

Helping Children Learn®

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

Harvard Elementary School



ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

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Ask these questions at your parent-teacher conference

Parent-teacher conferences are a great opportunity for you to get to know your child's teacher—and your child. By meeting with her teacher, you'll learn more about your child's strengths and weaknesses. Her teacher will also give you a better idea about what to expect throughout the rest of the school year.

Here are some questions you might ask your child's teacher:

- **What will you cover** in this grade this year?
- **What are your expectations** for homework? Has my child missed any assignments so far? If so, how can she make them up?
- **How are my child's** work habits? Does she use time in class well? Is she organized?
- **Does my child read** at the level you would expect for this grade?
- **Is my child able** to do the math you expect for a student in this grade?
- **Has my child missed any classes** other than the ones I contacted the school about?
- **Does my child qualify** for any special programs?
- **Does my child get along** well with the other students?
- **What can I do at home** to help my child be more successful?

Remember to bring paper and a pen to take notes on what your child's teacher says. Exchange contact information and find out the best way and time to get in touch.



Encourage writing in a variety of ways

Not everyone will grow up to be a best-selling author. But people who can put their thoughts into writing will be successful in any field.

Here are some ways you can help your child become a better writer:

- **Encourage him to email** or write letters to friends and family members.
- **Read a book together**, then write your child a letter about what you've read. Encourage him to write back to you. This will also help your child learn to read for meaning.
- **Suggest he rewrite** the ending to a movie you've just seen together. What would he change?
- **Encourage your child** to keep a journal. Help him choose or make a book with blank pages and pick out a special pen. Then encourage him to put thoughts and feelings on paper.

Motivate your child with a study buddy

Sometimes, kids can learn better if they work with another student. A study buddy can be great for helping children master challenging material.



To make study sessions productive:

- **Be clear about the purpose.** Students should agree that they are getting together to study—not to play.
- **Set goals.** Decide what is going to be covered during a session—and stick to it!

Source: G. Wood, *How to Study: Use Your Personal Learning Style to Help You Succeed When It Counts*, Learning Express.

Use teachers' suggestions on ways to help at home

The National PTA asked teachers what they wished parents would do to help their children in school. Here's what they said:

- **Ask your child** about school every day.
- **Set an example.** Show your child that learning is enjoyable and useful.
- **Emphasize academics.** Talk about how everyday experiences relate to what your child is learning in school.
- **Follow daily routines** that encourage healthy sleeping and eating habits.
- **Encourage your child** to do his best. Show that you believe education is important.



A set of 'House Rules' can help simplify discipline

As a family, consider creating a set of "House Rules" that will always be enforced. These should be rules and consequences regarding your family's biggest concerns. Creating rules and outlining consequences will create a house full of respectful, responsible family members.

Source: R. Guarendi, *Discipline That Lasts a Lifetime: The Best Gift You Can Give Your Kids*, St. Anthony Messenger Press.



How much homework should elementary schoolers have?

Q: My two children could not be more different about homework. One spends about two hours a day on his school assignments. He asks for help constantly. He wants me to check over everything. My younger child says he doesn't have homework or he did it at school. When he does work at home, he races through it. How can I help them find a happy medium?

A: This is a snapshot of the challenges teachers face every day! Your children have the same parents and the same home environment. Yet they are as different as can be.

Surprisingly, their problems have similar solutions. First, ask to talk with both teachers. Share what your sons are doing at home. How much time does each teacher expect homework to take?

Next, set a rule that there is daily study time at your house—so your younger son might as well bring work home from school; otherwise, you'll give him things to do, such as extra math problems to review.

Set some ground rules. At the start of every study session, go over the work they have to do and help make a list of priorities. Stay nearby as they work. Check at the end to see that they did what was on the list.



Is your child building responsibility?

Building responsibility is a lot like building muscles. The more your child acts in a responsible way, the more likely she is to do so again. The behavior she learns at home will show up at school. Are you helping your child be responsible? Answer *yes* or *no* to each of the statements below to find out:

___ **1. Is your child** responsible for getting herself ready for school in the morning?

___ **2. Do you have** a regular homework time in your house? That makes it easier for your child to be in charge of her schoolwork.

___ **3. Does your child** know that choices have consequences?

___ **4. Is your child** responsible for getting her belongings and homework to school? Create a place where everything goes. Help her pack her book bag at night.

___ **5. Do you keep** from rushing to school if your child forgets something?

How did you do?

Each yes means you are helping your child build her "responsibility muscles." For each no answer, try that idea from the quiz.

"There are many little ways to enlarge your child's world. Love of books is best of all."
—Jacqueline Kennedy

Put a limit on screen time

Kids spend an average of 7.5 hours a day in front of a screen. That's longer than some school days!

The more time children spend in front of screens, the less time they have to read, exercise or focus on school. To limit your child's screen time:



- **Create rules.** Studies show that when parents set limits, screen time drops.
- **Remove screens** from bedrooms.

Source: "Reduce Screen Time," National Institutes of Health, www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/obesity/wecan/reduce-screen-time/index.htm.

Set high expectations for math and science

Math and science are extremely important in any of today's best-paying jobs—and developing positive attitudes about math and science starts as early as elementary school. Play games that encourage these subjects. Teach your child that brains, like muscles, get stronger with practice.

Source: J. Jacobs and others, "I Can, But I Don't Want To: The Impact of Parents, Interests, and Activities on Gender Differences in Math," *Gender Differences in Mathematics*, Cambridge University Press.

Raising a moral child pays off

It takes dedication and constant watchfulness to raise a child with good morals—but it's worth it. With your help, your child will grow up with a strong moral compass that will serve her well in school and in life.

To build your child's character:

- **Explain how you make** decisions.
- **Talk about examples.** Discuss the decisions that TV characters make.
- **Catch her showing** good character. Tell her you're proud of her.

Source: M.W. Berkowitz, "Character Must Matter to Parent First," *The Topeka Capital-Journal*, http://cjonline.com/stories/081201/opi_berkowitz.shtml.

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P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474

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