

Elementary School Parents[®]

January 2010
Vol. 21, No. 5

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

make the difference!



Kids can't grow up responsibly if parents don't show them how

You probably know some people who've never quite grown up. They may have jobs, but never seem to be able to live on their own.

One reason may be that they didn't learn how to take on the responsibilities of adult life. Their parents may not have taught them the skills they need—to balance a budget or to take care of basic life skills like cooking or doing laundry.

If you want your child to grow up and live as an independent adult, you need to start teaching him those skills today. Here are some ways you can help your child develop the habits that will get him ready for adult life:

- **Expect him to get himself up** in the morning. Even a first grader can learn to wake up to an alarm.
- **Teach him to care for his own clothes.** Young children can put

clothes in the laundry basket.

They can fold their own clothes and put them away. Older kids can learn how to do laundry.

- **Help him manage money.** Whether it's an allowance or payment for extra chores, teach your child the value of saving.
- **Enlist his help.** Every family member should do something that helps out the family. Young children can set the table. Older kids can learn how to prepare a simple meal. When they do these things, thank them for making your home run more smoothly.
- **Volunteer.** Make time for your family to volunteer together. Doing something for others builds responsibility.

Source: William Damon, *The Path to Purpose: Helping Our Children Find Their Calling in Life*, ISBN: 9781-4165-3723-6 (Free Press, www.simonandschuster.net).

Teach your child the important skill of pacing



Your child can't be successful on a test if she only finishes a few questions.

Teaching your child how to pace herself can help.

Tests require a good sense of timing. If your child goes too quickly, she's likely to make careless mistakes. If she goes too slowly, she won't finish in time. To help your child:

- **Talk about activities** in which pacing is important. A 30-minute TV show can't last 27 minutes (or 33 minutes). If a child gets to the bus a minute late, she has still missed it!
- **Have your child try** to guess how long her homework will take her. At first, you might need to help. "Do you really think you could do 15 math problems in five minutes?" See how close her estimate is to the time it really takes.
- **Help your child work** more quickly. If making her bed takes five minutes, could she try to do it in four?

Source: Guinevere Durham, *Teaching Test-Taking Skills: Proven Techniques to Boost Your Student's Scores*, ISBN: 9781-5788-6572-7 (Rowman & Littlefield Education, www.rowmaneducation.com).

Too much screen time can equal too little play time for your child



Kids spend too much time in front of a TV or a computer and too little time in active play.

According to a recent scientific study, this is leading to an increase in childhood obesity.

More than 70 percent of 10-year-olds spend over two hours a day watching TV or playing on a computer. That means they don't have much time for active play.

You can probably figure out the result. Far too many children today are struggling with obesity. By age 11, one in five children is considered obese.

Over their lives, these kids will face many more health problems. They are more likely to contract diseases like diabetes.

What can you do? Here are some suggestions:

- **Limit time watching TV** and on the computer. If your child has a

cell phone, time spent texting is also considered screen time.

- **Build in time** for active play. Doctors recommend 60 minutes a day. Go to a park and play together!
- **Add exercise time** to screen time. Keep weights or an exercise mat nearby. During commercials, challenge your child to do sit-ups or a few jumping jacks.

Source: Sarah E. Anderson, Christina D. Economos and Aviva Must, "Active Play and Screen Time in US Children Aged 4 to 11 years in Relation to Sociodemographic and Weight Status Characteristics: A Nationally Representative Cross-sectional Analysis," Biomed Central, www.biomedcentral.com/1471-2458/8/366.

"Live so that when your children think of fairness and integrity, they think of you."

—H. Jackson Brown, Jr.

What can you do to make sure your child is listening to you?



You've talked and talked. But you feel like a television set with the volume turned down—your child just isn't listening.

Nothing is so frustrating to parents. But there are things you can do to make sure your child listens when you have something important to say.

To get your child to listen, try these two strategies:

1. **Make eye contact.** If your child's eyes are on the TV set, her brain is there, too. So calmly say, "Peyton, I need to say something to you.

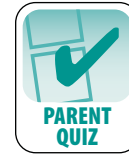
Could you look at me, please?"

Remember: If you shout, "Look at me when I'm talking to you," your child is likely to just tune you out!

2. **Remember that less is sometimes more.** Keep your instructions short and simple. It's best to give no more than two steps at a time. "Please pick up the books and put them on the shelf." Any more than that and your child is likely to forget what you've asked.

Source: Stanley Turecki and Leslie Tonner, *The Difficult Child*, ISBN: 0-553-38036-2 (Bantam Books, a Division of Random House, www.randomhouse.com/bantamdell).

Do you know how well your child is doing in school?



The school year is about at the midway point.

Do you have a good idea of how well your child is doing? Do you know

where problems could occur (or perhaps already exist)? Answer *yes* or *no* to each question below to find out:

___ 1. **Do you talk to your child** about the graded tests and projects he brings home?

___ 2. **Do you ask your child** why he thinks he received certain grades (good and bad ones) and what he has learned?

___ 3. **Have you contacted** your child's teacher to learn more about subjects he has problems with?

___ 4. **Do you check** your child's report card when it comes home, paying close attention to conduct and behavior grades?

___ 5. **Do you review** the results of state tests with your child's teacher?

How well are you doing?

Each *yes* means you are keeping up with your child's progress in school. For each *no* answer, try that idea in the quiz.

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.

Published monthly September through May by The Parent Institute®, a division of NIS, Inc., an independent, private agency. Equal opportunity employer. Copyright © 2010 NIS, Inc.

Publisher: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.

Editor: Rebecca Miyares.

Writers: Kristen Amundson & Susan O'Brien.

Illustrator: Joe Mignella.

Make thinking irresistible to your child with a few fun games



Ask your child if he wants to improve his thinking skills, and the answer will probably be “No way!” But ask if he wants to play games, and the answer will probably be “Yes!” By planning creative games, you can have fun and build thinking skills too. For example:

- **Discuss the day**—with a twist. At dinnertime, suggest that your child describe three things about his day. The twist is that one of them must be pretend, and other players have to guess which it is. Encourage your child to include plenty of details. A parent or older sibling can help your child prepare if needed.
- **Gather your family** or a group of friends in a circle. Tell a story, letting each person add one word at a time. If someone isn't sure what to say, he can say, “Pass.”

To make the game more challenging, ring a bell after nouns and adjectives. See if the group can name synonyms for them (words with similar meanings). *Happy* might become *cheerful*, *chipper* or *joyful*. Vote for your favorites and use them in the story.

- **Take a few moments** to write down the plot after watching a TV show or movie. Then read your summary aloud, leaving blanks for your child to fill in. “The plane landed in _____, where the passengers saw _____.”

Accept any answers that make sense. In fact, compliment your child for being able to provide several answers for one space! If the game is too hard, ask “multiple choice” questions your child is likely to get right.

Source: Paula Iley, *Using Literacy to Develop Thinking Skills with Children Aged 5-7*, ISBN-13: 978-1843122821 (David Fulton, www.routledgegeteachers.com).

Help your elementary schooler build strong observation skills



One thing that sets scientists apart is their skill as observers. Scientists notice and remember details. Here's a fun way to help your child develop this trait.

Ask your child to describe the front of a building she knows well. It could be your house, your apartment building or the school. Just choose a building that she sees regularly.

Have her be as accurate as she can. How many stories high is the building? What color is the front door? How many windows are there? Are the window frames painted a different color?

Write down what she thinks she remembers. Then take a trip. Walk outside to look at the front of your house. Walk down the street to see the school.

Check the reality against the details your child remembered. What observations were correct? Which details did she miss?

You can turn this into a game when you're out for a walk. Say, “How many windows were in the front of Mr. Johnson's house?” See if your child can remember without looking.

Source: Sally Berman, *Thinking Strategies for Science: Grades 5-12*, ISBN: 9781-4129-6288-9 (Corwin Press, a SAGE Publications Company, www.corwinpress.com).

Q: Lately, my son has been telling me he hates school. It doesn't happen every day, but it has happened more than once. I'm not sure how to respond—he has to go to school, after all. How can I sort out what's truth and what's exaggeration? And how can I help him without taking over his life?

Questions & Answers

A: Your questions are wise. Not all kids who say they hate school actually do. Sometimes, they're just looking for attention (or for a chance to put off homework). And not all parents who get involved with their child's school issues end up making things better.

Still, if he's said this more than once, there's probably something going on. Here's what to do:

1. **Talk to your child.** Wait for a time when he's relatively calm and when you have time to talk. Then ask him what's going on. “You've said you hate school a couple times. What's making you feel this way?”
2. **Identify the problem.** Listen closely to what your child says. Does he hate math class? Are kids mean to him on the bus? Is he feeling overwhelmed because he's in too many activities?
3. **Help your child find solutions.** For example, if he's struggling in a class, ask the teacher for advice. Does he need to spend more time on the subject? Is he turning in homework?
4. **Be positive.** Help your child see that nearly every situation has positives and negatives. Then help him build on the positives and minimize the negatives.

—Holly Smith,
The Parent Institute

It Matters: Attendance

Does my child's attendance really matter?



"Does it really matter if my child misses school?" parents wonder. "Yes!" say experts. Research

shows that regular attendance is linked to current and future school success. When kids miss too much school, they miss more than daily lessons. They miss the chance to build social and academic foundations that help with future learning.

To minimize attendance issues:

- **Remember that excused and unexcused absences** take a toll on learning. Keep track of how often your child is absent or tardy. In general, if a child is out of school 10% or more of the year, absences are considered particularly serious.
- **Keep the school calendar** handy when making plans. Schedule appointments and trips when school isn't in session. If your child needs to miss school, talk with the teacher.
- **Tell school officials** about problems that lead to absences. Many families face challenges with health, transportation, child care and other issues. Community programs may be able to help.
- **Avoid unnecessary absences** by establishing family routines that make life easier. Small changes, such as organizing school supplies at night and getting enough sleep, can make a big difference.

Source: Hedy N. Chang and Mariajosé Romero, "Present, Engaged, and Accounted For: The Critical Importance of Addressing Chronic Absence in the Early Grades," National Center for Children in Poverty, www.nccp.org/publications/pub_837.html.

Your family's good habits lead to your child's good attendance

Kids are tardy for all kinds of reasons, such as missing the bus, oversleeping and being unable to find something important. Some tardies are unavoidable, of course. But others are easily prevented with daily habits, such as:

- **Study routines.** Do homework at the same time, and in the same place, each day. Have your child double-check her schoolbag for anything you need to read or sign. When study time is over, pack the bag and put it by the front door.
- **Nighttime routines.** Stick to a regular bedtime each night. Kids might brush teeth, find the next day's outfit and put on pajamas, while parents pack lunches, set alarm clocks and tuck in kids. Any late-evening activities should be relaxing, such as listening to music or reading.



- **Morning routines.** Post a checklist of responsibilities, such as getting dressed, having breakfast and brushing teeth. Parents must stay on schedule, too, so their work (making breakfast, driving to school, etc.) supports their child's success.

Help your child stay healthy this winter to avoid missing school



Scientists estimate that up to 80% of infections are spread by hands.

That means a simple step—hand washing—

is the top way to stay well and avoid staying home sick.

Share these tips with your child:

- **Wash properly.** Wet hands, lather with soap and wash for 20 seconds. It takes about this long to sing the "Happy Birthday" song twice.
- **Include all parts of the hands**—front, back, fingernails, between

fingers, etc. To stay clean, use a fresh paper towel to turn off the faucet and open the bathroom door.

- **Wash hands** often, especially before eating. Soap and water work best. If they aren't available, use hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.
- **Sneeze or cough** into your elbow instead of your hand to reduce the spread of germs to others.

Source: "Put Your Hands Together," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, www.cdc.gov/CDCTV/HandsTogether/Transcripts/HandsTogether.pdf.