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Elementary School Parents[®]

Harvard Elementary School

make the difference!



A review sheet can help your child prepare for any test

Sometimes, students forget that they have a test. Or they study the wrong material. They may even study for the wrong type of test. To avoid such surprises, help your child come up with a strategy for test review—a routine she can follow for every test she has.

One effective strategy is to create a review sheet for each upcoming test. On it, your child should include:

- **The date of the test.**
- **The content of the test.** Will it be a quiz on definitions? Will it cover a specific chapter or class activity?
- **The type of test.** Will it be multiple-choice, true-false or an essay test? Tell your child it's important to ask the teacher for this information. Knowing the test type will affect how your child studies. She'll need to know more about a term if she has to use it in an essay, for example, than if she simply has to match a term with a definition.
- **Her plan for studying for the test.** Which days will she study? What times? (Remind her to check the family calendar and factor in time for her extracurricular activities and family commitments.)
- **The study strategies she'll use.** Will she look over a study guide from class? Highlight class notes? Make flash cards? Reread textbook chapters? Prepare sample test questions? Study with a buddy? She should also be sure to follow any review guidelines provided by her teacher.

Special days in April promote fun learning!



April may bring showers—but it also brings days parents can use to promote learning.

Here are some fun things you can plan this month:

- **April 2** is International Children's Book Day and Hans Christian Andersen's birthday. This day is designed to inspire a love of reading. Head to the library and grab some books!
- **April 15** is income tax deadline day. Talk about the purpose of taxes. And practice calculating percentages with your child.
- **April 22** is Earth Day. As a family, think of something you can do to protect the earth.
- **April 23** is the day when Shakespeare's birthday is celebrated. Ask your child to write a scene for a play and act it out with friends or family members.
- **April 30** is International Jazz Day. Find a radio station that plays jazz and listen to it with your child. Describe how the music makes you feel.

It's not too late to get involved—volunteer at your child's school



Have you ever thought of volunteering to help at your child's school? It's not too late! Here are five reasons to give it a try:

1. **Your child will benefit.** Even if you're not in his classroom, your child will know you're at school. He'll feel important and he'll know you think learning is important, too.
2. **You'll get to know** your child's teachers and other school staff. That makes it easier to ask for help when your child needs it.
3. **The school will benefit.** Whether you read to a classroom, help in the cafeteria or tutor students, you're freeing school staff to spend more time with kids. And that leads to better learning.

4. **Volunteering is easy.** Many schools offer training to volunteers. And there are volunteer jobs that can be done at home, at night or on weekends. So every parent can get involved.
5. **Volunteering is fun.** You meet other parents in your neighborhood. You may learn new skills. And you get a good feeling from knowing you've done something important.

Interested? Call the school today to see how you might be able to help.

"Nothing you do for a child is ever wasted ... or forgotten."

—Garrison Keillor

Regular review helps elementary schoolers master math skills



Success in math is built on mastering basic skills. Your child's chances of acing more math tests can improve

if you do these things:

- **Regularly quiz your child** on basic math facts: 2×9 , $12 - 4$, $6 + 6$, etc. With your child, make a set of homemade flash cards with the math facts he needs to know. You can use these to quiz your child—at the breakfast table, in the car or while you wait at the doctor's office. He has mastered a math fact when he can answer in fewer than three seconds.
- **Resist telling your child** the answers. Your child will learn better if you show him how to find the answer. For instance, if he doesn't know what 3×5 is, have him draw three parallel horizontal lines. Cross them with five vertical lines. Then have him count the intersections to get the answer.
- **Have your child practice** writing numbers neatly. One quarter of the math errors students make is due to messy number writing. Your child should make sure the numbers are neatly lined up, too.
- **Encourage your child** to work more problems than the teacher assigns. Good math skills come with practice.
- **Challenge your child** to do math "in his head." See if he can figure out a problem without using pencil and paper or a calculator.

How well are you listening to your child?



Communication between you and your child is very important. You want her to know that she can talk to you about school

problems or difficult situations she may be facing. But when your child talks, are you really listening? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

- ___ 1. **Do you give your child** some uninterrupted listening time every day, like when she comes home from school?
- ___ 2. **Do you avoid interrupting** your child when she is speaking to you?
- ___ 3. **Do you tell your child** if you are unable to listen to what she is saying and set a time when she can have your full attention?
- ___ 4. **Do you ask questions** if you don't understand what your child is saying?
- ___ 5. **Do you sometimes rephrase** what your child has said to make sure you understand?

How well are you doing?

Most *yes* answers mean you have strong listening skills. For *no* answers, try those ideas.

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Parents
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Work with the teacher first if you encounter a disagreement



Don't like what your child's teacher assigns for homework? Don't think the teacher has been fair to your child? Think her approach to teaching isn't working?

There are others at school who can help you resolve a problem with your child's teacher—the school counselor or principal. But the first person you should *always* talk with is the teacher.

Following these steps can help resolve a problem quickly:

- **Set up an appointment** or schedule a phone call with the teacher. The end of the day, when you're both tired, is probably not the best time for a discussion involving strong feelings.
- **Seek the facts.** Talk to your child. But try not to draw conclusions or assess blame until you've talked with the teacher.

- **Look for misunderstanding.** Sometimes the teacher isn't aware of a child's difficulty or confusion about a rule or assignment. Or your child might misunderstand an assignment.
- **Avoid criticizing the teacher** or school in front of your child. This confuses children, and might make them become defiant and rude to teachers.
- **Discuss possible solutions.** What might you, the teacher and your child do to solve the problem at hand?
- **Talk about how best to proceed.** Try to work something out with the teacher. But if you can't agree on a solution, discuss who you should talk with next.

Source: L. Katz, "Preventing and Resolving Parent-Teacher Differences," ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary & Early Childhood Education, University of Illinois.

Develop thinking skills by letting your child make some decisions



As your child moves from kindergarten to high school graduation, you need to figure out a way to teach him how to make good decisions.

The best way to learn to make good decisions is by making lots of them. So give your child as many chances as you can to make choices.

Young children can decide what they want for lunch. Older kids can have a wider range of choices.

Of course, you'll still set the boundaries. Your child can decide whether to do his math or science homework first, but he can't decide to watch TV before he starts his

homework. Gradually, give your child more practice in figuring out how he can make responsible choices.

Children don't always connect outcomes with the choices they have made, so help your child think about the consequences of his decisions.

And when he makes a poor decision, sit down and talk about what worked and what didn't. Ask, "What would you do differently next time?" The next time he has to make a decision, he will be able to draw on what he learned.

Source: R. Curwin, *Making Good Choices: Developing Responsibility, Respect, and Self-Discipline in Grades 4-9*, Corwin Press.

Q: My eight-year-old daughter has tantrums when she gets angry or frustrated. She's acting the same way in school, and her teacher has asked for my help in getting her to control herself. What can I do?

Questions & Answers

A: Elementary-age children have more stress in their lives than most parents realize. When they don't have the skills to cope with stress, they may resort to toddler-style outbursts and crying fits.

However, your daughter's success in school and with other children depends on her learning how to control her behavior.

To minimize temper tantrums, first try to figure out what triggers them. Keep a record of your child's behavior for one week. What happens just before a tantrum begins? Do you notice any patterns? Avoid, and help her avoid, some of the situations that lead to stress.

Next, give your child tools to manage her behavior. When your child has a meltdown at home, suggest that she:

- **Take time out.** Have her remove herself from the situation for a five-minute breather. Let her return when she feels composed enough to talk calmly.
- **Use calming techniques.** Teach her to breathe deeply, slowly counting to 10. Have her dribble a ball, pet an animal, or tell herself, "I can work through this."
- **Throw it out.** Have her write or draw her angry feelings on paper. Then have her wad the paper up and toss it away.
- **Talk it out.** Help your child become more self-aware. Note when she's having a bad day. Help her name her feelings.

It Matters: Motivation

Are you speaking the language of encouragement?



Most parents enjoy praising their children with phrases like “Great job!” and “That looks amazing!” But research shows that *encouragement* has a bigger effect than *praise* on a child’s motivation. So what is the difference between the two?

Praise:

- **Discusses results.** “Great job on the science quiz! You got an A!”
- **Uses opinion words** such as *good*, *great*, *terrific* and *wonderful*.
- **Is typically given** when your child has performed as you had hoped she would.

Encouragement:

- **Notifies effort and progress.** “Look at that project! I can tell you’ve spent a lot of time on it! It must feel good to know you worked so hard!”
- **Uses descriptive words.** “You picked up your room without being asked. Look at that *clean* floor and *organized* desk!”
- **Can be given** regardless of your child’s performance. “That didn’t work out the way you planned, did it? I can tell you’re disappointed, but I know you’ll try again next week. What do you think you might do differently next time?”

The big difference is that words of praise lead your child to rely on *your* assessment of her accomplishments, while words of encouragement lead her to form her *own* positive assessment of herself. Encouragement makes motivation soar!

Five easy ways to increase your child’s motivation for learning

Nagging your child to study doesn’t usually work. Nor does preaching about the many benefits of education.

To motivate your child:

1. **Be a learner yourself.** Let your child see you read books. Go to the library. Watch educational TV programs. Attend school functions. Tackle new projects. Show curiosity.
2. **Share what you learn.** Talk about new ideas or scientific discoveries with your child. Discuss things you read or hear.
3. **Show an interest** in what he is learning. Ask questions simply to learn and share—not to check up on your child.
4. **Believe he can learn.** If you show faith in his ability to learn, he



will have more confidence in his ability as well.

5. **Never lose faith.** If your child has problems in school, stay calm. Help him see that problems can be solved. Figure out what your child can do to improve, and how you and the teacher can help.

Setting expectations leads to your child’s academic success



Expect your child to succeed, and her chances for success improve greatly. Expect her to come up short, and the odds are that she will.

Children are usually keenly aware of how their parents view them, and they often tailor their actions to those views. So it’s very important to have high expectations—and communicate them to your child.

To set effective expectations:

- **Make sure what you expect** is within your child’s abilities. If you set expectations that are

either too high or too low, your child may do poorly.

- **Let your child know** what you expect of her. Make a list of expectations. Cover places and situations—home, school, homework, etc.
- **Be consistent.** Don’t lower your expectations because you feel guilty for being away from home. Don’t raise them because you’ve had a rough day.
- **Give your child the ways** and means to meet your expectations. For example, provide a well-lit study space and school supplies.