

Helping Children Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School



September 2019

Alexander City Elementary Schools

Title I

Build brainpower by helping your child learn from mistakes

Whether your child is a brand new kindergartner or in an upper grade, he'll be starting the new school year with a clean slate. But like all kids, he will sometimes make mistakes on tests or assignments. That's no reason for either of you to be discouraged!



Research shows that when parents and teachers actively encourage students to fix errors and learn from them, the children do better in school. One reason may be that correcting mistakes shows kids that their intelligence isn't fixed—they can improve and get smarter.

When you review your child's work, focus first on what he did right. Then, to help him learn from his mistakes:

- **Talk about them.** Does your child understand why his answers were wrong? If so, have him correct them. If he's not sure, offer suggestions or encourage him to ask his teacher for help.
- **Recognize progress.** Did your child make fewer mistakes on this test than the last one? Remind him that he's improving. Point out how paying attention to past mistakes—and learning from them—made a difference.

Source: H.S. Schroder and others, "Neural evidence for enhanced attention to mistakes among school-aged children with a growth mindset," *Developmental Cognitive Neuroscience*, Elsevier B.V.



Attendance makes a difference from the first day of school to the last

Did you know that attendance in elementary school is so important that students who frequently miss school have lower levels of achievement throughout their school careers?

This is true even in the early grades. And by sixth grade, children who miss more than two days of school each month are more likely to drop out of high school than other students are.

When children miss school, they miss learning. And it doesn't take long to fall behind. Poor attendance has a negative effect on reading and

math skills, as well as on school success traits such as persistence.

September sets the tone for the rest of the year. Start now to develop habits that will help your child arrive at school on time, every day. When you make attendance a priority, your child will, too.

Source: L. Bauer, "School attendance: A building block of student achievement," *Brookings*, niswc.com/keyblock.

You are part of the team!

Two-way communication between teachers and families supports students. To keep it flowing, review the materials your child brings home. Reach out to the teacher to:

- **Share information** about your child.
- **Ask questions** and express concerns.
- **Schedule a conference** to discuss your child's learning.

Put a premium on kindness

Pressuring children to get top marks often has the opposite effect. But according to one study, showing your child you value kindness and consideration as much as or more than grades can help her perform better in class. To get the message across:

- **Demonstrate.** Let your child see you being kind and respectful to others.
- **Praise** positive behavior in your child and others.
- **Encourage** healthy relationships with teachers and classmates.



Source: L. Ciciolla and others, "When Mothers and Fathers Are Seen as Disproportionately Valuing Achievements," *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, Springer US.

Support homework efforts

To encourage your child to be conscientious about homework, create the conditions for success. Make sure he has:

- **A designated study area.** It should be well-lit and free of distractions like TV during homework time.
- **A set study time.** Experiment to see when your child is most alert, then stick with that time.
- **A supply kit.** Having pencils, erasers, rulers and other tools handy eliminates time-wasting searches.





My fifth grader is lonely at school. What should I do?

Q: My daughter's three best friends are in another class. She says she has no friends in her class, and she doesn't like school anymore. Should I ask to have her moved to the other class?

A: Not all the lessons students learn in school are academic. One lesson your daughter will learn this year is that she won't always get to choose the people she works with. She can always stay friends with the children in the other class. But now she has an opportunity to make some new friends, too.



To help your daughter adjust:

- **Talk about your own life.** Have you ever had to work with people you didn't know? Share the story with your child. Remind her that making new friends is a skill she'll use in middle school and for the rest of her life.
- **Practice conversation starters** together that can help her find kids who share her interests. "I like your drawing. Do you like to draw? I love it."
- **Foster new friendships.** Help your child arrange to get together outside of school with classmates she likes.
- **Let the teacher know** about your child's situation. Ask for suggestions for ways to help your daughter connect with classmates.



Are you encouraging healthy habits?

Proper rest, nutrition, exercise and hygiene all make it easier for students to concentrate and learn in and out of school. Are you helping your child establish healthy habits? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

1. **Do you stick to** a bedtime that gives your child at least nine hours of sleep at night?
2. **Do you make sure** your child eats a nutritious breakfast before school?
3. **Do you give** your child healthy snacks, such as sliced raw vegetables, when he is hungry?
4. **Do you encourage** your child to get daily exercise? Getting the whole family involved makes this more fun.
5. **Do you teach** your child to wash his hands frequently and sneeze into his elbow?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are promoting habits that support learning. For each no, try that idea.

"If you are going to achieve excellence in big things, you develop the habit in little matters."

—Colin Powell

Get ready for a great year

The school year is busy. Setting up some structure now will help ensure it is also happy and productive for your child and your family. Here are some things to do:

- **Make a plan** for after-school activities. Include plenty of time for reading, family and relaxation.
- **Create routines** to help your child get tasks done on time.
- **Start a family calendar** to keep track of everyone's commitments.
- **Arrange for backup.** Agree to trade favors with another parent who will cover for you if you are delayed or sick.

Give out a few assignments

When it comes to teaching responsibility, practice works better than lectures. To begin the lesson with your child:

- **Choose a few tasks** he is ready to handle on his own, such as getting up on time, packing lunch and feeding a pet.
- **Make a checklist** for him to follow.
- **Agree on small rewards** for a job well done and consequences for skipping responsibilities.



Don't protect your child from learning

Getting involved with your child's education can enhance her learning. But it's crucial to remember that she has to do the learning for herself. Avoid these common pitfalls:

- **Don't do everything** for your child. Let her grow by trying new things.
- **Don't rush to school** with something she forgot. Let her face the consequences.
- **Don't try to negotiate** a better grade for your child.

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