

# Helping Children Learn®

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

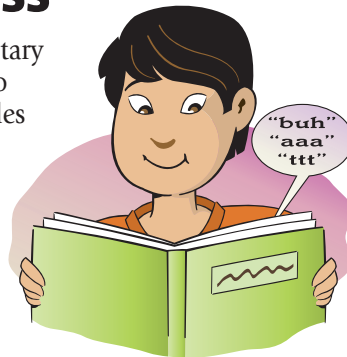
Harvard Elementary School



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## Help your young reader turn struggles into success

Reading can be challenging for some elementary schoolers, but there are things parents can do at home that really help. If your child struggles with reading, begin by reassuring him that you believe he *will* be a reader. Next, help him practice the skills that research links to reading success. These include the ability to:



- **Recognize and use sounds.** Talk about how words are made of parts. For example, *bat* is made of *buh*, *aaa* and *ttt*.
- **Learn the sounds that letters represent.** Look at printed letters with your child. Name their sounds. Also point out pairs and groups of letters, such as *gr* or *ing*. What sounds do the combined letters make?
- **Remember a lot of words.** The more words your child knows, the more he'll recognize and comprehend when he reads. Try to use new words often and repeat them frequently. Make sure their meaning is clear.
- **Use comprehension strategies.** Asking questions can improve your child's understanding. You might ask him, "How would you tell the story in your own words?" or "What would you do in that situation?"
- **Read quickly and correctly.** This takes time! As your child gains more experience with reading, this will become easier. Simply reading together will make a big difference!

Source: "Reading Tips for Parents," U.S. Department of Education, [www2.ed.gov/parents/read/resources/readingtips/part\\_pg5.html](http://www2.ed.gov/parents/read/resources/readingtips/part_pg5.html).



## Act quickly if you suspect bullying

Kids who are bullied often struggle in school. It's hard to learn math facts or concentrate on reading when you're worried about what might happen at recess. If you think your child may be a victim of bullying:

- **Don't wait.** Bullying has a significant impact on children. If you suspect something, talk with your child about it.
- **Learn as much as you can.** Ask your child who she sits with at lunch. Who does she play with at recess?
- **Contact the school.** Let the principal, the teacher or a counselor know what's going on.
- **Help your child practice a response.** She can say, "That's bullying and I want you to stop!"
- **Have her stick with friends,** if possible. It's harder to pick on a whole group.
- **Build her self-esteem.** Involve her in activities that make her feel good about herself.

Source: "Bullying: Help your child handle a bully," Mayo Clinic, [nswc.com/stopbully](http://nswc.com/stopbully).

## Language is no barrier

If English is not your first language, you may wonder how you can get involved with your child's schooling. There are many ways! You can:

- **Go to parent-teacher conferences.** If the school doesn't have an interpreter, ask if a friend can come along to help.
- **Find out from the teacher** what you can do at home to help your child.

## Try tips for learning using sight, sound and action

Not all kids learn in the same way, so it's useful to know which ways work well for your child. Watch how she tackles a new task for clues to see if your child prefers to:

- **Learn by seeing.** She may study well if she can make charts or flash cards of facts she needs to memorize.
- **Learn by hearing.** She may learn well if she reads the material she's studying aloud.
- **Get her whole body involved.** Encourage her to act out what she reads.



Source: "Discover Your Child's Preferred Learning Style," Rhode Island Department of Labor and Training, [nswc.com/studstyle](http://nswc.com/studstyle).

## Treat grades positively

If your child brings home a disappointing grade, don't get angry. Instead, motivate him to do his best:



- **Ask** what your child thinks is going on. Did he do the homework?
- **Talk** to the teacher. What has she noticed? Does your child understand the material?
- **Brainstorm** with your child about things he can do differently, such as set a regular time for homework and study.
- **Encourage** your child to take responsibility for his work—and be proud of it.



## Is it okay to give a fifth grader a cell phone?

**Q:** I am a single, working parent. My fifth-grade daughter is asking for a cell phone. I admit I would feel better if I knew she could reach me in a crisis. Still, fifth grade seems really young for a phone, and I worry she'll be distracted from her work. What should I do?

**A:** Cell phones are a big part of today's culture. More than 40 percent of elementary schoolers already have them. But what really matters is whether a cell phone will work for your child, her school and your family. To help you decide, consider these questions:



- **Why does she need a phone?** Safety is a big reason many parents want their child connected. You want your child to be able to reach you. Keep in mind that there are different kinds of phones—you can get one that is programmed to call just a few numbers, including yours.
- **Can she handle a phone and schoolwork?** Is your child able to use and keep track of a phone responsibly? Be sure you both know the school rules. Many schools do not allow cell phones to be turned on during the day. They *can* be distracting for learners. Your child must also know what kinds of messages are unsafe or inappropriate. And homework must come before phone time.
- **What limits will you enforce?** Who can she contact? Can she use apps? Which ones? For how long? Is your child prepared to have you check her phone and read her texts?



## Does your child have word power?

Knowing just the right word to use gives a student the power to express himself clearly. Are you helping your child expand his vocabulary and his ability to use the words he learns? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

1. **Do you talk** about words?  
If you are reading a book with your child and come across an unfamiliar word, talk about what it means.
2. **Do you use** new words to express familiar ideas? "Today, we're going to organize and categorize your toys."
3. **Do you play** word games?  
"Who can think of the most words that rhyme with *flag*?"
4. **Do you have** a family "word of the day"? Everyone tries to use the word three times.

5. **Does your child** write new words he learns in a personal "dictionary"?

### How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are giving your child word power. For each no, try that idea.

*"It's one thing to show your child the way, and a harder thing to then stand out of it."*

—Robert Brault

## Ease into middle school

If your child will be going to middle school next year, start preparing now to make the transition easier. You can:

- **Visit the middle school** with your child. Ask for a tour. Read the website.
- **Build school spirit.** Learn about the school's clubs, teams, classes, colors and mascot. What will your child learn and do in middle school that's exciting?
- **Encourage important habits.** Your child should stick to a daily homework routine and practice staying organized.
- **Keep communicating.** Discuss your child's hopes and concerns with her.

Source: "Packin' Up ... A Guide to Middle School Transition," Wake County Public School System, [niscw.com/moveup](http://niscw.com/moveup).

## Think outside the book

Successful students need to be able to do more than just read. They must think about what they read. Encourage your child to:

- **Ask questions.** "Do I understand this?" "What does it mean?" "What is it about?"
- **Discuss reading** assignments with friends. "Did you like the ending? Why, or why not?" "What was your favorite part?"

## Will this be on the test?

To help your child get organized to study for a big test, have her create a review sheet. She should:

- **Review** the chapter.
- **Write** down important facts and ideas. What did the teacher emphasize?
- **Add** key information or problems from the homework.



With her review sheet as a guide, your child can create—and then take—her own test. She'll be ready to take the test at school.

Source: A. Homayoun, *That Crumpled Paper Was Due Last Week*, Perigee Books.

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