

Helping Children Learn®

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL



October 2023

Encourage your child to think about situations, ideas and more

Elementary schoolers are expected to do more than memorize facts. Real learning also involves thinking about the material and drawing conclusions. These thinking skills take practice to develop.

To strengthen your child's thinking ability:

- **Ask questions** that require thought. After reading a story or watching a show together, talk about it afterward. Ask your child, "Why do you think the character did that?" or "Could something like that happen in real life?"
- **Think out loud.** When you are making up your mind about something, share your thoughts. "I'm thinking about who to vote for in the upcoming local election." Then talk with your child about the candidates' strengths and weaknesses. Your child may have some great insights.
- **Have family discussions** on topics of interest. Some families have a regular "reading dinner." Everyone brings a book to the table. After a few minutes of reading, family members talk about what they've read and ask questions about what everyone else has read.
- **Ask your child to guess** how simple machines and other items work. Do any of the parts look like other things your child knows about?
- **Encourage estimation.** Have your child estimate things like time needed for a task or cost of an item based on previous experience.



Meet teachers one-on-one

At a parent-teacher conference, you can find out more about what and how your child is learning. When you meet, ask the teacher:

- **What topics will you cover** in this grade or subject this year?
- **What are your expectations** for assignments and reading at home?
- **What can I do** at home to support my child's learning?

Help your child develop a taste for math

To promote comfort with fractions, point out that they are a key ingredient in many tasty meals. Then try these activities together:



- **Serve fractions** for dinner. Cut an apple into 12 slices. How many slices equal one-half or one-third of the apple?
- **Measure liquids.** Have your child use a measuring cup to pour one cup of water into a glass. How many half cups will it take to fill another glass the same size to the same level?
- **Change a recipe.** Ask your child to rewrite the amount of each ingredient to double a recipe or cut it in half.



Establish a communication link

Effective family-school communication is essential for meeting students' needs and fostering academic achievement. It starts with the understanding that you and the school have the same goal: your child's success.

To optimize communication:

- **Stay informed.** Attend meetings and read communications from teachers and the school.
- **Contact the teacher** if you have concerns about your child's learning. For questions about school policy, contact the office.
- **Listen.** A teacher's view of a situation may be different from yours.
- **Ask for clarification** of anything that is confusing.
- **Offer suggestions.** You know your child best. Explain factors the teacher may not know about and what you think would help most.
- **Follow up.** If a plan of action for your child isn't working, let the school know and discuss next steps for finding a solution.

Buddies can boost studies

Studying with a friend can help students master material and learn about working with others. To make it work, have your child:

- **Choose** a buddy who wants to learn.
- **Agree** that the goal is studying, not socializing.
- **Plan** what the buddies will study in each session—and stick to the plan.





How can I convince my child to see projects through?

Q: My fourth grader likes starting more than finishing. After an enthusiastic start on a project, about half-way through my child usually loses interest and wants to start something new. How can I encourage persistence?



A: Some children are always on the lookout for variety and excitement. But in school—and life—there are many things that have to be done even when they are no longer new and exciting. So help your elementary schooler experience the satisfaction that comes from seeing projects through to completion. To channel your child's energy and enthusiasm productively:

- **Brainstorm together** at the start of a project about everything your student will need to do. Bring up details that might slip your child's mind. When are you available to help get necessary supplies? Will anything need time to grow or dry?
- **Demonstrate how to break the project down** into steps. Seeing a long project as a series of different small ones may keep your child interested. Set a deadline for each step and write it on the calendar.
- **Add excitement by having your child** plan little self-rewards for completing "boring" parts of the project. "When I finish my bibliography, I can take 10 minutes to run around outside."



Are you making tests less frightening?

Some students get a little nervous before tests. But others go into full-blown panic that prevents them from doing their best. Are you helping your child conquer test anxiety? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

- ___ **1. Do you help** your child make and follow a study plan to prepare for the test?
- ___ **2. Do you explain** that while you expect your child's best effort, your love does not depend on a test score?
- ___ **3. Do you encourage** your child to talk with the teacher about test fears?
- ___ **4. Do you have** your child practice calming techniques like deep breathing, picturing a happy place or counting backwards from 100?

- ___ **5. Do you teach** your child to use reassuring self-talk? "I studied. I know this. I can think of the answer."

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are helping your child cope with test worries. For each no, try that idea.

"One important key to success is self-confidence. An important key to self-confidence is preparation."
—Arthur Ashe

Stay positive when talking to your child about grades

If your child's grades need improvement, a supportive—rather than upset—response from you can make a difference. To encourage your elementary schooler's best effort:

- 1. Talk to your child.** Ask questions like: What do you think is going on? Do you understand the lessons? Do you complete your work in class? What could you do differently?
- 2. Talk to the teacher.** Is your child having any issues at school? What resources are available to help?
- 3. Show your child** how to find or figure out answers instead of just giving up.

Downtime has an upside

Studies show that kids need some downtime from formal learning activities—and it can be a perfect time to learn in a different way. It's OK for your child to be bored sometimes. If



you hear "There's nothing to do," offer a challenge: "What screen-free activity can you come up with to fill the time?"

Source: L. Waters, Ph.D., "How Goofing Off Helps Kids Learn," The Atlantic.

Your engagement matters

Family engagement in education raises students' chances of earning higher grades, completing schoolwork, getting along with others, graduating from high school and more. To benefit your child the most:

- **Start early**, and stay involved through high school.
- **Promote learning at home** and ask the school about ways to help that match your time and talents.
- **Be confident.** All families have valuable contributions to make.

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