

Elementary School Parents

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make the difference!



Experts say paying for grades is not an effective motivator

You're worried about your child's math grades. Then she makes a suggestion. "I would do better if you paid me for every A on a math test," she says.

Should you get out your wallet? *No*, say most experts on motivation. Here's why paying children for good grades is not an effective motivator:

- **It puts the emphasis** in the wrong place. If you promise your child \$1 for a good grade, she'll be working for the money. She may find that she wants the dollar so badly that she's willing to cheat to get it.
- **It doesn't help** your child learn the satisfaction of doing a job well. Children need to learn the joy that comes just from doing something to the best of their ability. There's a lot of pleasure that comes from walking into a newly-cleaned room. There's great pride in

handing in a paper that was the best your child could do. Those are the rewards your child ought to be working for.

- **It puts all the focus** on the outcome. Children need to learn the importance of sticking with a challenging subject. They need to learn that practice really does make perfect. Putting all your attention on a reward at the end of the process will make it harder for your child to learn those lessons.

So what should you do? Let your child know that school is important. Set aside time and space for her to do homework. Celebrate her successes with time spent together. And keep your money in your pocket!

Source: Melissa Kossler Dutton, "How to Motivate Kids to Succeed in School," Columbus Parent Magazine, www.columbusparent.com/live/content/issue/stories/2009/08/01/cpfeature_grades.html.

Bring history to life with some historical fiction



History can be fascinating. But history books can sometimes be dull and dry.

That's where historical fiction can come in. The best historical fiction brings a past time to life. It shares the details about what people wore, what they ate and how they really lived. It gives the reader a vivid glimpse of history.

If you are looking for a good historical fiction book to help make history come alive, here are things to keep in mind:

- **Ask a children's librarian** to suggest a book that presents history accurately and avoids myths or stereotypes.
- **Look for a book** with illustrations. This is one time when a picture really is worth a thousand words.
- **Try reading the book aloud** if the book is a little challenging for your child.
- **Read more than one book** about the same period. Talk about how people see the same event differently.

Source: Esmé Raji Codell, *How to Get Your Child to Love Reading*, ISBN: 1-565-12308-5 (Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, www.workman.com).

Teach your child to respect other people's property, belongings



A classmate brought a really neat toy car to school. Your child really wanted a car like that. So he “borrowed” it.

Helping children learn to respect another person's property is an important skill for getting along with others. Talk with your child about a time when someone did not respect his property. Did they take something without asking? Did they borrow it and not return it? Did they break something while they were using it?

Talk with your child about how he felt when that happened. Then talk with your child about how he can show respect for another person's property.

Here are some ideas:

- Always ask permission before using something that belongs to someone else.
- **Be careful** when using something that belongs to another person.
- **Return things** when you said you would.

Talk about how these same rules apply to things at school. Your child should take care of his math book so he can return it in good condition.

Source: Gwendolyn Cartledge, James Kleefeld, *Taking Part: Introducing Social Skills to Children PreK-Grade 3*, ISBN: 9780-8782-2613-9 (Research Press, www.researchpress.com).

“In the end there is no program or policy that can substitute for a parent.”

—President Barack Obama

Face family-school challenges with confidence, common sense



Throughout your child's education, you may disagree with school staff about minor—and occasionally serious—issues. Although this can feel

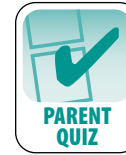
pretty uncomfortable, remember that conflicts are a natural part of relationships. What's important is *how* they're resolved. When serious issues need to be discussed:

- **Listen to your child.** Kids are often the first to mention school concerns. Take your child's feelings to heart, and use intuition and common sense to guide your actions. You might ask yourself, “Do my child's worries make sense to me?” “Has my child raised this concern more than once?” “Is it important to step in now?”

- **Listen to the teacher.** There are two or more sides to every story. It's valuable to keep an open mind and reserve judgment until all the facts (and opinions) are in.
- **Stay positive.** If you don't like a teacher, working together can be a challenge. Focus on your shared goal: a successful classroom experience for your child. By maintaining a calm, respectful attitude, you'll be the best advocate for your student.
- **Ask for help.** Sometimes, despite your hard work, a problem persists. Consider meeting with the guidance counselor or principal for help. Be confident that together, you'll find a solution.

Source: “Addressing Problems,” PBS Parents, www.pbs.org/parents/goingtoschool/address_prob.html.

Are you helping your child attend school every day?



Kids can't learn if they aren't in school. Yet every day, children are tardy or absent from school for reasons that could be avoided. That means they're missing out on important learning.

Are you doing everything you can to be sure your child is in school every day? Answer *yes* or *no* to each question below to find out.

- ___ **1. Does your child know** you expect her to go to school every day?
- ___ **2. Do you get ready** for the next day at night so you get out the door on time in the morning?
- ___ **3. Do you know** the school's attendance policy? Do you call the school to report if your child is too sick to come to school?
- ___ **4. Do you avoid scheduling** appointments during school time?
- ___ **5. Do you practice hand washing?** One study shows it can reduce absences by as much as 50 percent.

How well are you doing?

Each *yes* means you are helping your child get to school regularly. For *no* answers, try those ideas in the quiz.

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A 'think-through' sheet can help your child learn *how* to learn



Your child has to learn many important things in elementary school.

But perhaps the most important thing he can learn is how to take responsibility for his own learning.

A "think-through" sheet can help your child accomplish this. Here's how it works:

1. **Divide a sheet of paper** into three columns.
2. **Label the first column** "I have to." Label the second column "Do I know how to?" and the third, "Where can I get help?"
3. **Have your child write** the things he has to do for homework in the first column. For example, his list might include, "Multiply two-digit numbers in math" and "Write a book report."

4. **Have him fill in** the second column. Does he know how to multiply two-digit numbers? If the answer is *yes*, then he can go ahead and do the math problems. If the answer is *no*, he needs to move on to the third column.
5. **Have your child think** about where he can get help if he doesn't feel confident. Should he look back in his math book? Can he check with a friend? Should he ask the teacher for extra help? Have him write down all of her options.

Using this type of checklist will help your child see that there are things he can do when he's stuck. Over time, he will actually have a better sense of how he learns best.

Source: Rona F. Flippo, *Tests and Tests: Teaching Study Skills Across Content Areas*, ISBN: 0-325-00491-9 (Heinemann Publishing, www.heinemann.com).

Discipline is an opportunity to teach your child how to behave



Some parents think that the word *discipline* means something negative. But actually, discipline is much more

than just the times you say *no* or punish your child.

In fact, the word discipline comes from the Latin word that means "student" or "pupil." Experts say parents will be much more effective if they think about discipline as a way of *teaching* their children to behave in appropriate ways.

And one of the best ways to do that is by rewarding kids who are doing something right. Suppose you are working at your computer. You see your child is sitting quietly at the kitchen table working on his book

report. So take a short break. Say, "I am just so happy you started working on your book report without a reminder from me. And you gave me a little extra time to finish what I was working on. Now we can spend some time doing something together."

Then spend five or 10 minutes playing together, reading or doing something your child enjoys. Kids love getting undivided attention from a parent.

Spend a few minutes with a child who is behaving well. Otherwise, you'll spend much more time with a child who is misbehaving!

Source: Tara Parker-Pope, "It's Not Discipline, It's a Teachable Moment," *The New York Times*, www.nytimes.com/2008/09/15/health/healthspecial/15discipline.html).

Q: My daughter is in first grade. She was adjusting well to school until her dad was deployed to Afghanistan. Now she is having trouble. Her teacher says she **doesn't want to take part in class activities. She talks to me a lot about what will happen if her father doesn't come home. How can I help her, and how can I help her get back on track at school?**

Questions & Answers

A: Clearly the deployment has affected your child, both at school and at home. But there are some ways to help her. All of them involve opening up the lines of communication:

- **Tell your child** that it's not her fault that her father is away. Even if you've told her that this is her father's job, you need to tell her again. Children sometimes blame themselves when a parent goes away.
- **Find ways for your child** to communicate with her father. If possible, arrange for a phone call so she can hear her dad's voice. Just having Dad say, "I'll be home soon" may help her adjust.
- **Be sure your child's teacher** knows how you're handling this issue at home. She may be able to get your child to talk about her feelings. Sometimes, children will tell a teacher something they don't want to worry their parent by discussing.
- **Teach your child** the art of writing letters. Each day, have her write a sentence or two to her father. All these things will help your daughter feel more in control until her father returns from overseas.

—Kristen Amundson,
The Parent Institute

It Matters: The Home-School Team

Do you know what teachers really think?



Wouldn't it be nice to know what teachers really think? Wonder no more. In an informal survey, Education World.com asked

teachers what they wanted parents to know, and the responses were fascinating. For example:

- **No matter how much** I care about your child, I need to distribute my energy among all students in the class.
- **Let your child's strengths** develop naturally over time. Too much pressure actually hurts kids' learning.
- **We need to work as a team.** Without parents' support, it's hard for me to succeed.
- **Set limits on TV viewing.** Promote healthy alternatives, including exercise and reading.
- **I don't play favorites,** but I am especially touched by students who use good manners.
- **Choose school clothes** that are appropriate, comfortable and non-distracting. That's more important than being stylish.
- **When I send paperwork home,** such as homework guidelines, I need you to read it.
- **Parents make a big difference** at home by planning fun, educational activities and modeling respectful behavior.
- **I appreciate compliments** because they help me know what's working for students.

Source: Linda Starr, "What Teachers Want Parents to Know," Education World, www.educationworld.com/a_curr/profdev/profdev103b.shtml.

Find volunteer opportunities that match your personality

Research shows that parent involvement helps students succeed. But volunteering doesn't happen on its own. It takes generous parents to step up and pitch in!

To find the perfect job for you, consider:

- **The school's needs.** Many teachers rely on volunteers. In addition to helping in your child's class, consider art, computer, P.E., foreign language, music and other subjects. Talk with parent-teacher organization leaders, too. They are usually overwhelmed with volunteer roles to fill.
- **Your personality.** Think about which volunteer jobs match your interests. You may dislike organizing parties, but love interacting with kids. You could read to the class, lead games or work with small groups.
- **Your availability.** Some tasks require a weekly or monthly



- commitment, but others are occasional, such as chaperoning a field trip or decorating for an event. Check the school schedule often so you have the best chance of participating.
- **Your child.** Is there a volunteer activity that would mean the most to your child? Ask! Perhaps he's always wanted you to attend a class party or field trip. Or maybe he needs extra help in a certain subject.

Consider volunteer activities you can do after school hours



If you can't volunteer during school hours, don't feel guilty. There are countless ways to help out at home or on the weekends. All contributions, big and small, make a difference. For example:

- **Prepare a project.** Teachers spend lots of time cutting, gluing, stapling, collating and more. Much of this work can be done at home. If you're willing to help, let the teacher know!
- **Spruce things up.** Do the school grounds need landscaping, such as weeding or planting flowers? Does the teachers' lounge need fresh paint? Do library books need shelving? Ask which areas could use the most attention.
- **Get technical.** Computer skills are a valuable asset to busy teachers and staff. Offer to create a newsletter, publish a class directory, set up an email list, build a website, or organize and distribute a volunteer schedule.