

# Elementary School Parents<sup>®</sup>

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*make the difference!*



## Regular exercise boosts your child's health and academics

**P**hysical fitness provides many benefits for children. Studies show that regular physical activity is linked to higher self-confidence and attentiveness in school. It also lowers the chance of health problems such as type 2 diabetes.

To increase your child's activity level:

- **Plan family outings.** Pick activities your family enjoys and create some new healthy traditions. You might bundle up and go for a short walk after dinner or head to a park every Sunday afternoon.
- **Make suggestions.** When your child has a friend over, suggest they play games that involve movement, such as tag, soccer and jumping rope. Indoors, try games such as Simon Says and Red Light, Green Light.

- **Add movement to screen time.** Have your child take breaks that involve activity when watching TV or playing video games. For example, see how many sit-ups your child can do during commercial breaks.
- **Be creative.** During chore time, play music or race to finish a job. While doing errands, park a few blocks away from a store and walk. Or, make a quick stop at a playground on the way home.
- **Set an example.** Children are more likely to be active when they see family members staying fit. Let your child see you stretching, biking, walking with a friend, etc.

Source: A. McPherson and others, "Physical activity, cognition and academic performance: An analysis of mediating and confounding relationships in primary school children," *BMC Public Health*, BioMed Central.

## Strengthen your child's online research skills



Help your child develop important research skills by demonstrating how to find interesting

information online. Here are two games the whole family can play:

- **Scavenger hunt.** Make a list of 10 questions for which there is only one correct answer. For example: *What's the temperature in Buenos Aires right now? Who was the last Olympic Gold Medal winner in women's figure skating?* Then start a timer and see how quickly your child can find the answers (without asking Siri). Encourage the use of a variety of search terms to make the search more effective. Give the same list of questions to another family member and see who gets the best time!
- **Panning for gold.** Choose a famous person or event from history. Give everyone in the family 15 minutes to search online for interesting facts about that person or event. Share what each of you has learned. Vote for whose "nugget" of information turned out to be gold.

# Promote skills that will prepare your child for middle school



Long before students enter middle school, teachers start preparing them for its challenges.

You can do the same thing at home by encouraging your child to:

- **Manage time.** Demonstrate how to use short periods of time in productive ways. Your child could study flash cards on the way to basketball practice, or review math problems on the bus.
- **Get organized.** Make sure your child is using a planner to keep track of school assignments. Suggest ways to organize school papers and recommend cleaning out school bags and study spaces once a week.

- **Take notes.** Encourage your child to practice this skill while reading at home. Ask your student to identify and write down key words and information, then summarize the essential points.
- **Plan ahead.** Show your child how to make a study schedule and stick to it. Explain that several short study sessions are more effective than cramming.

**“The best preparation for good work tomorrow is to do good work today.”**

—Elbert Hubbard

# Downtime is vital for your child’s health and academic success



Some parents schedule every minute of their children’s time in an effort to prepare them for success in later life.

But studies suggest that kids benefit from enjoying unscheduled free time.

When days are packed with lessons, sports and other structured activities, children can become overwhelmed and stressed out. As a result, they don’t do as well in school and are more likely to get sick.

To determine if your child’s schedule is balanced, ask yourself:

- **Does my child** have time to play with friends? Practices that are planned and run by adults don’t count. Kids need time to relax and just “hang out” with other children.
- **When does my child** complete assignments? Working on them

while traveling between activities isn’t effective. Schoolwork takes concentration, and that takes time.

- **Why is my child** in these activities? Sometimes, parents are the ones who want their child to take a class or participate in a sport.
- **Does my child** get enough sleep? Children between the ages of six and 12 need nine to 12 hours of sleep each day to function well. School is your child’s most important job. If too many activities are getting in the way, ask your student to make a choice: “Which two activities do you enjoy the most?” For safety, middle school students should still be supervised, but increasing unstructured free time will increase your child’s happiness and health.

**Source:** C. Hennig, “The Lost Art of Play: How Overscheduling Makes Children Anxious,” CBC News.

# Are you building a bridge between home and school?



Studies consistently show that when families and schools form a strong team, students are more likely to succeed. They

learn more and do better in school.

School has been underway for a couple of months, so it’s a good time to think about the relationship you are building with the school. Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

- \_\_\_ **1. Have you met** with your child’s teacher at least once this year?
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you talk** with your child about school each day and review the information the school sends home?
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you monitor** schoolwork? If your child struggles with an assignment, do you ask the teacher how you can help at home?
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you make sure** your child gets to school on time each day?
- \_\_\_ **5. Have you reviewed** the school handbook together? Do you expect your child to follow all school rules?

## How well are you doing?

If most of your answers were *yes*, you are building a strong school-family team. For each *no* answer, try that idea from the quiz.

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# Bring geography to life with fun and educational activities



Learning about geography can make the entire world more relevant to your child. To strengthen interest in geography,

have your child:

- **Draw a map** of how to get from your house to school, the grocery store or a friend's house. Then follow the map together.
  - **Walk outside** and identify *north*, *south*, *east* and *west*, as well as *northeast*, *northwest*, *southeast* and *southwest*. Challenge your child to describe where things in your town are located. "My school is *northeast* of my house." "The library is *south* of the fire station."
  - **Go through your house** and talk about where various items came from. Look for labels to see where things were made. A calculator may have come from Taiwan.
- A box of cereal may have a Battle Creek, Michigan or Chicago, Illinois address. Locate them on a map.
- **Look for street patterns.** In some towns, streets run north and south, while avenues run east and west. Or, street names may be alphabetical. Help your child recognize the patterns.
  - **Start a collection** of objects from countries around the world. Stamps, postcards and coins are all easy items to collect, categorize and store.
  - **Learn more about** where your ancestors came from. Find these places on a map. If possible, help your child learn about the places ancestors lived before coming to this country. Where do your relatives live now? Again, check the map.

# Routine family dinners can improve outcomes for children



What does your child really want for dinner?

*You.* Families have varying schedules and you may wonder whether

gathering for a family meal is worth the effort involved. In fact, research suggests that family meals can make a real difference.

Studies have found that kids who eat dinner with their families four or more nights a week are less likely to try cigarettes, alcohol and marijuana. They also perform better in school.

Here's how to make family meals work for you:

- **Include your child** in mealtime conversations. Ask a few specific questions, such as, "What's one interesting thing that happened at school?"

interesting thing that happened at school?"

- **Keep it pleasant.** Don't use mealtime as an opportunity to argue or interrogate your child.
- **Laugh.** Humor makes dinnertime fun for everyone.
- **Be flexible.** If evening meals are hard to schedule, share breakfast with your child. You'll have the same chance to connect.
- **Go low-tech.** Turn off the TV and digital devices. Keep phones and tablets away from the table.
- **Don't worry** if you can't eat together every night. Try to have dinner together a few times each week.

**Source:** "Benefits of Family Dinners," The Family Dinner Project.

**Q:** My fourth-grader earns average grades, but I know they could be higher. Several of my friends pay their children for earning good grades. Is this something I should consider doing with my child?

## Questions & Answers

**A:** Parents want their children to do their best in school—and they are constantly looking for effective ways to motivate their kids to achieve. But there are some serious drawbacks to offering money for grades.

Paying for grades:

- **Doesn't allow children** to enjoy the satisfaction of learning. Kids don't need bribes to *want* to learn. They are natural learners. As they master new skills or memorize new facts, they gain self-esteem and self-confidence. However, when you pay your child for grades, you actually run the risk of *decreasing* your child's interest in learning.
- **Doesn't recognize effort.** Students should focus on doing their best. The goal is to keep trying and enjoy learning. If your child is trying but still struggling with the material, talk to the teacher.
- **Decreases intrinsic motivation.** Students who get paid for doing some things may expect to get paid for doing everything. Pretty soon, your child will expect a reward for every task you assign—from mowing the grass to taking out the trash to feeding the dog.

So what can you do to get your child's grades up? Help your student focus on learning and celebrate newly acquired skills. Praise your child for putting in the effort!

# It Matters: Discipline

## Take five steps to address clownish misbehavior



It's wonderful to have a good sense of humor. But it's no laughing matter when a student constantly disrupts

class with jokes and rude body sounds.

If your child is clowning around in school, take these steps:

- 1. Look for what's behind the behavior.** Sometimes children need attention or want to impress their classmates. Often, they try to use humor to cover up academic shortcomings.
- 2. Work with the teacher.** Together, try to identify when the problem behavior started and what might have triggered it. Acting up after recess, for example, may mean that your child needs help settling down. The teacher might help by assigning a high-profile task like handing out worksheets.
- 3. Talk about it.** Your child might not understand when it's OK to be silly and when it's not. Explain that there's a time when being funny and "clever" is actually being disrespectful.
- 4. Establish clear guidelines.** With the teacher's help, explain to your child what type of behavior you both expect.
- 5. Set consequences** that you and the teacher will enforce if your child breaks the rules.

By following these five steps, you and the teacher should be able to get your child's behavior back on track!

**Source:** K. Levine, *What To Do ... When Your Child Has Trouble at School*, Reader's Digest Books.

## Positive discipline is linked to better behavior at home & school

A recent review of discipline research reaffirms that physical punishment is ineffective—and actually increases behavior problems. Effective discipline should be focused on teaching correct behavior, rather than punishment. And it's most effective when it's delivered in a positive, calm and loving way.

When disciplining, consider your:

- **Words.** Tell your child exactly what you expect. For example, "It's time to work on your assignment" is better than, "Aren't you supposed to be doing your assignment?"
- **Tone of voice.** It's important not to sound too stern or too unsure. Try to find a happy medium, a tone that says, "I'm confident you will do as I say."
- **Body language.** If possible, face your child and make eye contact. Avoid intimidating gestures such



as shaking a finger or putting your hands on your hips.

- **Facial expression.** A calm look will encourage your child to cooperate. You don't need to look angry or upset.

**Source:** A. Heilmann, PhD and others, "Physical punishment and child outcomes: A narrative review of prospective studies," *The Lancet*, Elsevier.

## Improve your child's behavior with teacher-tested strategies



Can't get your child to focus on assignments? Pay attention? Respond to requests? Why not get help from those who get not just one child—but 20 or more children—to do what's expected?

Here's what teachers suggest:

- **Explain what you want your child to do.** Focus on the tasks you want to be routine—like putting items that go to school by the front door.
- **Post a schedule.** Your child will know what to do and when to do it—and will feel more independent.
- **Avoid abrupt transitions.** Let your child know how many minutes are left before it's time to switch gears and do something else.
- **Add excitement to ordinary tasks.** Challenge your child to clean up a mess in rhythm to music.
- **Use silent signals.** A gentle touch on the shoulder should get your child's attention. Flick the lights off and on to give a five-minute warning before bedtime.
- **Assign meaningful tasks.** Expect your child to contribute by doing chores that benefit the family.