

Helping Children Learn[®]

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



ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

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Build in some structure to make afternoons ideal for learning

Research suggests that participation in structured after-school activities can boost kids' academic achievement. That's because these programs provide chances to succeed at various activities, instilling confidence that can carry over into the classroom.

To create similar opportunities at home, focus on:

- **Homework time.** Set a regular study time. It encourages independence and responsibility.
- **Reading time.** Find creative, appealing ways to fit reading into your child's schedule. You might take books to the park, act out a story, or read a book and then watch the movie version.
- **Academic activities.** Incorporate math, science, history and more into everyday life. Help your child manage her allowance, for instance. Do a science experiment. Visit a historic site.
- **Creative or athletic activities.** When kids make progress in sports, art, music, technology and other areas, they gain a feeling of competence that can help them become better students. Remember to notice and compliment your child's hard work.
- **Goal setting.** Ask your child what she'd like to accomplish in and out of school. Set one or two reasonable goals. "I want to read a chapter book this week." Make a step-by-step plan for success.



Source: "Academic achievement improved among students active in structured after-school programs," (e) Science News, nswc.com/afternoon.



Point out fractions your child can use

Adults use fractions every day, whether they are measuring ingredients, calculating driving distance or figuring out the time before an event. To help your child understand more about fractions and their importance, point out all the ways you use them. Then get him involved! You can:

- **Collect a large pile of cereal,** plastic animals or Legos. Then divide it into four smaller, equal piles. Each pile illustrates $\frac{1}{4}$. Ask your child to rearrange the pile to illustrate other fractions.
- **Use measuring cups** and spoons and some rice or sand. It's easy for your child to see how many $\frac{1}{3}$ cup measures it takes to make one cup.
- **Share fraction facts.** "One-half of our family's birthdays are in May." "One-third of the rooms in our house have rugs."
- **Mark the passing of time** with fractions. Say, "It will take us 20 minutes to travel to Grandma's house. How long will it take us to get one-half of the way there?"

Source: S. Brown, "Fractions at Home: Beyond the Pie," Education.com, nswc.com/cerealmath.

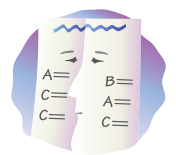
Investigate online sources

You can help your child learn how to do research on the Internet. To begin:

- **Prepare.** Find resources you trust, such as online encyclopedias for kids.
- **Supervise.** Teach your child to evaluate websites. Ask questions like, "Who is the author? What makes him trustworthy? Does this site present facts or opinions?"

Don't fuss over report cards

When report card time rolls around, getting angry (or gushing) about grades isn't helpful. Instead, try to stay CALM:



- C Control.** Remember whose report card it is—your child's, not yours.
- A Affirm.** Separate your feelings about the report card from your feelings about your child. Start with, "I love you always. Now let's talk about this report card."
- L Listen.** Your child may have a good idea why she got good (or poor) grades.
- M Motivate.** Encourage your child to keep doing her best. If necessary, help her plan ways she can do better.

Clean hands stay in school

Sickness and school absences go hand in hand. But studies show that there is one simple way to reduce illness and improve attendance: regular hand washing. Teach your child to:



- **Wash hands** after playing outside, after using the restroom and before eating. He should also try to wash his hands after he coughs or blows his nose.
- **Wash for at least 20 seconds.** (That's about how long it takes to sing the ABC song.)

Source: "Proper Hand Washing Helps Keep Kids in School," PreventDisease.com, nswc.com/wash.



How can I stop another child from being mean to mine?

Q: My son has never had many friends. One boy in his class who used to spend time with him seems to have moved to a new group of friends and now joins them in teasing my son. My son doesn't want to go to school. Should I call the former friend's mother and ask her to make her son stop?



A: As you know, social problems at school can have a negative effect on a child's emotional and academic wellbeing. When teasing gets to the point that it affects your child's willingness to go to school, you do need to take action.

But think very carefully before taking matters into your own hands and calling other parents. That hardly ever works. It could result in more heart-break for your son. Instead:

- **Talk to your child's teacher.** Let her know there is a problem and ask for her support in making your child feel safe in the classroom.
- **Check out after-school activities** and clubs at your child's school. Spending time with other students who enjoy activities such as making robots or singing in the chorus can help your son find his peer group.
- **Look for opportunities outside school** for your son to make friends. You might consider the Boy Scouts or a Boys and Girls Club. Sometimes, a structured setting makes it easier for kids to get along.

If your son continues to struggle, talk to the guidance counselor.



How do you handle issues at school?

When your child has a problem at school—academic, social or behavioral—the way you deal with it can affect the outcome. Do you know how to take positive action if your child has an issue at school? Answer *yes* or *no*:

1. **Do you communicate** regularly with your child's teacher, whether there is a concern or not?
2. **Do you begin** addressing any problems by arranging to talk to the teacher?
3. **Do you write** down your thoughts and questions before meeting with the teacher?
4. **Do you avoid** assigning blame if your child has a problem at school? Do you listen to find out if your child is contributing to the situation?

5. **Do you work** with the teacher to create an action plan to address the issue?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are handling your child's issues at school effectively. For each no, try that idea.

"The beautiful thing about learning is that nobody can take it away from you."

—B.B. King

Log in to online safety

Technology has changed the way students learn, play and socialize. Many children are even creating their own online content. To help keep your child safe online:

- **Establish rules.** Allow digital communication only with people you and your child know in real life.
- **Talk about safety and privacy.** Don't let your child reveal her phone number, school, password or location.
- **Stay informed** about online safety. Visit sites such as www.fosi.org (Family Online Safety Institute) and www.netismartz.org for more tips.

Focus on specific changes

You want your child to be more responsible. That's pretty general. To achieve your goal, make a list of specific things you want him to do, such as work on homework at a regular time without argument. Share it with your child and brainstorm ways he can do the tasks. Then, when you see changes in those areas, offer praise and recognition.

Self-talk helps your child say no



Whether it is joining in playground teasing or watching a forbidden movie, your child may sometimes feel pressured to do things to fit in. To help her say *no* to things that don't match your family's values, have her repeat to herself:

- **I can say no** to things that would put me in danger.
- **I can make good choices** for myself.
- **I can say, "You're my friend,** but I don't choose to do that."
- **It's OK** if I make choices that are not the same as the choices my friends make.

Source: D. Bloch and J. Merritt, *The Power of Positive Talk: Words to Help Every Child Succeed*, Free Spirit Publishing.

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