

Helping Children Learn®

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



ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

January 2014

Make learning resolutions for 2014

It's the start of a new year—and about halfway through the school year. So it's a good time to take stock and make any needed adjustments.

Talk with your child about how the school year is going. If you and your child set learning goals at the start of the year, review those. Is he making the progress you both would like? How can he make the rest of the school year even better?

Then make some learning resolutions. Here are a few to get you started:

- **Reduce screen time.** Briefly review all the time your child spends in front of a screen. How much time does he watch TV? Play computer games? Set a goal of reducing his total screen time to no more than two hours a day.
- **Spend more time reading.** There is no skill that will help him more in school. Reading gets better with practice. Make sure your child is reading every day. Encourage him to read about his interests: sports, his favorite musician or a hobby.
- **Return to routines.** Has your child's bedtime begun to slip later and later? Is your family's regular study time now not quite so regular? Go back to the routines you established at the beginning of the school year. Routines like these make life easier—and help kids do better in school.

Source: Kaiser Family Foundation, "Daily Media Use Among Children," <http://kff.org/other/report/generation-m2-media-in-the-lives-of-8-to-18-year-olds/>.



Choose the best books to read aloud

No matter how old your child is, reading aloud is a wonderful way to spend time together—and to continue boosting reading skills. Choosing books to read with your child can be fun and rewarding. But it can also be overwhelming with so many shelves of library books.

To make better book selections, ask yourself:

- **Does this book relate** to my child's interests? Is it similar to something we have enjoyed in the past?
- **Will this book teach** my child new words? Each time you read a book with your child, you are helping her expand her vocabulary.
- **Is this story** one that my child could tell later? One reason that fairy tales remain popular is that they tell stories children love to hear again and again.

Source: M. Strickland and L. Abbott, "Experiencing the Early Reading Experience: Books, Strategies, and Concepts," *The Reading Teacher*, September 2010.

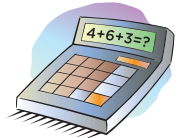
Calculators can help improve 'mental math'

Even though calculators are never far away, basic math skills are still important. Mental calculations stimulate thinking and build high-level math skills.

You can use a calculator to help your child practice mental math. Give him two three-digit numbers and ask him to estimate the total. After five seconds, let him use a calculator to check his answers.

As he gets faster, make the challenge even greater. While he does the math in his head, you use the calculator.

Source: D. Adams and M. Hamm, *Helping Students Who Struggle with Math and Science*, Roman & Littlefield Education.



Review the components of respect with your child

Learning to be respectful will help your child succeed in school and for the rest of her life. To build your child's respect for people and belongings:

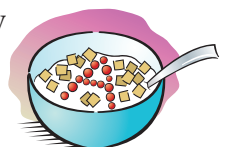
- **Be** a role model.
- **Look** for examples of respectful people.
- **Treat** books and toys with respect.
- **Make** sure your child feels cared for and trusted—this builds her self-respect.

Source: S. McChesney, "Respect: How to teach it and how to show it," *teAchnology*, <http://tinyurl.com/n8dsjmv>.

A healthy breakfast gets the day off to a good start

Research shows that children who eat breakfast have better attendance, concentrate better and have higher math scores.

For days when there isn't time to sit down for breakfast, have healthy grab-and-go options ready, like granola bars, dry cereal and fruit.



Source: Healthy Children, "The Case for Eating Breakfast," <http://tinyurl.com/l54d6uy>.



How can I teach my child about self-control?

Q: My six-year-old daughter just can't seem to control herself. If I tell her to clean up her room or start her homework, she dissolves into a full-blown tantrum. Her teacher says her behavior is not much better in school. What can I do?

A: No one—including your daughter—can be happy with her current behavior. Children need limits to feel safe. And while they're young, they need *you* to set the limits so that they can learn to control their own behavior.

Helping children learn self-control is a slow process. But it's not too late to start:

- **Help your child use her words** when she is feeling strong emotions. If she gets angry, she can say, "It makes me angry to have to turn off the TV." Those words are a signal to herself to stop, take a deep breath and calm down.
- **Prepare her for difficult situations.** Tell her that you understand how disappointed she is, but it's time to turn off the TV. Then remind her to stop, take a deep breath and stay calm.
- **Praise her when she stays in control.** Remind her that she is showing mature behavior, and that you are proud of her.
- **Model correct behavior.** "I'm upset because there's so much traffic. But I am going to take a deep breath and stay calm so I am in control."



Do you help your child use time wisely?

January is all about time. We turn over a new page on the calendar—and start a new year. This is a good month to review whether you are helping your child learn to use time wisely. Answer "yes" or "no" to each question.

1. **Do you develop** your child's sense of time? "Seven more days until Grandma comes."
2. **Do you create** a "count-down calendar" when your child is looking forward to something special? Cross off the days together.
3. **Do you use** the same method when he has a big project due? "Nine days until the Science Fair!"
4. **Do you break** big projects into small steps so it's not too overwhelming?
5. **Do you do** things at predictable times? Maintain regular bedtime and study time routines. Keep a calendar for things everyone has to do.

How did you do?

Each yes means you are helping your child develop a sense of time—and how to use it wisely. For each no, try that idea from the quiz.

*"The great aim of education is not knowledge, but action."
—Herbert Spencer*

What teachers really think

Parents often wish they knew what teachers were thinking. What do they want students—and parents—to do? Teachers hope parents will:

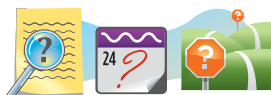
- **Take responsibility** for study time. Teachers rely on parents to enforce rules about homework time.
- **Have high expectations.** Help your child set realistic goals, and expect that he will meet them.
- **Understand teachers' schedules.** Teachers want to communicate with parents, but sometimes their time is limited. Ask your child's teacher about the best way to get in touch with her.
- **Avoid absences.** Missing an occasional day is understandable. Missing a week should be due to an unusual circumstance.

Source: R. Taibbi, "What Teachers Wish Parents Knew," Psychology Today, <http://tinyurl.com/n6dafve>.

Ask questions to help your child stay organized

For many children, getting organized to do homework is tough. Ask your child these questions every day to help her focus:

- **Is** the assignment clear?
- **When** is it due?
- **Is** it something you should finish today or is it a long-term assignment?



Keep three traits in mind when it comes to discipline

The secret to great discipline involves three things: being *firm*, *fair* and *consistent*.

Imagine your child forgot her homework—again. Stay *firm* about your expectations. It is her responsibility to remember all of her things. Together, think of a *fair* way to help her remember her belongings, such as posting a checklist near the door. Be *consistent* in holding her responsible—and in complimenting her success!

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Published in English and Spanish, September through May.

Publisher: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.

Editor: Stacey Marin.

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