

Elementary School Parents

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make the difference!



Take time to review the first half of the school year

It's the beginning of a new calendar year—and nearly the halfway point in the school year. So it's a good time to take stock of your child's habits and make needed adjustments.

Talk with your child about how he thinks the school year is going. If the two of you set learning goals at the start of the year, review those goals now. Is he making progress? How can he make the rest of the school year even better?

Then, help your child make some resolutions. Here are four to consider:

- 1. Recommit to routines.** Has your child's bedtime begun to slip? Are mornings more rushed? Is his regular study time now not quite so regular? Sleep and study routines make life easier—and help kids do better in school.
- 2. Spend more time reading.** There is no skill that will help your child more in school. And reading ability, like other skills, gets better with practice. Encourage your child to read every day. Let him read about anything, from sports to his favorite movie characters.
- 3. Limit recreational screen media.** Talk about ways to reduce the amount of time your child spends watching videos and shows, playing games and browsing online. Set and enforce daily limits.
- 4. Have a positive mindset.** Positive thinking makes it easier for students to tackle challenges and ask for help. To promote positivity, help your child manage his stress, visualize a successful outcome and learn from his mistakes.

Improve school performance with breakfast



It takes a lot of energy for students to concentrate in class. So it's no surprise that kids

who start the school day without breakfast often lack focus.

Studies consistently show that breakfast affects how well kids do in school. One study looked at how breakfast affected students' attendance and academic performance. They found that children who ate breakfast had:

- **Better attendance.**
- **Fewer episodes of tardiness.**
- **Higher math scores.**
- **Improved concentration, alertness, comprehension, memory and learning.**

Families don't always have enough time for a sit-down breakfast together. So make sure you have a few healthy grab-and-go options available. An apple and a piece of cheese will get your child off to a good start. So will a whole-grain bagel and cream cheese. In a pinch, even a piece of last night's pizza will do!

Source: K. Baildon, "Breakfast and the Brain: How Eating Breakfast Impacts School Performance," USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture.

Three strategies can help your child learn how to plan ahead



Your child can't return her library book if she can't remember where she left it. She can't turn in an assignment if it's ...

well, who knows exactly where it is?

Parents know that young children can have a very hard time planning ahead. Here are three reasons why—and what you can do about each.

Most kids:

- 1. Have difficulty resisting** the temptation to do something fun instead of something hard. Make a simple rule: No TV or games until schoolwork is finished.
- 2. Lack organization skills.** Show your child how to use a calendar to track assignments, test dates

and activities. Establish a study space where school supplies and school papers “live.”

- 3. Have very little sense of time.** Often, they really do think that one day is enough time to finish that big project. Help your child break big projects down into smaller steps.

“Loving a child doesn't mean giving in to all his whims; to love him is to bring out the best in him, to teach him to love what is difficult.”

—Nadia Boulanger

Make the writing process easier by guiding your child's thinking



Ask any writer about the hardest part of writing and you're likely to hear the same answer: Getting started.

What's true for a seasoned writer is even more true for an elementary school child who's staring at a blank sheet of paper. What on earth will he write about? And how can he possibly fill all that white space? It can seem overwhelming.

You can help your child get off to a running start by asking questions and offering comments to guide his thinking. If your child is asked to write about a personal experience, for example, follow these three steps:

- 1. Help your child make a list** of his recent experiences: the day he put up the tent in the backyard (and watched it fall down); the day he scored a goal in his soccer game;

the time he sprained his ankle; the day his baby sister arrived. Then, have him select one of the experiences to write about.

- 2. Ask your child to tell you** about the experience. Telling a story is an effective way to remember the key points. Why were he and his dad putting up the tent? Where was the tent stored? Did they read the instructions? Your child can even draw pictures about what happened first, second and third.
- 3. Have your child answer** the basic newspaper reporter questions: *who, what, when, where, why* and *how*. Answering these types of questions will help him collect all of the important details he needs for his writing.

Source: C. Fuller, *Teaching Your Child to Write—How Parents Can Encourage Writing Skills for Success in School, Work and Life*, Berkley Books.

Are you helping your child develop 'word power'?



Knowing just the right word to use can give an elementary schooler real power. A strong vocabulary improves your

child's thinking and communication skills. And there is a clear connection between a strong vocabulary and academic success.

Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to see if you are expanding your child's word knowledge:

- 1. Do you talk about words?** When reading books together, discuss the meanings of unfamiliar words.
- 2. Do you use new words** for familiar ideas? “Let's tidy your room by *categorizing* your toys.”
- 3. Do you play word games** as a family, such as Scrabble?
- 4. Do you pick a Word of the Day** that family members try to use at least three times during that day?
- 5. Does your child have a personal dictionary** where he writes new words and their meanings?

How well are you doing?

More *yes* answers mean you are helping your child learn and use words. For *no* answers, try those ideas from the quiz.

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Make your family read-aloud time a success with these tips



Some parents stop reading aloud as soon as their children learn to read. But reading aloud can continue to be fun,

and it builds reading skills, too.

To make your read-aloud time successful:

- **Do it every day.** When you read aloud with your child daily, you demonstrate that reading time is much too important to miss.
- **Pick a regular time.** When reading is already part of your daily routine, you won't have to think about trying to fit it into a hectic day. Choose a time when your child will be most receptive, such as after playing outside or before bed.
- **Read the book first**—before you read it aloud. Reading aloud is performing. You'll do a better job if you're familiar with what you're going to read. Previewing a book may also keep you from getting bogged down in a book that neither you nor your child enjoys.
- **Read books you like.** If you like a book, odds are your child will, too. Start by reading books you enjoyed as a child. Often, your enjoyment will be contagious!
- **Emphasize the first line.** The first line of any good story will grab the reader's attention. Your reading should make your child want to sit up and listen.
- **Use facial expressions.** Widen your eyes to show surprise. Squint a bit to show you're thinking.
- **Leave your child wanting more.** Stop your day's reading at a point where you are both eager to hear what happens next.

Plan activities at home to boost your child's academic skills



Learning doesn't happen *only* in a school setting. You can reinforce your child's academic skills during after-school hours,

too. Here's how:

- **Have conversations** with your child about everything—and really listen to what she has to say.
- **Ask about** what your child is doing in her classes. Find out about her perspective on school.
- **Have your child teach you.** Ask her to explain something she is learning to you. Retelling the things she's learning reinforces them in her own mind.
- **Expose your child to new things.** Every meaningful experience your child has—from a visit to a construction site to a museum trip—has an impact on her learning. On your next outing, ask her how what she sees relates to what she is learning in school.
- **Help your child** engage in critical thinking. Discuss the similarities and differences between her classes.
- **Give your child** meaningful responsibilities. If you have a pet, ask her to help with its care. Teach her how to prepare simple meals, do laundry and other chores to help the family.
- **Respect your child's ability.** Let her use her knowledge and skills to help you. Ask for her advice when you are facing a problem at work.

Q: My older daughter is in middle school. She is a good student and talented athlete—learning and sports have always come easily to her.

My younger daughter is in third grade and is quite different from her sister. She has some learning challenges and is not athletic at all. She has begun to compare herself to her older sister and always says, "I'm the failure in this family."

How can I help her realize that she isn't a failure and that we love her just the way she is?

Questions & Answers

A: Younger siblings often feel like they're running to catch up. But with your love and support, your younger daughter can find ways to grow into her own special self—and improve her grades at the same time!

Research consistently shows that a positive self-image is linked to higher school achievement. And the best way to help your child see herself as capable is to discover some areas where she can be successful. Success in one area truly does lead to success in another.

What are your child's interests? If her sister is an accomplished soccer player, maybe she should try a different sport. Or maybe she'd be happier playing an instrument or learning to cook. Help her find activities that are different from her sister's and that will give her an opportunity to shine on her own.

Point out the things your child does well. Whether it's her sense of style or her kindness to others, remind her that these are very important—and that you are just as proud of those achievements as you are of her sister's soccer goals.

It Matters: Building Character

Persistence is key to success in school and in life



It's wonderful for students to be talented and smart, but educators know it's just as important for them to

be persistent. At one time or another everyone faces a challenging task or a heartbreaking setback. The key is to remind children to keep trying until they are successful. Pushing forward—even when it's tough—is a key to success in school and in life.

To promote persistence in your elementary schooler:

- **Talk about it.** How has persistence already helped your child? Maybe she kept trying until she learned to ride a bike or play chess. What new challenge can she tackle now?
- **Break big goals** into small parts. If your child is determined to raise her grade in English, support her by discussing steps and helping her develop a reasonable plan.
- **Offer encouragement.** When your child is working on something challenging, say things like:
 - » *I know you can do this.*
 - » *I bet you'll figure it out.*
 - » *You're making great progress. Keep at it. You'll get it.*
 - » *It will get better. You'll get the hang of it.*
 - » *If it doesn't work that way, try another way.*
- **Focus on the process.** Sure, it feels great to see an A on a report card, but it also feels great to do well on a test after studying hard. Even better, it feels great to learn! Talk with your child about her accomplishments and what makes each of them worthwhile.

Focus on four areas as you help your child develop character

Your child may have been born with certain personality traits, but think of her character as a work in progress. In other words, the kind of person she'll eventually become is still being shaped. Teach her to:

1. **Be flexible.** Model compromise and negotiation by listening to the opinions of others. Encourage your child to do the same.
2. **Show empathy.** Teach your child to imagine how others might feel and to treat them with kindness. Make caring for others a priority in your family.
3. **Have self-control.** Tell your child that she can't control others, but she can control her choices, actions and reactions. Encourage her to always think before she acts.
4. **Take responsibility.** Let your child know that responsibilities are like promises. They are things she has to do—especially when others are counting on her.



Try these highly effective ways to teach your child respect



In today's society where disrespect is common, it can be challenging to raise respectful children.

To encourage respect:

- **Be a good role model.** Respect, like most values, is *caught*, not *taught*. When your child sees you treating everyone with respect—from his teacher to the homeless person on the street—he'll learn that it's the proper way to behave.
- **Name it when you see it.** When you see other people behaving in respectful ways, make a positive comment. "Did you see how that man gave up his seat so that elderly woman could sit down? What a respectful thing to do." No lecture is necessary. Your child will get the message.
- **Praise it** when your child demonstrates it. "Cole, I felt very proud of you when you held the door for Mrs. Jones. I know she appreciated that respectful gesture."
- **Correct it.** If your child slips up, help him make a course correction. In private, say something like, "Remember what we said about how to greet guests?"
- **Report what you hear.** If a teacher or neighbor tells you that your child greeted her politely, let your child know how pleased you are with his respectful behavior.