

Helping Children Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School
Harvard Elementary School



ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

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Demonstrate and expect respect and your child will, too

Children must have respect for authority, peers, belongings and themselves to learn and achieve in school. As a parent, you are uniquely qualified to teach your child to be respectful. Your child learns from everything you say and do. To encourage your child to have respect for people and property:



- **Be a role model.** If you want him to say *please* when asking for something, remember to say *please* yourself—both to your child and to others.
- **Discuss respect.** What is it? What does it look like? Who shows it? Who doesn't? Why is it important? How does it feel to be treated with respect or disrespect? Role-play situations in which your child should show respect.
- **Set high expectations.** If you're clear about what you expect of your child, he will be more likely to follow through. "I expect you to raise your hand in class and wait patiently for your turn."
- **Praise success.** Look for respectful words and behaviors. Compliment your child's efforts. "You listened to the coach even when the other kids were joking around. I was impressed!"
- **Criticize constructively.** Be precise and respectful. "Next time, please hold the door for Grandpa. That will make life easier for him."

Source: R. Silverman, "10 Tips on Teaching Respect to Children: You can't get it if you don't give it," drosbynsilverman.com, niswc.com/expectrespect.



Realistic resolutions jump-start change

A new year is a good time to talk with your child about how the school year is going. And making New Year's resolutions can be a good way to start positive change. Try these tips to help your child make resolutions she can keep:

- **Start small.** She probably won't go from reading 10 minutes a week to finishing an entire book in that time. Help her figure out smaller steps. "How about if you read for 30 minutes before bed?"
- **Think about the rewards.** If your child needs to raise her math grade, help her focus on the benefits of doing that. It will be easier to make the necessary changes.
- **Plan for obstacles.** If she always watches TV after school, help her think about what to do instead.
- **Celebrate successes.** Change is not always easy. If she didn't read for 30 minutes a day, but did manage to read on four days this week, that's still a lot more reading than she was doing before!

Source: S. Shellenbarger, "How to Keep a Resolution," *Wall Street Journal*, niswc.com/new.

Math: one step at a time

When children are in a hurry, they can forget that solving a math problem involves taking things step by step.

If your child is stuck on a problem, ask him to talk you through it. If he still can't figure it out, let the teacher know. Your child may need to review that material.

Source: K.A. Zahler, *50 Simple Things You Can Do to Raise a Child Who Loves Math*, ARCO Books.

Visualize for better reading

One way to improve your child's reading comprehension is to help her create mental images of the story. To start:



1. **Ask your child** to describe what is happening in the book.
2. **Have her sketch** on a sticky note a picture of a character, the setting or a conflict. She'll learn to read for details.
3. **Have her stick the note** to the book and keep reading. At the next stopping place, she should do another drawing.

In time, your child will stop thinking about the words, and the story will come alive.

Source: C. Blachowicz and D. Ogle, *Reading Comprehension: Strategies for Independent Learners*, The Guilford Press.

Self-control leads to success

Research shows that self-control is twice as important as intelligence in predicting your child's academic achievement. Build his self-control by offering him chances to:

- **Take responsibility.** Assign chores he can master, such as clearing the table. If he's responsible for a routine, post a chart with the steps.
- **Practice patience.** Make and enforce rules such as "Finish homework before watching TV."



Source: N. Shute, "For Kids, Self-Control Factors Into Future Success," *NPR*, niswc.com/control.



How do I stop my child from comparing herself to sister?

Q: I have two daughters. My older child is popular, a good student and a great athlete. My younger daughter is quiet. She has some learning challenges, so school is harder for her. She's not athletic at all. She compares herself to her older sister and says, "I'm the failure in this family." How can I help her realize that we love her just the way she is?



A: Younger siblings often feel as though they're running to catch up. But with your love and support, your child can find ways to grow into her own special self.

Research shows that self-esteem is directly linked to school achievement, so it is important for her to carve out some areas where she can be successful. Success in one area truly does lead to success in another.

To help her find her niche:

- **Look for activities that are different** from her sister's. What are your younger child's interests? If her sister is a soccer star but she has two left feet, perhaps she could try another sport, such as swimming. Maybe she'd be happier playing violin or acting in the school play.
- **Point out the things she does well.** Whether it's her sense of style or her kindness to others, make it clear that you are as proud of her achievements as you are of her sister's soccer goals.



Do you teach listening by example?

Your child's ability to listen well is critical for academic success. It will help him absorb and understand more, and that comprehension will help him communicate. Are you modeling listening skills for him? Answer *yes* or *no*:

1. **Do you try** to give your child your undivided attention when he's talking? If you're busy, say, "I'd love to talk about this after dinner."
2. **Are you patient** when you listen? Let him make his point.
3. **Do you avoid** interrupting your child? Do you ask him not to interrupt you?
4. **Do you "listen"** to what your child's behavior is telling you about his needs?
5. **Do you avoid** chiming in with the "right" answer?

Instead, let your child try to sort out what to do.

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you're taking steps to raise a good listener. For each no, try that idea.

"If you want children to keep their feet on the ground, put some responsibility on their shoulders."
—Abigail Van Buren

Practice tests aid studying

Many students reread the text when studying for a test. But research shows that taking practice tests may be more helpful. The process of recalling information over and over is a learning activity. Your child can:

- **Focus on quizzes in class.** Quizzes do more than prove what's been learned. They are chances to recall material.
- **Work with others.** It's helpful when kids quiz each other.
- **Make practice tests.** Create questions from textbook section headings, vocabulary and review questions.

Source: S. Sparks, "Research Finds Students Short on Study Savvy," Edweek.org, nismc.com/recall.

Specific compliments are good discipline

The best discipline strategies are positive, not harsh. Try to focus on what your child does right.

Be specific when you compliment your child. "You started your homework without being reminded. Great job!" Your child will be more likely to repeat good behaviors if he understands what you expect.

Strive for a healthy weight

More than one-third of all children in this country are considered overweight. In addition to increased health risks, overweight children also often have low self-esteem and become victims of bullying—and both negatively affect grades. All parents should:

- **Encourage children** to get an hour of physical activity per day.
- **Promote healthy eating** habits. Offer fruits and vegetables, not chips and candy.



Source: "Childhood Obesity Facts," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, nismc.com/obese.

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