

# Helping Children Learn<sup>®</sup>

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

Harvard Elementary School



ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

April 2014

## Responsibility taught at home pays off with school success

All parents hope their children will grow up to be responsible adults. A good way to make that happen is by helping them be responsible *students*. Thankfully, parents have more influence on this than anyone else! To help your child take control of her behavior, commitments and relationships:

- **Enforce rules and consequences.** Pick a few important rules. State them clearly so your child knows exactly how to behave—and what will happen if she doesn't. Then stick to them.
- **Encourage sympathy.** Help your child understand how classmates and others feel. "Sonja's sad because she's moving to a new house. How could we help her?"
- **Monitor your child's homework.** Make sure you know what the assignments are. Establish a homework routine for your child so she'll be able to turn assignments in on time.
- **Support good financial habits.** Many kids earn an allowance or are paid for extra chores. These are perfect opportunities to teach about budgeting, spending, saving and giving.
- **Find ways to help others.** Discuss what it means to be responsible to yourself, your family, your school and your community. Choose useful ways to contribute, such as planting flowers in the school garden.
- **Adjust responsibilities.** As your child matures, her abilities will change. Perhaps she can take on a more grown-up chore or make new, exciting decisions. Talk about how responsibility feels great!



Source: M. Purcell, "Building Responsible Kids," PsychCentral, <http://tinyurl.com/p865ppq>.



## Plan to learn with your child this April

No April fooling—there are many anniversaries and events this month that you and your child can celebrate. Try these engaging learning activities:

- **April 2—International Children's Book Day** is celebrated on Hans Christian Andersen's birthday. Read a book together about a different culture.
- **April 13—Thomas Jefferson's Birthday.** Our third president loved gadgets that made life easier. Check his out at <http://classroom.monticello.org/kids/resources/profile/241/Design-and-Gadgets/>. Then ask your child to design a gadget for your home.
- **April 22—Earth Day.** Ask your child to think of a new use for something he thought was trash. (Plant a seed in a yogurt cup.)
- **April 23—Shakespeare's Birthday** is celebrated on this day. Act out a scene from one of his plays. Or have your child write (or dictate) a play of his own.

## Team up with the teacher to help your child thrive

If a teacher tells you your child is having difficulties in school, it might be time for a parent-teacher conference. To make the most of it:

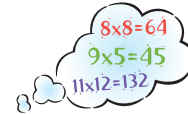
- **Keep an open mind.** Kids don't always act the same at home and school.
- **Ask the teacher** how you can help. It may be simple. "Please check that your child has her homework before school."
- **Stay positive.** Children win when parents and teachers work together.



Source: A. Egan and others, *Is It a Big Problem or a Little Problem: When to Worry, When Not to Worry, and What to Do*, St. Martin's Griffin Press.

## Why math facts matter

Why should your child memorize times tables when the world is full of calculators? Because math facts are the basis for higher math. When students have to stop and calculate, they lose their focus on the larger concept. Knowing the facts will also give your child the confidence to try more advanced math.



Source: P. Lehner, "What Is the Relationship Between Fluency and Automaticity through Systematic Teaching with Technology (FASTT Math) and Improved Student Computational Skills?" Virginia Beach Public Schools, <http://tinyurl.com/n6lnkn4>.

## Get a little R-E-S-P-E-C-T

It can be a challenge these days to raise respectful kids. But an effective classroom environment depends on it. Try these tips:

- **Be a good model of respect.**
- **Point out and praise** respectful behavior, your child's and others'.
- **Correct slip ups.** "Is that what we say?"

Source: R. Silverman, "10 Tips on Teaching Respect to Children: You can't get it if you don't give it," <http://tinyurl.com/jw6vkea>.



## How do I make time for my child if his sibling needs me?

**Q:** Learning is a real struggle for my fifth grade son, who has serious challenges. He also has a difficult personality—the smallest thing can set off a tantrum. But my real concern is my younger son. I'm afraid he gets overlooked as we deal with his brother's problems. How do I support him too, so he can be happy and succeed in school?

**A:** Your older son faces issues other kids don't. But your younger son also has to deal with the effects of his brother's behavior. There are things you can do to help.

It's important that you carve out some one-on-one time with your younger son. It should be a regular time so he can look forward to it. What are his strengths in school? If he likes math, you can take him with you to the grocery store and ask him to help you calculate which items are the best value—but stop first at the library or for an ice cream. Your son will know he gets his moment to shine, and that you want to set him up for success as much as you do his brother.

Talk with your younger son about his brother. You might say, "Mike needs a lot of our attention. You must feel kind of cheated at times. Maybe you're even a little mad at him for taking our time."

He may agree. He may deny that there's a problem. But by raising the issue, you let him know it's okay to talk about it. He'll know that you aren't overlooking him—and that you *are* paying attention.

Finally, tell both boys—often—that you love them.



## Is test anxiety holding your child back?

Elementary school students take lots of quizzes and tests to show what they know. But while some kids stay calm while being tested, others may go into a full-blown panic, even when they know the material.

Are you helping your child overcome test anxiety? Answer *yes* or *no* to each question.

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you tell** your child that tests are a part of life, and that you will help her conquer any fears she has?
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you ask** the teacher how you can help your child?
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you help** your child picture herself as a successful test-taker?
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you make sure** she wears comfy clothes and has what she needs on test day?

\_\_\_ **5. Do you let** her know your love for her doesn't depend on a test score?

### How are you doing?

*Each yes means you are helping your child relax and succeed at test taking. For each no, try that idea from the quiz.*

*"Parents who are afraid to put their foot down usually have children who step on their toes."*  
—Chinese Proverb

## Tech tools make spelling fun

What do you get when you combine technology and spelling? A good time. Have your child try these tips to learn new words:

- **Fool around with fonts.** Type words into a word-processing program. Change the fonts, the size and the color.
- **Spell in a spreadsheet.** Type one word into each cell, then let the program alphabetize them.
- **Puzzle it out.** Make word searches and more for free at [www.puzzlemaker.com](http://www.puzzlemaker.com).
- **Create high-tech flash cards** at [www.scholastic.com/kids/homework/flashcards.htm](http://www.scholastic.com/kids/homework/flashcards.htm).

Source: "Fun Spelling Practice Ideas!" Kalispell (Montana) Public Schools.

## Revive tired writing muscles

If your child can't express all his great ideas on paper, his fingers may be too tired to write. He can build up his stamina by:



- **Writing daily.** Add a little time each day.
- **Using pens or pencils** he doesn't have to grip as hard.
- **Using a softer writing surface.** If he presses too hard, he'll tear the paper.

Source: C. Cruz, *A Quick Guide to Reaching Struggling Writers*, K-5, FirstHand.

## When it comes to the Web, give your child a choice

It's a good idea to preview educational websites when your child isn't nearby. Then, when you hear, "Can I go online?" you'll be able to offer her some choices you like. Try:

- **Funbrain.com.** Learning games for K-8.
- **Scholastic.com.** Searchable by subject.
- **Starfall.com.** Phonics with comics.
- **PBSKIDS.org.** Play with TV friends.

Source: L. Alphonse, "Top Ten Educational Websites for Kids," Work it, Mom!, [www.workitmom.com/quicktips/detail/7025](http://www.workitmom.com/quicktips/detail/7025).

### Helping Children Learn®

Published in English and Spanish, September through May.

Publisher: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.

Editor: Alison McLean.

Staff Editors: Rebecca Miyares & Erika Beasley.

Production Manager: Pat Carter.

Translations Editor: Victoria Gaviola.

Layout & Illustrations: Maher & Mignella, Cherry Hill, NJ.

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P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474

1-800-756-5525 • [www.parent-institute.com](http://www.parent-institute.com) • ISSN 1527-1013