

Helping Children Learn®

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

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



February 2015

Support your child's efforts to take responsibility for learning

Doing well in school can be a key to a student's enjoyment of life. In order to be a successful student, your child must take her school responsibilities seriously—and that requires your help.

To inspire your child's dedication to education:

- **Make learning a priority.** Explore your surroundings with your child. Visit the library, try new foods and take nature walks. Use classic toys (such as puzzles or interlocking building blocks) and games (such as Simon Says) to build important thinking skills. Show your child that learning is fun, not a chore!
- **Encourage perseverance.** Kids need their parents' support to keep trying when homework and other tasks are tough. When your child is tempted to give up, guide her to a positive outlook. "Let's review the instructions. I know you can do this!" Compliment her progress, too.
- **Get organized.** Students need help creating and sticking with the routines that lead to success. Set the same times each day for waking up, reading, studying and going to bed. Also make sure your child has designated spots for school supplies.
- **Wonder together.** Instead of providing answers, let your child take charge sometimes. If she asks, "Who was the second president?" help her find the answer. Use her question as an opportunity to learn about other things, too. "I wonder who the second vice president was. Let's find out."



Source: L. Markham, "How to Raise a Motivated Student," Aha! Parenting, niscw.com/wonder.



Motivate with opportunities for success

Many parents use stickers and prizes to motivate their children. But the secret to motivation is to make success feel so good that it's an inspiration—and a reward—all by itself. To encourage this kind of self-motivation:

- **Offer options.** Let your child make age-appropriate choices. After making smart choices, he'll probably feel pride—and a desire to keep making good decisions.
- **Support curiosity.** Give your child time to play independently and solve some of his own problems. His successes will give him the confidence to take on new challenges.
- **Let your child compliment himself.** Ask what he thinks of something he's done. He might say, "This tower is strong because I made a big foundation." This gives him a chance to feel good about himself without relying on others for approval. Compliment him for effort and persistence.

Source: "Motivating Learning in Young Children," National Association of School Psychologists, niscw.com/self-motivate.

Writing letters can improve communication

Help your child build her writing skills by trying a new approach to the old "What did you do in school today?" question.

Once a week, have your child write you a letter describing something that happened at school. Not only will she get great writing practice, but you may also find out about something interesting that happened!

Source: T. Thomason and C. York, *Write on Target: Preparing Young Writers to Succeed on State Writing Achievement Tests*, Christopher-Gordon Publishers.

Take the worry out of tests

You want your child to prepare for quizzes and tests so he can do his best. But you don't want him to feel so pressured he falls apart. Try these tips for anxiety-free tests:



- **Have your child** set aside time to study. If he has, reassure him it will pay off.
- **Encourage him** to get a little more sleep for a few nights before the test.
- **Offer tips** on staying calm during the test. He should read the directions. If he's stuck, he can take some deep breaths. If he's really stuck, he should move on.
- **Remind him** that no one test can make or break his elementary school career.

Source: E. Hartley-Brewer, *Talking to Tweens: Getting it Right Before it Gets Rocky with Your 8- to 12-Year-Old*, Da Capo Press.

Point to the past to problem-solve

If your child is overwhelmed by a project or stuck as she tries to figure out homework, help her draw on past experience to address her current problem.



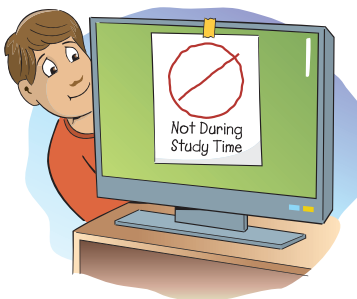
Remind her that she has done other complicated things. Ask, "What did you learn then about ways you can work through tough problems?"



How do I refocus my child's attention on schoolwork?

Q: My son spends hours each day playing video games. He has mostly stopped doing homework, and his grades are suffering. How can I get him to start living in the real world again?

A: Used responsibly, video games can be a fun way for children to relax. Some games promote physical activity. Some encourage play with others. But while some kids may handle video games well, many do not. And it is clear they are causing a problem for your son. His grades are falling. He is spending little or no time with friends and family. It's time for you to take action. To begin:



- **Set limits on screen time.**

The American Academy of Pediatrics advises that children spend no more than an hour a day playing video games. That may be your goal. But you may not get there all at once.

- **Establish electronics-free times.** These should include study time, meals and family time.
- **Supervise homework closely.** Select a regular time and place for your son to study. Help him build good study habits. He's out of practice, after all.
- **Plan things to do as a family.** Reading aloud, taking walks and playing games together will replace some of the video game time with more productive activities.



Can your child handle tough times?

Parents can't protect their children from everything, as much as they might like to. But they can equip their kids to deal with challenges and failures. Are you helping your child develop resilience? Answer *yes* or *no*:

1. **Do you let** your child make decisions wherever possible? It's a skill that improves with practice.
2. **Do you talk** about the process you use to find answers when you have a problem?
3. **Do you remind** your child that she's handled other difficult situations in the past?
4. **Do you listen** to your child when she's facing a tough choice, without trying to solve the problem for her?

5. **Do you try** to help your child see what she's good at?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are teaching your child to cope with challenges. For each no, try that idea.

"Genius without education is like silver in the mine."
—Benjamin Franklin

Stop a slump at the start

By February, your child's enthusiasm for learning may have begun to fade. So it's a good time to check progress and promote success. To do this:

- **Talk with the teacher.** Review how your child is doing and what you both can do to help him be successful.
- **Be creative.** Read books and do activities that relate to things your child is studying. Use methods such as drawing and acting to reinforce information.
- **Stay positive.** Help your child set reasonable goals, then applaud his efforts!

Source: J. Dayle, "Report Cards and the Midyear Slump," NYMetroParents, nismc.com/slump.

Set expectations that fit

Having high expectations for children helps them achieve in school. To establish expectations for your child that are both high and achievable, consider your child's:

- **Development.** Think about her age, personality and maturity. Goals shouldn't be easy or overwhelming to reach.
- **Understanding.** State your expectations in clear, simple terms.

Work on time management

Most kids have a hard time planning ahead. That's because they have very little sense of time. And like many adults, most kids have trouble resisting the temptation to do something fun instead of something hard. To help your child fit everything in:

- **Break big projects into small steps.**
- **Make a rule** that there is no TV or games until homework is done.
- **Create a big calendar** to keep track of due dates.



Source: M.L. Kutscher, *Organizing the Disorganized Child*, HarperCollins.

Helping Children Learn®

Published in English and Spanish, September through May.

Publisher: Phillip Wherry.

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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1-800-756-5525 • www.parent-institute.com • ISSN 1527-1013