

Elementary School Parents[®]

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How to get the most out of parent-teacher conferences

Some parents say that the parent-teacher conference is one of the most valuable things they attend all year. These one-on-one meetings are great for learning more about your child's strengths and weaknesses, and will give both you and the teacher a better idea about the year ahead.

To get the most from your meeting:

- **Talk to your child.** Ask her to tell you what she thinks are her easiest and most difficult subjects—and why. Does she have any questions she'd like you to ask the teacher?
- **Make a list of things to tell the teacher.** You know your child better than anyone else. Sharing some of this information will make it easier for the teacher to meet your child's needs.
- **Write down your questions.** Ask things such as:
 - » *Is my child in different groups for different subjects?*
 - » *Does my child participate in class discussions and activities?*
 - » *Is my child working up to her ability?*
 - » *How well does my child get along with others?*
- **Arrive on time.** Teachers usually have many conferences scheduled during a single day. Arriving on time will allow you to take full advantage of the time the teacher has available.
- **Create an action plan.** Ask the teacher what you can do at home to reinforce what your child is learning at school. Try to get at least one or two specific suggestions.

Make sure your child's schedule is balanced



Extracurricular activities can help your child develop responsibility, social skills and

self-discipline. But participating in too many activities can have a negative effect on your child's health and grades.

All children need time for homework, relaxing, adequate sleep and family. Look at your child's schedule. If it's too crowded, don't be afraid to blow the whistle.

Here are some tips:

- **Set the rules of the game.** Many families set a limit of one activity per season, per child. Tell your child that school is his top priority and that his activities come second.
- **Focus on the fundamentals.** If your child isn't able to start his homework until late at night, adjust his schedule. Activities should never interfere with schoolwork.
- **Stay on the sidelines.** If your child shows signs of stress, or if he doesn't seem to be enjoying an activity, it may be time to rethink how he spends his time.

Reinforce the concept of time with your elementary schooler



Teachers put a lot of effort into teaching students about the concept of time.

And there's a lot for young students to learn. What

is a *second*, *minute*, *hour* and *day*?

What's a *week*, *month* and *year*?

What are *past*, *present* and *future*?

The more your child understands time and how it's measured, the more responsible she can be. She can "be ready in 10 minutes" or estimate how much time it will take to do homework.

A real mastery of time doesn't come until later in the elementary years. But the more you can do now to help your child understand time, the better.

Have your child:

1. **Select a task to do.** She could choose to jump up and down

50 times, draw a picture, complete three math problems, or eat a bowl of cereal.

2. **Estimate how many minutes** it will take her to complete the task.
3. **Use a timer or stopwatch to track** the time it takes to complete the task.
4. **Check to see how close** her estimate was to the actual time it took.

If your child does this—estimating and verifying time—for several tasks, her sense of time will begin to improve.

"Time is what we want most ... but what we use worst."

—William Penn

A positive mindset can help your child succeed in math



Think your child's state of mind has nothing to do with his performance in math class? Think again.

According to research,

the brain's "emotion" and "intellect" centers are connected. They are permanently entwined.

What this means for your child is that his mindset can affect his ability to solve math problems. Think about it: If he's nervous or upset about the worksheet in front of him, he may struggle to answer the questions. But if he's calm and confident, he'll likely do much better.

To encourage a positive mindset in your child when it comes to math:

- **Remind** him that effort leads to achievement. Does your child claim he can't do math because he's "just not smart"? That implies people are either born intelligent or not. But

that isn't true. Buckling down can lead to smarts.

- **Send** the right message. Instead of saying, "That problem looks really hard," say, "That problem looks challenging." If your child worries about something being too difficult, he may decide he can't do it. But if it's a *challenge*—not necessarily hard or easy—he might approach it more positively.
- **Teach** him to relax. If your child's jitters get the best of him when he's faced with a math problem, have him take a deep breath. Suggest that he picture something happy or fun. Remind him that he knows more than he thinks he does. If you can help him calm his nerves before he picks up his pencil, he'll have a better chance for success!

Source: S. Sparks, "Positive Mindset May Prime Students' Brains for Math," *Education Week*, nswc.com/elem_mathbrain.

Are you building a team with your child's school?



Research shows that when home and school act as a strong team, students are the real winners. They learn more and do better

academically and socially.

Are you doing everything you can to build a successful school-home team? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

1. **Have you met** your child's classroom teacher?
2. **Do you talk** with your child about school each day and review all of the information he brings home?
3. **Do you monitor** your child's homework? If he struggles with an assignment, do you ask the teacher how you can help at home?
4. **Do you make sure** your child gets to school on time each day with everything he needs for school?
5. **Have you reviewed** the school handbook and told your child that you expect him to follow all school rules?

How well are you doing?

Each *yes* answer means you are helping build a strong home-school team. For each *no* answer, try that idea from the quiz.

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Studies suggest older kids play a role in encouraging reading



Lots of factors have an impact on your child's love of reading, but one of them may be closer to home than you realize. It's an older sibling! Recent studies show that children who see their older brother or sister reading for pleasure are more likely to seek out books themselves.

It's not just that book-loving older kids model good reading habits. They're also great resources when it comes to sharing books, suggesting new stories to explore and talking about literature.

To help your little bookworm reap the benefits of having an older sibling (or other older child) around:

- **Make reading a family affair.** Set aside some group reading time each week. Turn off the TV, snuggle up on the couch, and read together.

Include older siblings, cousins or friends. It'll show your child how much reading matters in your home.

- **Visit the library together.** After your younger child chooses her books, let her look in the "big kid" section while her sibling finds a new book. No older sibling? Explore the pre-teen section with your child anyway. Let her see all the bigger kids browsing the shelves and reading in the aisles.
- **Involve the babysitter.** The next time your teenage sitter comes over, ask her to bring along a favorite book. If your child notices how important reading is to her, she may follow her lead and become interested in it, too!

Source: M. Knoester and M. Plikuhn, "Influence of siblings on out-of-school reading practices," *Journal of Research in Reading*, John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Multitasking results in mistakes and decreased concentration



Look around your home at homework time. Is your child studying while singing to music? Are you answering his questions while checking email?

Multitasking has become a way of life, but not necessarily a good one. In fact, while multitasking, the brain doesn't really concentrate on several tasks at once. Instead, it moves quickly from one thing to another—not giving anything its full attention.

To prevent multitasking mistakes:

- **Eliminate distractions.** Choose a quiet place for your child to study—free of TV, phones and loud music. Soft background music is OK.
- **Set a good example.** It's natural to want to accomplish as much as

possible, as quickly as possible. But do what really works. If you give your child your undivided attention (instead of answering emails while you talk), you'll show him how to focus—and that what he is saying is important to you.

- **Schedule tasks.** Instead of planning multiple things at once, schedule tasks consecutively. For example, your child can do homework at 4:00, call friends at 5:00 and clean his room at 5:30.
- **Limit multitasking** to activities that don't require much concentration. For example, your child can eat a snack while talking on the phone with friends.

Source: "Multitasking: Switching Costs," American Psychological Association, nswc.com/elem_multitask.

Q: Getting three children out the door in the morning is hard! One day, someone won't get up. Another day, somebody else forgets a science book and has to go back for it. The result is that my kids usually miss the school bus and I end up driving them to school. What can I do?

Questions & Answers

A: Mornings are challenging in many households. But as long as your kids know there's an easy out—you will drive them to school—they don't have much incentive to change.

Here's how you can begin to turn things around:

- **Call a family meeting.** Announce that your "taxi service" has a new policy. From now on, rides to school come with a cost. Anyone who misses the bus and rides the "taxi" will have to pay the toll. You can choose the cost—perhaps it's part of your kids' allowance, or perhaps it means some extra time spent on chores. It doesn't have to be a high price, but it should be something your children want to avoid.
- **Help your kids get organized** at night. Have them lay out their outfits. Fill book bags. Pack lunches. And set alarm clocks to go off a few minutes earlier.
- **Give a five-minute warning** in the morning. Then calmly walk out the door and head for the bus stop. If a child comes racing along with one shoe on and the other in hand—well, figure you're giving the neighbors a chuckle.
- **Enforce consequences** once you set them. Odds are, you'll only have to collect your "taxi fare" once or twice before everyone gets better organized.

It Matters: Discipline

Research reveals discipline that actually works



Think about how your parents raised you. What discipline methods did they use? Studies show that even

when parents don't agree with how they were disciplined as children, many use the same approaches themselves.

For example, adults who were yelled at as kids were more likely to yell as parents—even if they thought yelling didn't work, according to one study.

In order to discipline effectively, consider what you believe *will* work. Experts say certain methods work best. For example:

- **Plan ahead.** Talk with your child about discipline. Why is it helpful? How does it work? After considering her ideas, list basic rules and consequences. Then follow through with consistency, fairness and respect.
- **Acknowledge good behavior.** What are the most important behaviors for your child to learn? When you see them, take notice. Say, "It's nice that you invited the new boy to sit with you at lunch. I bet that made him feel good."
- **Use consequences** that are natural or logical. When your child does something inappropriate, choose a natural or logical response, if possible. A natural consequence of forgetting homework is getting a zero. A logical consequence of losing an item is having to replace it.

Source: J. Warner, "Parents Flunking Discipline," WebMD, nswc.com/flunk.

Learning to work with others leads to academic success

There's a lot to be said for encouraging children to show leadership. But, let's face it—some kids are just plain bossy. They won't take turns. They won't share. They won't listen to what anyone says.

Your child will be expected to work with others. So, whether he has a group project in social studies or a role in the school play, he'll be more successful if he knows how to be a team player.

To help your child learn how to be less of a dictator and more of a contributor:

- **Allow family members** to take turns making some decisions—from which movie to watch to what to have for dinner.
- **Establish some basic house rules.** For example, if one child cuts the cake, the other gets to choose the



first piece. If one child chooses the game, the other gets the first turn.

- **Teach fair ways** to make decisions. Have your children play "rock, paper, scissors" to see who gets on the computer first. Flip a coin to decide who takes the first bath.
- **Praise your child** when you see him being a team player. "That was nice of you to let your brother pick the cookie he wanted first."

Five ways parents can improve their children's listening skills



Teachers agree that the ability to listen is one of the most important skills children need in order to be successful in school.

Here are five ways to help your child strengthen her listening skills:

1. **Be a good model.** When your child is telling you something, stop what you're doing. Give her your full attention. Some parents find it easier to sit down so that their child's eyes are at their own eye level.
2. **Have family members** take turns telling about their day. Then have

each person draw a name and repeat something that happened to the person whose name they drew.

3. **Play Simon Says.** This will teach your child to listen very carefully and to follow directions exactly.
4. **Practice reflective listening.** When you say something, ask your child to paraphrase what you said. When your child asks a question, repeat her question and then respond.
5. **Stop and ask questions** during story time. When you get to an exciting part of the book, ask, "What do you think will happen next?"