

Elementary School Parents[®] *make the difference!*

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Celebrate the month of April with fun learning activities

April may bring showers—but it also brings learning opportunities. Here are some fun things you can plan to do with your child:

- **April 2** is International Children's Book Day and Hans Christian Andersen's birthday. This day is designed to inspire a love of reading. Head to the library and grab some books!
- **April 13** is the birthday of Thomas Jefferson. Go online to learn more about this president. Take a virtual tour of his home, Monticello, at explorer.monticello.org/virtualtour.
- **April 15** is income tax deadline day. Talk about the purpose of taxes. Practice calculating percentages with your child.
- **April 22** is Earth Day. As a family, think of something you can do to protect the earth. Perhaps you could plant a tree or set up a recycling station at home.
- **April 23** is the day Shakespeare's birthday is celebrated. Ask your child to write a scene for a play and act it out with friends or family.
- **April 26** is the birthday of John James Audubon, who is known for his drawings and paintings of North American birds. Ask your child to draw pictures of the birds she sees.
- **April 30** is International Jazz Day. Find a radio station that plays jazz and listen to it with your child. Then each of you can describe how the music makes you feel.

Build your child's online research skills



Help your child develop important research skills by showing him 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 Madrid 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. Teach him to use a variety of search terms to make his 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!

Give your elementary schooler practice making decisions



The best way to learn how to make good decisions is by making lots of them. So give your child as many opportunities as you can to make choices.

Young children can decide which healthy items to pack for lunch, or which long sleeve shirt to wear, for example. Older children can make decisions about more significant things. Of course, you must still set the boundaries. For example, your child can decide whether to do her science or her social studies homework first, but she can't decide to watch TV before she starts her homework.

Gradually give your child more freedom to make decisions. Keep in mind that children don't always

connect outcomes with the choices they have made, so help your child think about the potential consequences of her decisions.

If she makes a poor decision, sit down and talk about why it didn't work. Ask, "What would you do differently next time?" The next time she has to make a decision, she will be able to draw on what she learned.

"Listen to the desires of your children. Encourage them and then give them the autonomy to make their own decision."

—Denis Waitley

Learn why teachers assign different types of homework



While doing her math homework, your child says, "Why do I have to do the same kinds of problems over and over? I'm tired of them!"

It's true that teachers sometimes assign repetitive homework, and it's helpful for students and parents to know why. Here are four kinds of assignments—and the reasons teachers use them:

- 1. Practice homework.** Doing the same kind of work repeatedly helps students remember a skill. This is especially true when it comes to learning math, word definitions and spelling.
- 2. Preparation homework.** This is a way to introduce students to new topics. For instance,

students might read a book about animals before studying animal families.

- 3. Extension homework.** Students need to be able to connect separate topics. For example, they might be asked to compare and contrast two historic events.
- 4. Creative homework.** Teachers like to challenge students to use different skills to show what they've learned. For instance, your child might be asked to build a model for science class.

Of course, all homework builds your child's self-discipline. So remind her that even if she doesn't see a reason for a homework assignment, she still must do it.

Source: M. Martin and C. Waltman-Greenwood, *Solve Your Child's School-Related Problems*, HarperCollins.

How well are you listening to your child?



Communication between you and your child is very important. You want him to know that he can always talk to you about school

problems or difficult situations he may be facing. 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 when he comes home from school or at bedtime?**
- 2. Do you avoid interrupting your child when he is speaking to you?**
- 3. Do you tell your child that you want to hear what he has to say, and if you're not able to listen, set a time when he can have 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 make sure 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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Responsibility is crucial for your elementary schooler's success



Educators agree that responsible children do better in school. Luckily, families have endless opportunities

to foster responsibility.

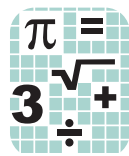
To boost your child's sense of responsibility:

- **Enforce a few age-appropriate** rules and consequences. State them clearly so your child knows exactly how you expect him to behave—and what will happen if he doesn't.
- **Trust him with meaningful tasks.** School-age children are capable of handling responsibilities such as picking up their rooms, setting the table and helping with the laundry.
- **Discuss ways to help others.** Talk about what it means to be a responsible member of a community.

Consider different ways your family can contribute, such as by donating gently-used clothing to a charity or volunteering your time for an important cause.

- **Talk about financial responsibility.** Many kids receive an allowance. Even a small one provides a great opportunity to teach about budgeting, spending, saving and giving.
- **Let your child make decisions,** such as how to solve a problem with a friend at school. Making decisions builds confidence.
- **Adjust rules and responsibilities.** As your child matures, his abilities will change. Perhaps he can take on more grown-up chores. Or perhaps he can make new and exciting decisions. Talk about how great it feels to be responsible!

Regular review helps your child strengthen math skills



Success in math is built on mastering basic skills. Help your child establish math review habits that reinforce these skills.

Here's how:

- **Regularly quiz your child** on basic math facts: 2×9 , $12 - 4$, $6 + 6$, etc. Together, make a set of flash cards with the math facts he needs to know. Review them together often—at the breakfast table, in the car or while waiting at the doctor's office. Your child has mastered a math fact when he can give the correct answer in less than three seconds.
- **Resist providing the answers.** Your child will learn better if you show him how to find them instead. For instance, if he doesn't know

what 3×5 is, have him draw three parallel horizontal lines. Cross them with five vertical lines. Then have him count the intersections to get the answer.

- **Have your child practice** writing numbers neatly. Many of the math errors students make are due to messy number writing. Your child could use graph paper to make sure his numbers are neatly lined up.
- **Encourage your child** to work more problems than the teacher assigns. Good math skills come with practice.
- **Challenge your child** to do math "in his head." See if he can figure out a problem without using pencil and paper or a calculator. Practice estimating, too.

Q: My daughter is starting middle school next year and won't be attending the same school as most of her friends. She's very anxious about this move. What can I do over the next few months to ease her nerves?

Questions & Answers

A: Middle school is a really big adjustment for any child. Instead of having one teacher, your child will have several. Instead of staying in one classroom, she will have to move from room to room. Instead of being in the highest grade level in the school, she will now be in the lowest.

It is completely normal for your daughter to feel anxious about this transition. To help her feel a little more confident:

- **Sign up for a tour.** See if she can take a tour while classes are in session. Just walking around the building and seeing students will give your child a better idea of what to expect (and even what to wear) on her first day.
- **Buy a combination lock** and have your child practice opening it. Lockers are a big source of anxiety for many kids. Even if your child has to learn a new combination when school starts, she'll feel confident that she can open and close her locker.
- **Remind your child** that she won't be the only new kid in her school. Everyone will be starting fresh. Assure her that she'll still have opportunities to see her old friends, even if they're at a different school.
- **Check out school activities.** If your child can get started on a team or in the band over the summer, she'll make some new friends before the school year starts.

It Matters: Motivation

Encouragement is more effective than praise



Most parents praise their children with phrases like “Great job!” and “That looks amazing!” But experts agree that *encouragement* has a bigger effect than *praise* on a child’s motivation. So what is the difference between the two?

Praise:

- **Discusses results.** “You did a great job on your science project! You got an A!”
- **Uses opinion words** such as *good*, *great*, *terrific* and *wonderful*.
- **Is typically given** when your child has performed as you had hoped she would.

Encouragement:

- **Notifies effort and progress.** “Look at that project! I can tell you’ve spent a lot of time on it! It must feel good to know you worked so hard!”
- **Uses descriptive words.** “You picked up your room without being asked. Look at that *clean* floor and *organized* desk!”
- **Can be given** regardless of your child’s performance. “That didn’t work out the way you planned, did it? I can tell you’re disappointed, but I know you’ll try again next week. What do you think you might do differently next time?”

The big difference is that words of praise lead your child to rely on *your* assessment of her accomplishments, while words of encouragement lead her to form her *own* positive assessment of herself. Encouragement makes motivation soar!

Five strategies can increase your child’s motivation to learn

Kids who are motivated to learn are likely to be more successful in school than those who are not.

To motivate your child:

1. **Be a learner yourself.** Let your child see you read books. Watch educational programs. Attend school functions. Try new things. Show curiosity.
2. **Share what you learn.** Talk about new ideas or scientific discoveries with your child. Discuss things you read or hear.
3. **Show an interest** in what he is learning. Ask questions to learn and share—not to check up on your child.
4. **Stay positive.** If your child has problems in school, help him see that problems can be solved. Meet with the teacher to figure out ways your child can improve.



Then discuss ways you can work together to help him succeed.

5. **Let your child know** you believe he can learn. If you show faith in his ability to learn, he will have more confidence in himself.

Foster academic achievement by setting high expectations



Expect your child to succeed, and her chances for success will improve greatly. Expect her to come up short, and the odds are that she will.

Children are usually keenly aware of how their parents view them, and they often tailor their actions to those views. So it’s very important to have high expectations—and to express them to your child.

To set effective expectations:

- **Make sure what you expect** is within your child’s abilities. If you set expectations that are either too

high or too low, your child may do poorly.

- **Let your child know** what you expect of her. Make a list of expectations. Cover places and situations such as home, school, homework, etc.
- **Be consistent.** Don’t lower your expectations to make your child happy. Don’t raise them because you’ve had a rough day.
- **Set your child up for success.** Give her the ways and means to meet your expectations. For example, provide a well-lit study space and necessary school supplies.