

Helping Children Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL



September 2024

Inspire your elementary schooler to meet high expectations

From the first days of a new school year to the last, one of the most fundamental ways you can encourage academic achievement is to let your child know that you *expect* it. When families express high, realistic expectations, their children are likely to meet them.



To reinforce your message in positive ways:

- **Show confidence in your child.** Avoid responding to success with surprise. If your elementary schooler brings home a high grade on a hard math test, for example, act like you never had any doubt. "That's awesome! I knew all the practicing you did would pay off!"
- **Keep mistakes in perspective.** Never belittle your child for an error. Failure happens to everyone sometimes. Show that mistakes won't change your love for your child. Just help your child figure out what can be learned from the error, and move on. Always be your child's "safe place."
- **Empower your child to take action** when something goes wrong. When unfortunate things happen, help your child think about how to handle similar situations in the future. Don't chalk them up to bad luck or a mean teacher. This can make your child feel like a powerless victim.

Source: W.H. Jaynes, "A Meta-Analysis: The Relationship Between the Parental Expectations Component of Parental Involvement with Students' Academic Achievement," *Urban Education*, Sage Journals.



Encourage student responsibility

Elementary schoolers sometimes forget their supplies, their schoolwork and their lunches. But keeping track of these and other school responsibilities *for* your child won't help in the long run.

Instead, help your child become a responsible student. Here's how:

- **Create checklists.** With your child, make lists of responsibilities and items needed for school. Make checking items off the lists part of your student's morning routine.
- **Teach your child** how to keep track of activities, due dates and test dates on a weekly calendar.
- **Help your child choose** places to store things when not in use.
- **Foster independence.** Put your child in charge of organizing and packing up school supplies.
- **Allow your child** to experience the consequences of forgetting or losing an item.
- **Offer specific praise** when your child shows responsibility.

Instill a love of learning

Students who are motivated by their own desire to learn retain what they learn longer and earn higher grades. To encourage this:

- **Ask your child** to consider, "What do I want to learn from this assignment?"
- **Help your child** recognize progress. Offer positive feedback.
- **Help your child** pursue learning interests.

Start smart with routines

Routines make it easier for children to remember tasks and carry them out. For a smoother school year, set up these routines:

- **An evening prep session.** Agree on outfits, make and refrigerate lunches, pack backpacks and set them by the door. Mornings will be much less hectic!
- **A soothing bedtime.** Choose a time that allows for nine to 12 hours of sleep. Help your child relax with a bath and a cozy read aloud.
- **A reading** and schoolwork time. This should be when your elementary schooler will have the most energy and motivation.



Begin a helpful partnership

Forming a working relationship with your child's teacher will help you both help your child learn. To start one:



- **Introduce yourself** to the teacher. Ask how you can support learning at home.
- **Share information** throughout the year. Tell the teachers about changes at home that may affect your child.
- **Communicate respectfully.** Give busy teachers a few days to answer.



My child is prone to meltdowns. What can I do?

Q: My second grader's response to anger and frustration is often a tantrum. This happens at home and at school—and the teacher is asking me to help. How can I help my child learn self-control?

A: When children don't have the skills to cope with the strong emotions they feel, they may resort to tearful outbursts. But being able to maintain self-control and respond appropriately to big emotions is important for success in the classroom.

Begin by trying to find out what's behind your child's tantrums. Keep a record of your child's behavior for one week. What happens before a tantrum begins? Do you notice patterns? Then, help your child avoid some of the situations that add to stress, such as hunger and fatigue.

Next, share strategies your child can use when feeling angry or upset. At home, show your child how to:

- **Take time to cool down.** Have your child walk away from a situation for a five-minute break. Say, "You may return when you can talk calmly."
- **Use relaxation techniques,** such as taking deep breaths while slowly counting to 10. Teach your child to repeat "I can work through this."
- **Name the feelings.** Help your child become more self-aware. Teach your child to recognize different emotions—frustration, annoyance, sadness, disappointment, etc.—and use the words for them when they arise.



Are you boosting learning self-reliance?

Do you regularly hear "Help me!" before your child even tries tackling a task? It may be time to work on developing self-reliance. Are you helping your child become an independent learner? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

1. **Do you say** things like, "I bet you can figure this out"?
2. **Do you encourage** your child to problem-solve by asking questions? "What did you learn about this in class?"
3. **Do you help** your child break tasks down into smaller pieces? "Is there any part of this you *can* do?"
4. **Do you talk** about things your child has learned through persistent effort?
5. **Do you praise** your child for completing work without

help, even if it is not the way you would have done it?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are helping your child learn to solve problems independently. For each no, try that idea.

"Education is experience, and the essence of experience is self-reliance."

—T.H. White

Attendance is rewarding

By doing one thing every day, you can help your child learn, do better on tests and make friends more easily—and reduce drop-out risk. That is to make sure your child attends school. To help your student reap the benefits that come with regular attendance:

- **Explain to your child** that attending school is important—and not optional.
- **Keep track of absences.** Look for patterns that need to be addressed.
- **Tell the teacher** if your child regularly doesn't want to go to school, or if your family faces attendance obstacles.

Source: A. Ansari and M.A. Gottfried, "The Grade-Level and Cumulative Outcomes of Absenteeism," *Child Development*, The Society for Research in Child Development.

Turn off screens and read

Research points to a link between digital media use and delays in young children's ability to understand what they read. In one study, children who read more and reported less screen use created brain connections that make kids better readers. Children who spent more time with screens and read less did not. At home, limit recreational screen use, and offer your child unlimited hours of fun with books and reading!



Source: E. Heubeck, "Is Too Much Screen Time, Too Early, Hindering Reading Comprehension?" *EducationWeek*.

Encourage extra effort

Doing the bare minimum required will take your child only so far. Explain that doing a little bit more usually leads better results. Encourage your child to:

- **Read a few extra pages** of an assigned reading.
- **Start a project early** and add a detailed illustration, graph or chart.
- **Solve a few extra math problems** to master a concept.

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P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474

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