

# Helping Children Learn®

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

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



February 2014

## Increase your child's motivation to learn in school

You don't just want your child to learn. You want her to *want* to learn! Motivation is an important part of being a successful student.

To encourage your child's self-motivation:

- **Stay involved.** When parents are involved in education, kids do better in school. Make sure you monitor study time and communicate with the teacher regularly.
- **Remember that kids are adaptable.** If your child is struggling, don't give up! Stay positive. Work with her teacher to find solutions.
- **Promote independence.** Give your child age-appropriate freedoms. You might let her choose between two places to study.
- **Limit criticism.** Use positive words to boost your child's self-confidence.
- **Correct mistakes in an encouraging manner.** Instead of saying, "Your spelling is poor," try, "You spelled everything right except these two words! I bet you can fix them!"
- **Be specific.** It's better to say, "Your report is so neat. I can read it all," than, "I like your handwriting." Specifics help her repeat good behavior.
- **Expand your child's learning opportunities.** Let schoolwork spark your imagination. Visit the state capital, do a science experiment, or figure out a waiter's tip together. The key is to have fun!



Source: E. Pomerantz, "Research: Motivating Children to do Well in School," <http://i-parents.illinois.edu/research/pomerantz.html> and K. Seal, "Raising Self-Motivated Children," HighScope, [www.highscope.org/file/NewsandInformation/ReSourceReprints/Motivated.pdf](http://www.highscope.org/file/NewsandInformation/ReSourceReprints/Motivated.pdf).



## Simple ways to make homework easier

Sometimes getting kids to do homework is tougher than the homework itself! To get your child ready to tackle his assignments:

- **Develop organization skills.** Help your child devise a system that works for him.
- **Stick to a routine.** Let your child choose a quiet, comfortable place to do his daily work.
- **Help without taking over.** It's okay to guide your child. But never do the work for him.
- **Implement 'study time'** instead of "homework time." Kids can't say, "I don't have any study." If your child doesn't have assignments, he can read or review.
- **Be a role model.** While your child studies, work on important tasks such as paying bills.
- **Give compliments,** not prizes. Say, "Wow! You kept trying and it paid off!"

Source: C. Moorman and T. Haller, "How to Motivate Your Kids to Do Homework," NewsforParents.org, <http://tinyurl.com/3gdheq>.

## Setting high expectations leads to success

Expect your child to succeed in school, and she's more likely to! As well as setting high (yet reasonable) expectations, you should:

- **Look** for progress.
- **Communicate** clearly.
- **Celebrate** successes often.
- **Help** her learn from her mistakes.



Source: W. Parker, "Setting Appropriately High Expectations for Children," About.com, <http://tinyurl.com/43t872p>.

## Review these strategies for math test success

Studying for a math test can challenge both students and parents. But there are ways to help your child do his best. Help him:

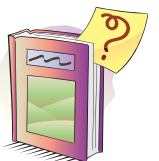
- **Look over material** to be covered. Be sure he understands those concepts.
- **Review homework** and quizzes.
- **Explain how to solve** a problem. This often helps a child see where he made a mistake.
- **Play 'Beat the Clock.'** Working quickly and accurately is important in math.
- **Remember to check** his work before handing the test in.

Source: Ontario Ministry of Education, "Helping Your Child Learn Math: A Parent's Guide," <http://tinyurl.com/mpxf56v>.

## Ask questions to get your child thinking critically

When children talk about what they read, they boost memory, critical thinking and comprehension skills. To develop your child's thought power, ask:

- **What is the most** interesting part of the book to you? Why?
- **What main idea** do you think the author was trying to get across?



Source: C. Fuller, *Teaching Your Child to Write*, Berkley Books.

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## What can I do when my child's health affects his studies?

**Q: My son is overweight. I have talked with his doctor, and we are working on improving our diet at home. But meanwhile, his grades are dropping and he has almost no one to play with. What can I do to help my child?**

**A:** Your son is not alone. Studies now show that one-third of all kids under the age of 18 are overweight.

Research also shows that overweight kids often do poorly in school. They can be afraid to speak up because they worry that the other kids will make fun of them. They may lack confidence in their abilities.

Kids who are overweight are more likely to spend time by themselves. And when they're alone, they're often watching TV, eating ... or doing both at the same time.

Encourage your child to be active. Start planning a family walk each day. Look for things you can do together on the weekends—like going to a park and kicking a soccer ball around.

You are already working with your child's doctor on a food plan. Although you need to follow that plan, don't become the "Food Police." Instead, focus on making healthy changes that benefit the *whole* family.

Finally, talk with your child's teacher. Ask her what she has observed. She may also have ideas about students your son could spend time with.



## Are you teaching problem-solving skills?

Children need to know more than how to answer the questions on a test. They also need to know how to solve problems for themselves. Are you helping your child develop problem-solving skills? Answer *yes* or *no* to each question:

\_\_\_ **1. Do you teach** your child that problems always offer opportunities for solutions?

up with? Even if they don't work, she'll learn something.

\_\_\_ **2. Do you look** for low-tech toys for your child to play with? These toys let children invent ways to use them.

### How did you do?

*Each yes answer means you are helping to develop your child's problem-solving skills. For each no answer, try that idea from the quiz.*

\_\_\_ **3. Do you encourage** your child to learn more about her special interests?

\_\_\_ **4. Do you encourage** your child to brainstorm solutions to problems? Ask things like, "How could you fix that?"

\_\_\_ **5. Do you let** your child try out the solutions she comes

*"I like a teacher who gives you something to take home to think about besides homework."*

—Lily Tomlin

## When parents talk less, kids listen more

It's important to talk with your child every day. But often, the more parents talk, the less children seem to listen!

To make the most of what you say:

- **Develop routines** for things like homework so you're not always nagging.
- **Keep the volume down.** Kids don't hear you more clearly if you yell.
- **Keep it short.** Give directions in five words or fewer. "Jack—Homework. Backpack. Car."

Source: L. Ticknor, "When I Stopped Yelling," *Washington Parent*, February 2009.

## Learn a new word each day

Improve your child's vocabulary by having the family learn one new word each day.

Write the word and its definition on a piece of paper. Put it on the refrigerator. Have each family member try to use the word at least three times during the day.

Don't forget to take time each week to review the words you've learned!

## Seek out service projects your child can lead

When your child helps in your community, he builds responsibility skills that carry over to success in school and life. Here are some easy activities he can take charge of:

- **Collect spare change.** Have your child count the money and then make a decision about where to donate it.
- **Make greeting cards.** Encourage him to make some to deliver to a senior citizens' center or a children's hospital.



Source: C.R. Tomlin, "10 Ways to Involve Children in Their Community," *Early Childhood News*, <http://tinyurl.com/kodt4vb>.

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