

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

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## make the difference!



## Three fun ways to celebrate your child's achievements

There is no better motivator for a child than setting a goal and reaching it. But sometimes, a major accomplishment also calls for a celebration.

Perhaps your child earned a higher grade in a class this grading period. Or, maybe your child finally finished reading that book series. Whenever your child sets and reaches a challenging goal, try one of these fun ideas:

1. **Take a picture** of your child reaching the goal—holding up a report card or a finished book series, for example. You could also ask your child to draw a picture of the accomplishment.

Frame the picture and place it by your child's bed. When children regularly see images of themselves

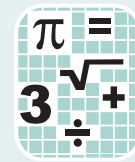
being successful, they will start to see themselves as achievers.

2. **Plan a special surprise.** On one side of a piece of paper, write down a goal your child wants to achieve. On the other side, write down a small reward—such as having a friend over for a sleepover.

Roll up the paper, put it into a balloon, and then blow up the balloon. Once the goal is reached, have your child pop the balloon to find out what the reward is.

3. **Host a family victory dinner** to celebrate your child's success. Set a "fancy" table and serve some of your child's favorite foods. During dinner, ask your child to say a few words about how great it feels to reach a goal.

## Look for lines of symmetry in nature



If you fold a picture of a butterfly in half, you'll notice that the two halves match exactly. That's

because butterflies, like many things in nature, are *symmetrical*.

Showing your child how to look for lines of symmetry is a great way to practice recognizing patterns. It is also a fun family activity that can give your child a new way of looking at nature.

To get started:

- **Look for natural objects** that are symmetrical and take photos of them. Flowers, leaves, spider webs and shells may all have these lines.
- **Have your child predict** where the line of symmetry will be. Then fold along that line to see if the two sides match up exactly.
- **Find lines of symmetry** in other places, such as in the pages of a magazine or book. Remember that lines of symmetry can be vertical (as in the letter A) or horizontal (as in the letter B). They can even be diagonal. Sometimes, things may have more than one line of symmetry.

## Regular family meetings build skills and make life a bit easier



Weekly meetings can make family life run more smoothly—and help children learn about cooperation and leadership.

To hold productive family meetings:

- **Establish a schedule.** Meet at the same time every week and keep meetings brief. Fifteen minutes is often long enough.
- **Set ground rules.** No devices or other distractions.
- **Plan an agenda.** During the week, let family members jot down issues they'd like to address.
- **Encourage participation.** Give each family member a chance to talk uninterrupted.
- **Brainstorm solutions** for concerns raised during the meeting. Consider everyone's ideas.

- **Discuss expectations** for the upcoming week and review goals.
- **Coordinate schedules.** Review your family calendar and discuss who is doing what this week.
- **End with a team-building activity.** Play a quick game, or make up a story or sing a song.

After a few meetings, let family members take turns being the meeting leader.

**“Unity is strength ... when there is teamwork and collaboration, wonderful things can be achieved.”**

—Mattie Stepanek

## Women's History Month is a great time to read a biography



March is Women's History Month—the perfect time for your child to read a biography of a famous woman.

To find a biography your child will enjoy, talk about interests. If your child likes:

- **Sports**, consider reading about Wilma Rudolph, a three-time Olympic gold medal winner.
- **Politics**, read about Victoria Woodhull, who in 1870 became the first woman to run for president. Or, look for a book about Sandra Day O'Connor, the first woman appointed to the United States Supreme Court.
- **Fashion**, find a biography about Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis, who

was considered a cultural and fashion icon in the 1960s.

- **Science**, read about Marie Curie, the only person to win a Nobel Prize in two different sciences—chemistry and physics.
- **Helping others**, learn more about Mother Teresa, who dedicated her life to serving the poor and disadvantaged.
- **Space**, read about Sally Ride who was the first American woman in space. Upon her return, she dedicated her life to helping girls excel in STEM fields.

Read the book together or let your child read it independently, but don't stop there. Encourage your child to do some additional research on the person online.

## How well are you listening to your child?



Communication between parents and children is important for developing a positive relationship. You want your child to know

that you are always available to talk about any school problems or difficult situations. But when your child talks, are you really listening? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you give your child** some uninterrupted listening time every day, like after school or at bedtime?
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you avoid interrupting** when your child is speaking to you?
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you say that you want** to hear what your child has to say—and if you're not able to listen, set a time when you can give your full attention?
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you ask questions** if you don't understand what your child is saying?
- \_\_\_ **5. Do you sometimes rephrase** what your child has said to confirm that you understood?

### How well are you doing?

If most of your answers are *yes*, you are promoting effective communication with your child by demonstrating strong listening skills. For *no* answers, try those ideas.

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# March weather activities can teach your child science skills



According to the old saying, March comes in like a lion and goes out like a lamb. Is this true where you live?

In many parts of the country, March brings changeable weather—which makes it a great time to enjoy science and other weather-related activities.

With your child:

- **Keep a temperature graph.** Have your child record and graph the temperature each day for a month. Or, use the online weather report for your area. Record whether the day was sunny, cloudy or rainy.
- **Measure the rain.** You'll need a plastic jar with straight sides and a flat bottom, a ruler and a marker. On the outside of the jar, use the ruler and marker to mark off each quarter inch. Have your child keep track of the amount of rainfall.

- **Make wind chimes.** You'll need four clean, empty cans, some string and a coat hanger. Make sure the edges of the cans are not sharp. Help your child punch a hole in the bottom of each can. Tie a knot in one end of the string and thread the string through a can. Then tie the other end to your hanger. Repeat with each can. Each time the wind blows, the cans will make music!

You and your child can also go online to learn more about weather. Check out these fun, age-appropriate websites:

- **Weather Wiz Kids**, [www.weatherwizkids.com](http://www.weatherwizkids.com).
- **The Old Farmer's Almanac for Kids**, [www.almanac4kids.com/weather](http://www.almanac4kids.com/weather).
- **NASA's Climate Kids**, [climatekids.nasa.gov/menu/weather-and-climate](http://climatekids.nasa.gov/menu/weather-and-climate).

# Offer support when your child has a writing assignment



A writing assignment can seem like a tough challenge for many students. Good writing involves everything from understanding a subject to knowing how to organize thoughts to checking spelling and punctuation.

To support your child:

- **Suggest that your child** “talk through” some ideas before starting to write. Clear writing starts with clear thinking.
- **Encourage your child** to take notes and make an outline before starting to write. Organized thoughts will make the writing clearer.
- **Remind your child** that first drafts aren't supposed to be perfect.

Students should focus on what to say first—and edit the paper for spelling and grammar later.

- **Offer plenty of praise** to motivate your child to keep working. Be as specific as you can: “I really like the way you've described what led up to this event. I understand it much better now.”
- **Don't over criticize.** It's helpful to point out errors now and then, but if you are always looking for what's wrong, your child will be less likely to ask for help in the future.
- **Be patient.** Good writing takes time. Your patience and support can help your child develop into a clear thinker and skilled writer.

**Q:** My fourth-grader does well on tests and quizzes, but doesn't always complete daily assignments. How can I get my child to take schoolwork more seriously?

## Questions & Answers

**A:** It's critical that your child learn to take schoolwork seriously. Although quizzes and tests may have a larger impact on overall grades, it's regular assignments that reinforce knowledge on a daily basis.

To help your elementary schooler become a more responsible student:

- **Explain how you feel.** If you haven't spelled it out yet, do so now. “I've noticed that you blow off your assignments quite a bit. That's not OK, so let's figure out how to change the situation.”
- **Enforce a daily work time.** Brainstorm with your child to find a time that works best—and make sure your child sticks to it. “Study time starts at five o'clock. No arguments.” If there are no assignments, your child can use the time to review class notes, get started on a long-term project or read.
- **Tie schoolwork to privileges.** “After you have finished your assignment, you may go outside and play basketball.” To show your child you're serious, be sure to check that the work was really completed.
- **Follow up at school.** If your home strategies don't work, get the teachers involved. Let your child know that you'll be checking with them each week to see whether your student is turning in completed assignments. Set appropriate consequences for not doing so.



# It Matters: Mental Health

## Boost emotional well-being with family meals



Eating together as a family can boost your child's mental wellness. Regular family meals strengthen relationships,

giving your child a sense of security and connection.

Here's how to get the most out of meals with your child:

- **Make eating together a priority.** It doesn't always have to be dinner. If you work in the evening, have breakfast with your child or plan a weekend picnic or brunch.
- **Involve your child** in planning and preparing nutritious meals. Ask your child to choose the vegetable, toast bread for sandwiches or toss a salad. Having a say in what you eat and helping to get it on the table will give your child a more positive attitude toward family meals and teamwork.
- **Enjoy pleasant conversations.** Mealtime is a great time to check in by asking about your child's day. Sharing something about your own day first may inspire your child to speak up.

You can also spark conversations by asking a "question of the day." The question can be silly or serious. Go around the table and have each person answer. Have family members take turns coming up with future questions.

- **Eliminate distractions.** Turn off the TV and put away those mobile devices. You'll be fully present and able to focus your attention on one another.

Source: "Increasing Family Meal Consumption to Boost Mental Health," The Food Industry Association.

## Teach your child how to recognize and manage feelings

All children feel worried or upset sometimes. Being aware of these feelings and thoughts is the first step toward managing them in healthy ways. Here's how:

- **Talk about thoughts.** When your child seems sad or anxious, ask, "What are you thinking about right now?" Your child might say, for example, "I'm worried no one will sit with me in the cafeteria at lunch tomorrow."
- **Show understanding.** Put your child's feelings into words. "I know you're worried about finding someone to eat with at lunch tomorrow."
- **"Flip" thinking.** Tell your child to make negative thoughts do a "flip" so they're more positive or helpful. Your child might think, "I can ask my reading buddy to have lunch



with me" or "I can tell my teacher I'm worried about sitting alone."

If your child often seems worried or upset, talk to your child's teacher, school counselor or pediatrician.

Source: "Catch, Check, and Change Your Thoughts," National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine.

## Did you know that playtime is a proven stress reliever?



When children have fun, their brains release chemicals that cause happiness and reduce stress—which leads to improved mental health.

To get the most from playtime:

- **Make time for active play.** Your child needs at least one hour of daily exercise for good physical and mental wellness. Active play (jumping rope, playing tag, etc.) counts toward that hour. Have your child keep a physical activity diary for a week—does it total at least seven hours?

- **Limit recreational screen time.** Hands-on, real-life play stimulates your child's brain better than passively looking at a screen. Together, make a list of screen-free playtime activities. When your child wants to play a video game, point to the list.
- **Play with your child.** Parent-child play is great for strengthening bonds. Have a family board game night, build something together or ask to join in your child's pretend play.

Source: S. Wang, Ph.D. and S. Aamodt, Ph.D., "Play, Stress, and the Learning Brain," *Cerebrum*, National Library of Medicine.