he'll need for school on the launch pad.

Source: "School Attendance: Helping Your Child Make the Best Start," www.direct.gov.uk/en/Parents/Schoolslearninganddevelopment/YourChildsWelfareAtSchool/DG_067554.

"There is frequently more to be learned from the unexpected questions of a child than the discourses of men."

— John Locke

Build your child's character by finding ways to teach fairness



Learning to be fair is an important part of developing character. Kids who are fair understand that they can't always be first. They know that they won't always get their own way. They see that sometimes, they should offer the larger piece of cake to their younger brother or sister.

It's usually easier for kids to recognize unfair behavior when it happens to them. But teaching them to recognize unfair behavior that affects others can be a challenge.

Here are some ways you can help your child recognize the importance of treating others fairly:

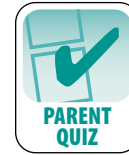
- **Pay attention to the words you use.** Lots of common expressions include the word *fair*. We say we want to be treated "fair and square." We say we want a "fair

fight" if we have to get into a conflict. On the athletic field, we talk about the importance of "fair play." Each time you use or hear one of those phrases, talk about it with your child.

- **Think about ways you can display fairness in your home.** In some families, one child cuts the cake and the other one chooses first.
- **Look for TV shows where one person is not treated fairly.** What happens? Could that have been avoided if everyone had been treated fairly?
- **Recognize people who play sports and games fairly.** Hold them up as positive role models for your child.

Source: Virginia Cooperative Extension Service, "Tips and Tools for Teaching Fairness in the School Environment," January 2006 (Cooperative Extension Service, Virginia Tech, 540-231-5299, www.ext.vt.edu).

Do you encourage your child to work independently?



"Mom, I can't do it. I need help!" Every child makes that plea once in a while. But if your child says it every day, you may need

to help her become more independent. Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out if you are fostering self-reliance:

___ 1. Do you tell your child that you believe she can do it?

___ 2. Do you help her break big projects down into smaller pieces that are easier to finish?

___ 3. Do you remind her of the importance of effort? "You couldn't ride a bike the first time you tried. But you kept at it. You'll learn this if you keep at it."

___ 4. Do you ask her questions when she gets stuck? "What did you learn when you read the chapter?"

___ 5. Do you sometimes offer small treats to keep her motivated?

How well are you doing?

Each *yes* answer means you are helping your child learn how to work on her own. For *no* answers, try those ideas.

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Take your suspicions about learning disabilities seriously



It's normal to worry about your child's struggles in school. You may wonder, "Is school just hard for my child? Or could it be a learning disability?" Answers aren't always easy to come by, but it helps to consider:

- **Risk factors.** Certain things may raise a child's chance of having a learning disability. Talk with your doctor about issues such as a family history of learning disabilities, or medical problems that could affect her at school.
- **Delays.** Think about your child's growth. Did her skills develop on time? Did she use large muscles (such as for walking) when expected? What about small muscles (such as for grasping)? Have thinking, talking, listening and social skills seemed on target?
- **Expert opinions.** Meet with both your child's doctor and teacher regularly. Be honest about your concerns. Is there a pattern in

what others have seen in your child? If she attended preschool, did the staff there have concerns?

- **Progress.** Even if a learning disability is not detected, pay attention to your child's development. In third grade, for instance, can she read grade-level books? Write short sentences? Add and subtract fairly well? Talk with the teacher about your child's progress.
- **Abilities.** In addition to noticing what your child can do, pay attention to what is tough. Does she have trouble reading? Focusing? Behaving? These are a few of the red flags that deserve attention.
- **Next steps.** If you believe your child may have a learning disability, seek help. Schools have many ways of identifying problems and finding solutions. By working with the school, you can make sure your child reaches her full potential.

Source: Ann Logsdon, "Top 8 Tips to Recognize Early Signs of Learning Disabilities," About.com, <http://learningdisabilities.about.com/od/learningdisabilitybasics/tp/SignsofLD.htm>.

Use the Internet to teach your child important research skills



The Internet is filled with all types of information. Have some fun teaching your child about the kinds of information he can find there. Try these two games to get started:

1. **Scavenger hunt.** Make a list of 20 to 30 questions for which there are right answers. What's the temperature in Madrid today? What's the longest river in Asia? Who holds the Olympic Gold Medal in women's figure skating? Then see who can find the answers most quickly. As you search for answers,

you may find that some search engines are better for finding out some types of questions than others. See if you can beat your own time.

2. **Panning for gold.** Choose a famous person from history. Give everyone in the family 15 minutes to search the Internet for interesting facts about that person. After everyone takes a turn, share what you've learned. Vote for whose "nugget" turned out to be gold!

Source: Jamie McKensie, "The New 'HomeWork': Parents and Students Together on the Web," From Now On, www.fno.org/feb97/teach.html.

Q: Although I hate to admit it, my son is quite lazy. His teacher says he does the bare minimum at school—and his grades reflect his lack of effort. If I ask him to do anything at home, it takes so much nagging it's easier to do it myself. How can I help this child develop a work ethic?

Questions & Answers

A: There's a saying that the parent has to teach the child how to work before the teacher can teach the child how to learn. Clearly, your son hasn't learned that first lesson—and as a result, his teacher is having trouble with the second!

First, rule out any health issues. Then start helping him develop a good work ethic. Household chores are a great way to do this.

Hold a family meeting. Explain to your son that he is an important part of your family and you need him to pitch in and do his share. "Dad's busy at work. I have a new job. We need your help."

The parent has to teach the child how to work before the teacher can teach the child how to learn.

Putting it this way will make chores seem important and not like a punishment. They're actually a way to make the household run more smoothly.

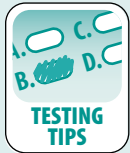
First, have him work with you. When you're fixing dinner, have him set the table. When you fold laundry, have him help. Later, he can do some chores on his own.

Be sure to share your thanks and gratitude. Say, "You really helped our family." That praise will make him want to do more.

—Kristen Amundson,
The Parent Institute

It Matters: Test Success

Support your child by sharing test-taking tips



Your child has a big test tomorrow, and you want her to do her best. How can you help? During the test, tell

your child to remember to:

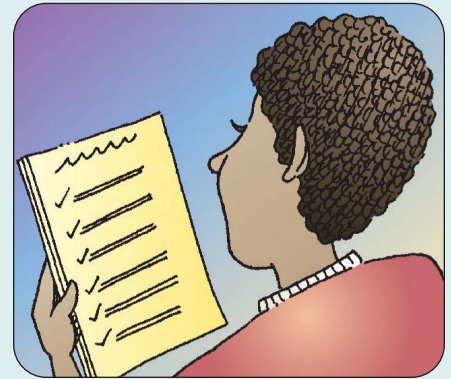
- **Focus on directions.** Whether they are given out loud or are written, she should ask about anything that is unclear.
- **Write down information.** If she struggled to memorize something, she should write it down as soon as the test starts, in case she needs it later.
- **Start with the easiest questions.** to earn the most points. She should mark the hardest ones and go back to them last.
- **Remember true/false tricks.** If any *part* of the answer is false, the *whole* answer is false!
- **Use multiple-choice strategies.** She should try to answer the question before looking at the choices. Or, she can eliminate the wrong answers and see what's left.
- **Look for fill-in-the-blank hints.** If the blank line is short, the answer should be short, too.
- **Match the best answers.** She should avoid matching too quickly and consider all options. If one is a mystery, answering the others may solve it.
- **Outline essays.** Instead of writing freely, she should make a plan and stick to main points and key details. Even a brief outline is better than no answer.

Source: Nancy Firchow, M.L.S., "Test-Taking Tips," GreatSchools, Inc., www.greatschools.net/cgi-bin/showarticle/2375.

Now is the time to develop your child's test preparation skills

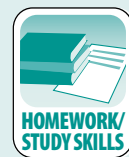
It's so awful that many adults never forget it—the feeling of arriving at school unprepared for a test. Prevent this from happening by helping your child build good study habits. Encourage your child to:

- **Study every day.** Even if no homework is assigned, use that time to read or review.
- **Plan ahead.** As soon as the teacher announces a test, make a plan for success. Don't "cram" at the last minute!
- **Make to-do lists.** Use a calendar or notepad for organizing tasks. Check off finished work.
- **Ask questions.** If it isn't clear what will be on the test, talk with the teacher. Find out what to study.



- **Review returned homework.** Teachers often make important corrections for students to see.
- **Take practice tests.** Use flash cards, have someone ask questions or write down questions and answers. Spend extra time on the hardest parts.

Reduce your child's anxiety over taking standardized tests



Whether schools use standardized tests to assess students, teachers or both, the exams usually cause stress for parents, too. To ease the pressure on your family:

- **Learn about the test.** Ask what subjects it will cover. Likely topics are math, language arts and reading.
- **Ask about preparation.** The teacher may send home a "practice test" or provide information to review.
- **Understand results.** Find out how the scores will be used. How might a particularly low or high score affect your child?

- **Consider accommodations.** If your child receives special services, this may influence how the test is administered.
- **Practice following directions.** When studying at home, have your child read directions carefully. Check to make sure he understands them.
- **Set a timer** during math homework to help your child get comfortable with "timed tests."
- **Relax.** Make sure your child gets plenty of sleep and nutritious food. Provide happy distractions from stress, such as family walks.

Source: "Standardized Test Success," Family Education, <http://school.familyeducation.com/educational-testing/teaching-methods/37502.html>.