

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

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Offer support when your child has a writing assignment

A writing assignment can seem like a tough challenge for many students. Good writing involves everything from understanding a subject, to knowing how to organize thoughts, to checking spelling and punctuation.

To help your child with writing assignments:

- **Suggest that she** “talk through” some ideas before starting. Clear writing starts with clear thinking. Talking with you can help your child clarify her thoughts.
- **Encourage her** to take notes and make an outline before she starts to write. Organizing her thoughts will make her writing clearer.
- **Remind her** that first drafts don’t have to be perfect. Encourage her to focus on what she wants to say first. She can edit her paper for spelling and grammar later.
- **Offer plenty of praise.** Your praise can motivate your child to keep working. Be as specific as you can: “I really like the way you’ve described what led up to this event. I understand it better now.”
- **Don’t over criticize.** It’s helpful to point out errors now and then, but if your child thinks you are always looking for what’s wrong, she will be less likely to share her writing with you.
- **Be patient.** Good writing takes time. Your patience and support can help your child develop into a clear thinker and skilled writer.

Five ways to motivate your child to read



When children *like* to read, they do it more often—which boosts their reading skills and overall

school success.

To ignite your child’s love of reading:

1. **Celebrate.** Instead of simply checking out books at the library, make an event of it. Select interesting books, then choose a special place to enjoy reading together.
2. **Explore.** Help your child find an appealing book series. He may not be able to resist picking up the next book.
3. **Investigate.** If he doesn’t know what a word means, have your child take a guess. Look it up together and see if he is right.
4. **Play.** Turn something you just read together into a fun challenge: Ask your child to summarize the story using only three sentences. Or, ask him to use the characters from the story in a new story.
5. **Experiment.** Try new kinds of books with your child. If he’s used to reading fiction, have him try a biography or how-to book, for example.

Celebrate these famous February birthdays with some learning fun



February is filled with birthdays of notable people. Plan some fun activities to help your child learn about these heroes, writers, inventors, scientists and artists:

- **February 4**—Rosa Parks. Go online to learn more about this heroine of America's civil rights movement.
- **February 7**—Laura Ingalls Wilder. Read one of the books from the *Little House on the Prairie* series, which is based on Wilder's childhood in a family of settlers and pioneers.
- **February 8**—Jules Verne. Read one of his science fiction stories with your child.
- **February 11**—Thomas Edison. Ask your child what he would like to invent to improve daily life.
- **February 12**—Abraham Lincoln. Challenge your child to memorize the Gettysburg Address.
- **February 19**—Nicolaus Copernicus. Take a walk together and look at the stars.
- **February 21**—Nina Simone. Listen to some of her music with your child and learn more about her life.
- **February 22**—George Washington. Ask your child what she would do if she were president of the United States.
- **February 25**—Pierre-Auguste Renoir. Check out a book with reproductions of his paintings. Ask your child to paint one of her own.

“There’s no excuse for the young people not knowing who the heroes and heroines are or were.”

—Nina Simone

High expectations can motivate your child to succeed in school



Don't just *hope* your child will succeed—*expect* him to succeed! If you express high, yet realistic, expectations for your child, he's likely to meet them.

To help your elementary schooler succeed in the classroom and beyond:

- **Don't act surprised** when he does well. Did your child just bring home a B+ on a super-hard science test? Instead of acting shocked, act like you never doubted that he'd do well. "That's awesome! I knew all of your extra studying this week would pay off!"
- **Support him when he stumbles.** Never belittle your child when he messes up. Remind him that failure happens to everyone sometimes. Besides, plenty of other people in the world will be there to criticize him. That's why your constant love and acceptance are so vital. Always be your child's "safe place."
- **Discourage "victim mode."** When unfortunate things happen, don't chalk them up to bad luck or a mean teacher. That will make your child feel as if he's a victim and has no control over situations. Instead, empower him to take action. When something goes wrong, ask him what he learned from it. Help him think about how he might handle similar situations in the future.

Are you making the most of your report card talks?



Perhaps your child's report card is great. Or maybe it's worse than you feared. Whatever the report card says, it provides a valuable opportunity to talk with your child about school and his study habits.

Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to see if you are making the most of report card talks:

- ___ **1. Do you take** your child's report card seriously and set aside time to review and discuss it together?
- ___ **2. Do you ask** your child if he agrees with the grades, and why or why not?
- ___ **3. Do you remain** calm and try not to make your child feel worse if he's already disappointed?
- ___ **4. Do you help** your child figure out a plan to improve or maintain his grades for the next grading period?
- ___ **5. Do you contact** the teacher if you have concerns or questions?

How well are you doing?

If most of your answers are *yes*, you're turning report card time into learning time. For each *no* answer, try that idea in the quiz.

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Everyday tasks can strengthen your child's math skills



Most people read every day. They probably do math every day, too—although they may not realize it. Math is a vital part of life, so it's important to involve your child in everyday math when you:

- **Follow recipes.** When preparing meals, let your child help with weighing and measuring. Discuss sizes, shapes and fractions. Ask her questions such as, "How could we double this recipe?" and "When we add $\frac{1}{4}$ cup to $\frac{1}{4}$ cup, what do we get?"
- **Go shopping.** Help your child use a calculator to keep a running tally of purchases. Use coupons to inspire math problems. "If we use this coupon, will the item cost less than other brands?" "Which of these items is really the best deal per pound?"
- **Save money.** Ask your child to choose a goal, such as saving for a book. How much does she need to save each week? How long will it take her to reach the total? Help her track her progress on a chart. Then have fun shopping together!
- **Take a trip.** Before leaving, measure the air pressure in your car or bike tires. Calculate how many miles you'll go. If you are driving, how much gas will you use? As you travel, say a number between 1 and 10. Who can find a license plate with numbers that add up to the number you called out?
- **Start a family project.** Planning to paint a bedroom? Involve your child in figuring out how much paint you will need to do the job.
- **Play games.** There are lots of fun math games you can play together. Try dominoes, Uno and Connect 4.

Help a disorganized child take responsibility for belongings



Your child has a special notebook where he is supposed to write down homework assignments—but he forgot to bring it home. Or he needs to turn in his math worksheet—but he left it sitting on his desk at home.

Some children never seem to know how to take responsibility for their schoolwork. Here's how you can help your child learn to be responsible:

- **Ask him** to help develop a plan. Talk with your child about what he needs to do to get more organized. You might say, "You're having trouble getting to school with all your homework and bringing home everything you need. What could you do that would help you remember? Why don't you think about it, and we'll discuss it at dinner."
- **Let your child** try to make his plan work—without jumping in to rescue him. If he leaves his homework at home, don't rush to school to take it to him. Let him face the consequences.
- **Suggest changes** he can make, but let him put them into action. "How about if we try placing a box here by the door? Then you can put everything that needs to go to school in the box. What do you think of that idea?"

Q: My fourth-grade daughter is very competitive in sports. Her teacher says she is competitive in the classroom, too. She rushes through assignments, hoping to be the first one finished. She doesn't take the time to be neat or to check her work. I know this hurts her grades. How can I help?

Questions & Answers

A: It sounds like your daughter has a habit of turning tasks into competitions—and she wants to be first across the finish line. But being first isn't what matters when it comes to schoolwork.

Start by talking with your child's teacher. Let her know you would like to work together on a plan to help your daughter focus more on *quality* work, not *speedy* work.

Then, talk to your child. Put her competitive nature to work by using a comparison from a sport, such as basketball. Explain that sometimes it is important for a player to get down the court as fast as she can. But when a player is shooting free throws, her accuracy is more important than her speed.

Doing schoolwork is more like shooting free throws. Tell your child that you're going to look over her homework each night to check her work for neatness and accuracy. If her work is not up to an appropriate standard, tell her you'll ask her to do it over.

In school, the teacher can try the same approach, looking over work before it's handed in.

Soon your child will figure out that when she slows down, she'll get the work right the first time—and that actually takes less time in the long run!

It Matters: Discipline

Take five steps to address school misbehavior



It's wonderful to have a good sense of humor. But it's no laughing matter when a student constantly disrupts

class with jokes and rude body sounds.

If your child is clowning around in school, take these steps:

1. **Look for what's behind** the behavior. Sometimes children need attention or want to impress their classmates. Often, they try to use humor to cover up academic shortcomings.
2. **Work with the teacher.** Together, try to identify when the problem behavior started and what might have triggered it. If your child tends to act up after recess, for example, she may need help settling down. The teacher might help by assigning her a high-profile task like handing out worksheets.
3. **Talk to your child.** She might not understand when it's OK to be silly and when it's not. Help her see there's a time when being funny and "clever" is actually being disrespectful.
4. **Establish clear guidelines.** With the teacher's help, explain to your child what type of behavior you both expect from her.
5. **Set consequences** that you and the teacher will enforce if your child breaks the rules.

By following these five steps, you and the teacher should be able to get your child's behavior back on track!

Source: K. Levine, *What To Do ... When Your Child Has Trouble at School*, Reader's Digest Books.

Improve behavior at home with effective teacher strategies

Can't get your child to complete homework? Pay attention? Respond to requests? Why not get help from those who get not just one child—but 20 or more kids—to do what's expected? Teachers!

Here's what they suggest:

- **Explain what you want** your child to do. Focus on the tasks you want to be routine—like putting his backpack by the front door.
- **Post a schedule.** Your child will know what to do and when to do it. And he'll feel more independent.
- **Avoid abrupt transitions.** Let your child know how many minutes he has left before he needs to switch gears and do something else.
- **Add excitement to ordinary tasks.** Don't just tell your child to pick up his room. Challenge him to do it in rhythm to music.
- **Use silent signals.** Use a gentle touch on your child's shoulder



to get his attention. Flick the lights off and on to give a five-minute warning before bedtime.

- **Provide meaningful things** for your child to do. Expect him to contribute by doing household chores. In the grocery store, put your child in charge of the list.

Positive discipline can help your child learn and grow



The first thing many people think of when they hear the word *discipline* is punishment. But discipline actually

means *to teach*. And it's most effective when it's delivered in a positive, calm and loving way.

When disciplining, focus on your:

- **Words.** Tell your child exactly what you expect. For example, "It's time to do your homework," is better than, "Aren't you supposed to be doing your homework?"
- **Tone of voice.** It's important not to sound too stern or too unsure. Try to find a happy medium, a tone that says, "I'm confident you will do as I say."
- **Facial expression.** A calm look will encourage your child to cooperate. You don't need to look angry or upset.
- **Body language.** If possible, face your child and look her in the eye. Avoid intimidating gestures such as shaking a finger or putting your hands on your hips.