

Helping Children Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

Harvard Elementary School



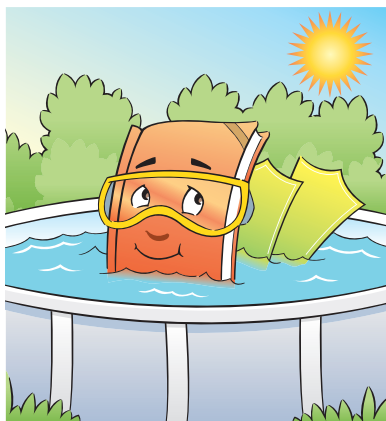
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

May 2014

Plan now to make summer reading fun, not frustrating

You know that reading over the summer is a great way for your child to maintain important skills. But did you know that she benefits most when you emphasize key elements of reading? They include:

- **Access.** Make sure your child has regular opportunities to find books she likes. Plan frequent trips to the library. Sign up for summer reading programs. Visit bookstores and reading websites.
- **Support.** Kids need help picking the right books. For example, does a book match your child's reading abilities? How about her interests? Before school ends, ask the teacher for your child's reading level, and for summer reading suggestions. These will help when selecting books and talking to librarians. Websites like *greatschools.org* can help you find books, too.
- **Discussion.** It's important to check your child's comprehension when she reads. Ask, "What happened in the story?" and "How did it end?" Also encourage her to ask you questions. Enjoy learning from each other! If your child struggles with more than five out of every 100 words, the vocabulary is probably too advanced. It's okay for a book to be challenging, but summer reading should not be a source of stress.



Source: "How to Make Summer Reading Effective," National Summer Learning Association, www.summerlearning.org/resource/collection/CB94AEC5-9C97-496F-B230-1BECDFC2DF8B/Research_Brief_03_-_Kim.pdf.



Learning: Don't let your child miss out

The school year is winding down, but summer isn't here yet. It is important that you keep the same focus on attendance that you did earlier in the year.

Here are three reasons why your child should come to school on time each day:

1. Learning hasn't stopped.

Teachers are still teaching new content. Kids who are absent won't know this information. Students who miss just 10 days of school in their early years are still behind in high school.

2. Teachers often plan group projects for the end of the year.

These promote cooperation, problem solving and responsibility—skills your child will need in the workplace. If he's absent, he won't benefit from these critical lessons.

3. Regular attendance teaches kids to be dependable. That's an important quality for everyone to develop.

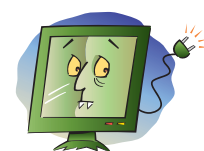
Source: H. Chang and M. Romero, "Present, Engaged & Accounted For: The Critical Importance of Addressing Chronic Absence in the Early Grades," National Center for Children in Poverty.

Encourage your child to try new skills in new ways

Summer is a great time for you to challenge your child to experiment with subjects and skills that are outside his comfort zone. A child who has never thought of himself as an athlete could try a sport. A shy child may enjoy being in a play. Trying and mastering hard things is how kids learn.

Unplug your screen fiend

You've probably heard the experts' advice: "Limit screen time to two hours a day." That includes TV, computer fun and video games. It's easier said than done! It helps to:



- **Change the family focus** to more exercise and less sitting around.
- **Be a role model.** That means the two-hour rule applies to parents, too.
- **Combine activities.** Do sit-ups while watching a favorite show.
- **Make mealtime technology free.**

Source: "Tips to Reduce Screen Time," National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, <http://tinyurl.com/35pb9rl>.

Look on the plus side

Rules and consequences are part of discipline, but to give your child tools for success in school, most of the discipline you do—roughly 85 percent—should encourage good behavior. Try to:



- **Teach by example.** If you want a responsible child, show her you take your own responsibilities seriously.
- **Give specific compliments.** Let your child know exactly what she did right.

You'll spend most of your time on the things that really matter.

Source: W. Sears and M. Sears, *The Successful Child: What Parents Can Do to Help Kids Turn Out Well*, Hachette Book Group.

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How can my child overcome indecision?

Q: My eight-year-old has a terrible time making decisions. While she's still choosing between chocolate or vanilla, the rest of the family is already finishing their cones. Her behavior also hurts her when she's taking tests—she can't decide between A or B. How can I give her more confidence in her ability to make choices?

A: The best way to help your struggling choice-maker is to let her make more choices. Start with easy ones (cheese sandwich or peanut butter?).

If she agonizes over those, ask her to think about the worst that could happen if she doesn't like a choice she's made. (She eats a cheese sandwich.) Help her see that not all choices are life-changing.

For bigger choices, here are some things to try together:

- **List the pros and cons of each choice.**
- **Make a pretend choice.** Let her imagine she has chosen to play softball rather than soccer, for example. Spend a few days pretending to live with that decision. She'll know by then if she's happy with it.
- **Talk about choosing wrong.** People sometimes change their minds. Talk about decisions that you regret. Say, "I made the best choice I could at the time. Now I know more and I am making a different choice." Let her see that even a bad decision is rarely the end of the world.



Can you train a child's brain to plan?

Planning ahead doesn't come naturally to many elementary schoolers—their brains are still developing those skills. Are you helping your child learn to manage his time and priorities well? Answer *yes* or *no* to each question.

1. **Do you discuss** with your child all the steps involved in finishing a big school project, and write them on the family calendar?
2. **Do you help** your child make a list each day of things he needs to complete?
3. **Do you ask** your child to make a plan for earning and saving money when he wants the latest fad item?
4. **Do you make** a family list of things you'd like to do this summer?

5. **Do you treat** TV like dessert: allowing it only after the main meal—homework—is done?

How are you doing?

Each yes answer means you are helping your child look ahead. For each no, try that idea from the quiz.

"Children are educated by what the grown-up is and not by his talk."

—Carl Jung

Persistence pays off

Successful people in fields from athletics to science share one trait: persistence—the ability to keep going, even when things are challenging. If your child is losing motivation for schoolwork, remind him:

- **Regular practice** is important for success. It is true for soccer or piano playing, and it is just as true for learning to read or solving math problems.
- **How good it will feel** to achieve his goals for the year. Have him post them where he can see them daily.

Source: A. Duckworth and C. Peterson, "Grit: Perseverance and Passion for Long Term Goals," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 2007, <http://tinyurl.com/kuye8w>.

Fine-tune self-esteem

What would Goldilocks say about your child's self-esteem? To make sure it's "just right":

- **If your child feels** she is entitled to special treatment, set limits and enforce them. Ask her to pitch in around the house.
- **If your child thinks** her ideas don't have much value, teach her new skills—mastering them will boost her confidence.

Source: Mayo Clinic Staff, "Self-esteem Check: Too High or Too Low?" www.mayoclinic.com/health/self-esteem/MH00128.

Avoid the summer slide

Research shows that to do their best in school, students need to maintain their skills over the summer. Make it a priority to:



- **Choose summer programs wisely.** Many kids enjoy camps that combine academics with non-academic fun.
- **Stay involved.** Before a family trip, for example, ask your child to help you budget, research and map out your plans.
- **Ask the teacher** what skills your child should work on this summer.

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