

Elementary School Parents[®]

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make the difference!



Regular exercise boosts your child's health and academics

Physical fitness provides many benefits for children. Studies show that regular physical activity is linked to higher self-esteem and attentiveness in school. It also lowers the chance of health problems such as type 2 diabetes.

Here are some ways to increase your child's activity level:

- **Plan family outings.** Pick activities your family enjoys and create some new healthy traditions. You might go for a walk after dinner or head to a park every Sunday afternoon.
- **Make suggestions.** When your child has a friend over, suggest they play games that involve movement, such as tag, soccer and jumping rope. Indoors, try games such as Simon Says and Red Light, Green Light.
- **Add movement to screen time.** Encourage your child to take breaks that involve activity when she watches TV or plays video games.
- **Be creative.** You can find lots of ways to sneak in exercise. During chore time, play music or race to finish a job. While doing errands, park a few blocks away from a store and walk. Or, make a quick stop at a playground on the way home.
- **Set an example.** If your child sees you staying fit (stretching, biking, walking with a friend, etc.), she is more likely to be active herself.

Source: A. McPherson and others, "Physical activity, cognition and academic performance: an analysis of mediating and confounding relationships in primary school children," *BMC Public Health*, BioMed Central, nswc.com/elem_activity.

This four-step process can end procrastination



At one time or another, most kids put off doing their homework.

But when procrastination becomes a habit, it can affect school performance.

To help your child break the procrastination habit, have him:

1. **Select just one thing to do.** Sometimes kids put things off when they feel overwhelmed. Tell your child to focus on one assignment at a time.
2. **Set a timer for 30 minutes** and begin working on the assignment. While the timer is ticking, he should focus only on that assignment.
3. **Avoid breaks.** Your child should get water or a snack *before* he starts the timer so he doesn't interrupt his work flow.
4. **Reward himself.** Once the timer goes off, encourage your child to do something he likes, such as playing an online game for a few minutes.

Have your child repeat this process until his homework is complete!

Source: R. Emmett, *The Procrastinating Child: A Handbook for Adults to Help Children Stop Putting Things Off*, Walker & Company.

Manage your child's screen time by creating a family media plan



Digital devices are an important part of our world—and can be very appealing to kids.

Technology helps your child discover new ideas, connect with others and access educational information for school.

However, too much recreational screen time can negatively affect his schoolwork, health, activity levels and face-to-face communication skills.

To help your child strike a healthy balance, experts recommend creating a personalized family media plan that answers the following questions:

- **What devices** do I want my child to have access to?
- **Where** will devices be allowed and where will they be off-limits?
- **How much time** will my child be allowed to use them?

- **Will the same rules** apply during weekends and school breaks?
- **What content** is appropriate for my child to access?
- **How will I maintain** consistency?
- **What consequences** will there be for misusing devices?
- **What example** am I setting through my own use of technology?

Source: *Ways Parents Can Manage Kids' Technology Use*, QuickTip Brochure, The Parent Institute.

"Sometimes you have to disconnect to stay connected. We've become so focused on that tiny screen that we forget the big picture, the people right in front of us."

—Regina Brett

Teach your child how to become a more confident test-taker



Test anxiety often comes from self-doubt. If your child doesn't think she will succeed on a test, she probably won't.

To help her become more confident before a test:

- **Take off the pressure.** Tell your child that tests just show the teacher what she's learned so far, and what she needs help with.
- **Make sure your child knows** what the test will cover. Encourage her to listen carefully when her teacher talks about the test—and to ask any questions she may have.
- **Avoid last-minute panic.** Your child should begin to study several days before the test. Cramming the night before a test rarely works.
- **Teach efficient studying.** Help your child focus on the material she hasn't mastered yet.
- **Help your child connect** new material to information she already knows. These connections can help her recall the material during the test.
- **Encourage positive self-talk.** If she gets stuck during a test, she can quietly say to herself, "I know this. The answer will come to me."
- **Remind your child** of her strengths.
- **Help your child visualize** success. Have her close her eyes and picture herself answering the questions correctly.

Source: S.M. DeBroff, *The Mom Book Goes to School: Insider Tips to Ensure Your Child Thrives in Elementary and Middle School*, Free Press.

Are you building a bridge between home and school?



Studies consistently show that when families and schools form a strong team, children are more likely to succeed. They learn more and do better in school.

School has been underway for a couple of months, so it's time to make sure you are doing your part to build a relationship with the school. Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

- ___ **1. Have you met** with your child's teacher at least once this year?
- ___ **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?
- ___ **5. Have you reviewed** the school handbook with your child? Do you expect him to follow all school rules?

How well are you doing?

If most of your answers were *yes*, you are building a strong school-family team. For each *no* answer, try that idea from the quiz.

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The Parent Institute, 1-800-756-5525,
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Here's how to make the most of your parent-teacher conference



Preparation is the key to a successful parent-teacher conference. Here's how to get the most benefit from your meeting:

Before the conference:

- **Make a list** of things you'd like to tell the teacher, such as your child's favorite subjects and activities, difficulties in school, medical needs and any sensitive issues.
- **Make a list** of things to ask the teacher about, such as your child's work habits, attitude, behavior, strengths and weaknesses.
- **Let your child know** you are having a conference. Ask if there's anything you and the teacher should discuss.

During the conference:

- **Be on time.** Teachers have many conferences, and a five-minute delay can throw off the schedule.
- **Listen carefully** and take notes about your child's progress.
- **Be positive.** Remember: You and your child's teacher both want what's best for your child.
- **Make a plan** with the teacher to address any concerns and schedule a time to follow up.

After the conference:

- **Let your child know** how the conference went.
- **Start with positive comments.** Then, talk about any suggestions the teacher made—and how you plan to help your child carry these out.

Make sure your child is on the road to reading success



Ask any educator to name the single most important thing parents can do at home to help children learn and do well in school

and they will likely say, "Encourage your child to read!"

Here are some ways to make reading a priority for your family:

- **Read together.** Your child may enjoy reading to you or taking turns reading chapters aloud.
- **Go to the public library.** Help your child sign up for a library card. Each week, have him browse and check out new books.
- **Offer suggestions.** Think about your child's interests. Find books or articles about them. Ask the librarian for help.
- **Start a family book club.** It doesn't have to be formal. Just set aside one night each week to talk about something you've all read. Better yet, do it during dinner—you'll get the benefit of one another's company and a good discussion.
- **Create a reading nook.** Some kids love to read anywhere. But a cozy reading spot can make reading more appealing.
- **Suggest a series.** When there are several books about a character they like, kids often keep reading, book after book.
- **Let your child see you reading.** If your child sees you with your nose in a book, he'll be more likely to want to read himself. Be sure to talk to him about what you're reading: "I just read the strangest story in the newspaper."
- **Talk with the teacher.** Ask about your child's reading progress and strategies you can use at home to strengthen his reading skills.

Q: My daughter struggled with math last year and now she says she hates it. I can't really blame her, because I'm not good at math either. How can I help her develop a better attitude?

Questions & Answers

A: Parents' attitudes about math have a lot to do with how well their children do in math. Kids whose parents tell them they didn't like math when they were in school, often struggle with math as well. Likewise, children whose parents instill a sense of enjoyment about math tend to perform better.

To help your child develop a positive attitude about math:

- **Set the tone.** Let your child know you believe *everyone* can be successful in math. If you say this often to your child, she'll start to believe it!
- **Avoid stereotypes.** Women can be engineers. Children of all races can be successful in school. In fact, students who are successful in math can go a long way toward breaking the stereotypes that others may hold.
- **Talk about careers.** Young children may decide that being a Ninja Turtle or an Avenger is a great career choice. Expand their horizons. Talk about people who use math in their jobs—an airline pilot, a weather forecaster, an architect, an astronaut, a researcher, an engineer, etc.
- **Connect math** to the real world. When you and your child go to the store, bank, restaurant, etc., point out all of the ways people use math. At dinner, challenge family members to tell one way they used math that day.

It Matters: Building Responsibility

Responsibility leads to success in the classroom



Children who learn to be responsible do better in school. They get along better with teachers and peers.

They make better decisions. They're more apt to try, follow through and succeed.

To strengthen your child's sense of responsibility:

- **Revamp her chore list.** Are you still packing your child's lunch? How about making her bed? If so, pass the torch. Most elementary schoolers are capable of handling such tasks. Don't overload her with too many chores, but work toward giving her meaningful responsibilities.
- **Teach lessons about money.** If she does not have an allowance, consider giving her one. If you let your child manage her own money, she may develop more respect for it. Include her when you're working on your budget. Don't share specific financial details, but let her see what budgeting looks like. Say things like, "I'd love to order pizza tonight, too, but it'll have to wait. Payday isn't until Friday."
- **Use consequences to teach.** When your child makes a mistake, don't swoop in to save her (unless she's in true danger). If she experiences the consequences of her actions, she's more likely to learn not to make the same mistake again. If you're always running to her rescue, she'll learn that she doesn't have to take responsibility for anything.

Encourage your child to do more than the bare minimum

You asked your child to take the recycling to the curb. It's a windy evening, so he placed a rock on the papers in the bin so they wouldn't blow all over the neighborhood. Congratulations! Your child just demonstrated responsibility and maturity by doing more than the bare minimum.

Talk to your child about other areas where he can go above and beyond. For example, when he:

- **Makes a snack** after school, he can leave the kitchen clean.
- **Uses the last** of the peanut butter, he can add it to the grocery list.
- **Pours the rest** of the water out of a pitcher, he can refill it.

Encourage your child to do more than what's required at school, too. He could:

- **Read a few extra pages** of an assigned reading.



- **Take time** to make sure his report is written in neat handwriting.
- **Start a project early**, and go beyond what is expected, by including a detailed illustration or adding a colorful cover page.
- **Work a few extra math problems** to make sure he grasps a concept.

Help your child set goals and take responsibility for learning



Setting weekly goals helps your child take control of her learning. To help her set goals and achieve them:

1. **Ask your child to identify** one goal at the beginning of the week, such as finishing a book she has been reading for school.
2. **Have your child write** the goal on a piece of paper and post it on the refrigerator or bulletin board.
3. **Talk about how to accomplish** the goal. Help your child break the goal down into smaller steps.

For example, "You could read two chapters every day."

4. **Check your child's progress** in a few days. If problems arise, talk about possible solutions. If your child falls behind in reading, delaying bedtime by 10 minutes might help her catch up.
5. **Help your child evaluate** how she did at the end of the week. Did she achieve her goal? Why or why not? Regardless of the outcome, praise your child for trying. Then set a new goal for next week.