

Elementary School Parents[®]

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make the difference!



Review the school year and make necessary adjustments

It's the beginning of a new calendar year—and nearly the halfway point in the school year. So it's a good time to take stock of your child's habits and make needed adjustments.

Talk with your child about how she thinks the school year is going. If the two of you had set learning goals at the start of the year, review those goals now. Is she making progress? How can she make the rest of the school year even better?

Then, help your child make some resolutions. Here are three to consider:

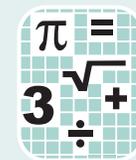
1. Recommit to routines. Has your child's bedtime begun to slip? Are mornings more rushed? Is her regular study time now not quite

so regular? Sleep and study routines make life easier—and help kids do better in school.

2. Spend more time reading. There is no skill that will help your child more in school. And reading ability, like other skills, gets better with practice. Encourage your child to read every day. Let her read about anything, from sports to her favorite movie character.

3. Spend less time on screen media. Talk about the amount of time your child spends in front of screens. How much time does she spend watching shows and movies? Playing online games? Browsing the internet? Set and enforce limits.

Use toothpicks to reinforce math concepts



A box of toothpicks is all you need to teach your child some valuable math skills—reasoning, number sense and even basic geometry. Toothpick math is also a fun way to make time go faster while waiting at an appointment.

Here are some fun ways to put a box of toothpicks to use:

- **Last one wins.** This is a great game for two people. Lay out 12 toothpicks. Taking turns, players may remove one or two toothpicks. The player who takes the last toothpick wins. (Try to leave three toothpicks on the table to guarantee a win on your next turn.)
- **Can you copy this?** Using five toothpicks, create a design. Let your child look at it for only three seconds. Then cover it up and see if your child can recreate it from memory.
- **Tricky triangles.** Give your child seven toothpicks. How many triangles can he create? For even more toothpick fun, head to www.education.com/activity/article/Toothpick_Math and download a page of toothpick puzzles to try!

Share tips to help your child master reading assignments



Some kids rush through the reading assigned for homework and think, “That’s it. Finished!”

Reading the chapters the teacher assigns is essential. But homework doesn’t end there.

To truly learn from the text, your child must study as she reads. Strong study skills will also help her prepare better for tests.

So show your child how to:

- **Skim chapters** to find important themes and key points. She should first look at headings and subheads. Then she can take note of boldface and italicized words. Material in the margins is important, too.

- **Take notes** in her notebook as she reads. Or, if allowed, your child can highlight key passages right in the book or on the handout.
- **Pay attention** to illustrations, graphs, tables and charts. These can clarify important concepts.
- **Write a short summary** of the material in her own words. She can also tell you about what she’s read.

“Continuous effort—not strength or intelligence—is the key to unlocking our potential.”

—Liane Cordes

Doing chores helps kids develop important values and skills



In the past, children had to do their chores. With everyone doing their part, the family was able to survive.

Today’s kids don’t always have family responsibilities. And that’s too bad. There are significant benefits for children who do chores—and those benefits also carry over into school.

Chores help children:

- **Become “stakeholders.”** When your child does some of the tasks that keep the household running, he makes a real investment in your home. A child who swept out the front hall is less likely to walk through it in muddy soccer cleats.
- **Develop skills.** Each time you give your child a new chore, he learns how to do the job and also learns skills he’ll use throughout his life.
- **Understand** that the world doesn’t revolve around them. We all know people who expect others to clean up the messes they make. Your child won’t grow up to become one of those people.
- **Learn to work well with others.** If you have more than one child, ask them to do a chore together. Or, encourage them to create a weekly chore chart and alternate responsibilities.
- **Develop self-discipline.** There will be lots of things throughout your child’s life that he’ll need to do, even though he won’t want to.
- **Develop a sense of pride.** If your child is responsible for doing his laundry, having a stack of clean shirts is an accomplishment. He can take pride in what he has done.
- **See that they are an important part of the family.** Your child will know he is helping to keep your home running smoothly.

Are you teaching and practicing listening skills?



The most important part of communication isn’t talking—it’s *listening*.

And listening skills are crucial for your child’s success in school.

Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to see if you are helping your child become a good listener:

___ **1. Do you try to give your child your undivided attention** when he’s talking? If you’re busy, say, “I’d love to talk about this after I cook dinner.”

___ **2. Are you patient** when you listen? Sometimes, it may take a while for your child to actually say what he wants to say.

___ **3. Do you avoid interrupting** your child when he is talking and ask him not to interrupt you?

___ **4. Do you “listen”** to your child’s behavior? A child who is acting up is communicating a need.

___ **5. Do you avoid chiming in** with the “right” answer? Instead, let your child try to sort out what to do.

How well are you doing?

Mostly *yes* answers mean you’re raising a good listener. For each *no* answer, try that idea.

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Seven strategies can make your family read-aloud time a success



Some parents stop reading aloud as soon as their children learn to read. But reading aloud can continue to be fun, and it builds reading skills, too.

To make your read-aloud time successful:

- 1. Do it every day.** When you read aloud daily, you demonstrate that reading time is much too important to miss.
- 2. Pick a regular time.** When reading is already part of your daily routine, you won't have to think about trying to fit it into a hectic day. Choose a time when your child will be most receptive, such as after playing outside or before bed.
- 3. Read the book first—before you read it aloud.** Reading aloud is performing. You'll do a better job

if you're familiar with what you're going to read. Previewing a book may also keep you from getting bogged down in a book that neither you nor your child enjoys.

- 4. Read books you like.** If you like a book, odds are your child will, too. Start by reading books you enjoyed as a child. Often, your enjoyment will be contagious!
- 5. Accentuate the first line.** The first line of any good story will grab the reader's attention. Your reading should make your child want to sit up and listen.
- 6. Use facial expressions.** Widen your eyes to show surprise. Squint a bit to show you're thinking.
- 7. Leave your child wanting more.** Stop your day's reading at a point where you are both eager to hear what happens next.

Practice tests reinforce learning and help your child study



What is the best way to study for tests? Many experts believe that taking practice tests is an ideal way to study.

The act of recalling information is a learning activity. By studying this way, students may also retain the information better.

Practice testing can occur in several ways, including:

- **Taking quizzes in class.** Help your child understand that quizzes are opportunities to practice recalling information. Simply taking a quiz can improve learning and future grades. When class quizzes are returned, have your child correct any wrong answers and use the quizzes for further studying.

- **Working with others.** Consider allowing your child to invite classmates over to study and quiz one another. You can also help your child study by calling out questions.
- **Studying independently.** Your child can use flash cards and make his own practice tests. Discuss how to create questions by looking over textbooks and handouts. He should notice the section headings, vocabulary words and review questions. And don't stop at one quiz. Research shows that quizzing five to seven times reinforces learning even more!

Source: J. Dunlosky and others, "Improving Students' Learning With Effective Learning Techniques," *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, Association for Psychological Science.

Q: My daughter spends hours playing online games. From the minute she walks in the door until she falls asleep, she wants to be playing one of her games. She is rushing through her homework and her grades are suffering. How can I get her to start living in the real world again?

Questions & Answers

A: Used responsibly, online games can be a fun way for kids to relax. Some games promote physical activity, some encourage play with others and some even build important academic skills.

But studies show that children are spending more and more time in front of screens. And since video game designers know how to create games that keep players hooked, parents must step in to set limits. As a matter of fact, the American Academy of Pediatrics strongly urges parents to limit children's recreational screen time.

Clearly, the amount of time your daughter spends playing online games is interfering with her responsibilities. If her grades are suffering and she is spending little or no time with friends and family, it's time to take action:

- **Talk with your child** and let her know that you will be setting limits on the amount of time she spends online.
- **Establish times** when online games are never allowed, such as during homework time, meal time and family time.
- **Provide alternatives.** Plan daily family activities, such as reading aloud, taking a walk or playing a board game. All these will replace some of the screen game time with more productive activities.

It Matters: Discipline

Try positive discipline for positive results



The discipline strategies you use at home can increase your child's likelihood of succeeding in school.

And experts agree that the best discipline methods are positive, not harsh. Studies have shown that physical punishments may actually increase children's risk for mental health problems.

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that parents:

- **Develop loving**, supportive relationships with their kids. This gives children a strong foundation and motivates them to behave well. When kids feel loved and respected by their parents, they are more likely to cooperate at home and at school.
- **Focus on the positive.** Compliment what your child does right—and be specific. “You started your homework without my reminding you. Great job!”
- **Use time-outs** and other non-physical consequences when needed. A child who speaks disrespectfully may need some time alone in her room. A child who puts off homework may miss other fun activities.
- **Let natural consequences** do the work. If your child forgets to bring her homework to school *again*, don't bring it to school for her. Instead, allow her to get a zero. She will be more likely to remember her homework tomorrow!

Source: P. Holinger, M.D., “Physical Punishment—and Violence: A Serious Health Problem,” *Psychology Today*, niscw.com/elem_physical2.

Predict, prepare and practice for the most effective discipline

No parent would wait until their child burned down the house to talk about the danger of playing with matches. Yet when it comes to discipline, parents often wait until *after* a problem arises to take action. Preventing problems in the first place is much more effective.

Follow these steps:

1. **Predict.** Think about a behavior you would like to change. Perhaps your child gets up so late in the morning that he often misses the bus.
2. **Prepare.** Since you can predict the behavior, you can also think about ways to prevent it. Instead of waiting until your child straggles down to the breakfast table, think of ways to avoid the late start. Is he tired in the morning because he's been up too late at night? An earlier bedtime could change that. Is he rushing around trying to get



organized for school? Spending time the night before could save precious minutes in the morning.

3. **Practice.** Help your child practice the prevention strategies until they become habits.

If you predict, prepare and practice, you can also prevent many behavior problems from recurring.

Focus on respect to support a positive learning environment



When students have respect for teachers and classmates, they help create the positive academic environment all kids need in order to be successful.

To promote respectful behavior:

- **Discuss respect.** What is it? Why is it important? How does it feel to be treated with respect or disrespect?
- **Be a role model.** Do what you want your child to do. If you want her to say *please* when asking

for something, remember to say *please* yourself. If you want her to knock before entering your bedroom, do the same for her.

- **Criticize constructively.** When you need to correct your child, do it privately and respectfully. “Next time, please hold the door for Grandpa. That will make it easier for him to get through the door.”
- **Notice times** when your child is respectful. “You listened to the coach even when other kids were joking around. I was impressed.”