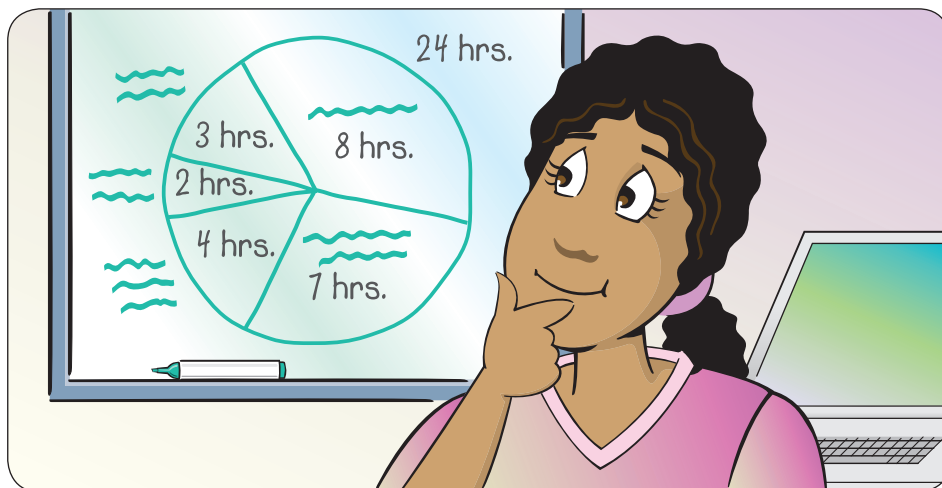


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Elementary School Parents[®]

Harvard Elementary School

make the difference!



Simple tips get your family back into the school 'groove'

The start of a fresh school year brings new routines, schedules and priorities. Here are some practical ideas to help you and your family gear up for a great school year:

- **Make a plan** for after-school activities. Schedule adequate time for homework, play, sports, clubs and family time.
- **Scale back screen time.** Set a weekly maximum for time spent watching television, playing electronic games and surfing the Internet. Maintain a firm rule that homework and chores come first.
- **Establish a family reading time.**
- **Reestablish bedtimes** for school nights.
- **Keep a family calendar.** Mark each family member's activities in a different color.
- **Start a change jar** so you'll have spare lunch money on hand.
- **Collect important phone numbers**, such as numbers for the school office, after-school program and a neighbor. Update work, doctor and other emergency contact numbers.
- **Have a backup plan.** Find another parent who will exchange school pickup favors—in case you get sick or delayed by work or traffic.
- **Spruce up a study space** for your child. Provide paper, pencils, a dictionary and other needed supplies.
- **Set up a file for school papers.** Place all school notices in it so you don't misplace them.
- **Get ready the night before school.** Have your child set out her clothes, pack her lunch and put her school bag by the door.

Don't let your child miss out on learning!



As the school year begins, help your child get into the habit of going to school every day.

Research shows that missing school regularly can hurt both the students who miss class and their classmates.

When students miss school, they miss out on learning. When they return, they have to work harder to catch up. And since most subject matter builds on previous lessons, it doesn't take long for these students to fall behind.

As a result, kids who miss school have lower levels of achievement throughout their school careers. Research shows that, by sixth grade, students who miss an average of just one day a week are more likely to drop out of high school.

The students who do come to class also miss out. When teachers have to repeat material or pay extra attention to kids who have been absent, everyone suffers.

Source: K. Nauer and others, "Strengthening Schools by Strengthening Families," Center for New York City Affairs.

Set the stage for success by promoting respect at school



Respectful behavior is just as important at school as it is at home. Encourage your child to show respect at school.

He can do this by:

- **Being courteous.** He should say *please* and *thank you* to his teacher and classmates.
- **Doing what's expected.** Everyone in school has a job to do. If the teacher doesn't plan lessons, no one can learn anything. If students don't do their jobs—homework, listening to the teacher—it makes it more difficult to learn.
- **Raising his hand.** Imagine having 30 students in a class, each of whom wants attention right now. When your child raises his hand and waits for the teacher to call on him, he demonstrates

self-control and respect for others.

- **Addressing the teacher** by name. Just saying “Good morning, Mrs. Jones” is an easy way to show respect.
- **Listening to the teacher's** comments. Teachers want students to learn. That means they have to point out mistakes. Your child will do much better in school if he can recognize and accept constructive feedback.

Source: R. Payne, *Understanding Learning: The How, the Why, the What, Aha! Process Inc.*

“Respect is a two-way street. If you want to get it, you've got to give it.”

—R.G. Risch

Five ways parents can improve their children's listening skills



Now that summer is over and school has started, it's time to help your child get back into the swing of things.

One way to do this is to help your child work on her listening skills. Research shows that the ability to listen is one of the most important skills children need in order to be successful in school.

To help your child strengthen her listening skills:

1. **Be a good model.** When your child is telling you something, stop what you're doing. Look at her and give your full attention. Some parents find it easier to sit down so that their child's eyes are at their own eye-level.
2. **Have family members** take turns telling about their day. Then have each person draw a name and repeat something that happened to the person whose name they drew.
3. **Play Simon Says.** This will teach your child to listen very carefully and to follow directions exactly.
4. **Practice reflective listening.** When you say something, ask your child to paraphrase what you said. When your child asks a question, repeat her question and then respond.
5. **Stop and ask questions** during story time. When you get to an exciting part of the book, ask, “What do you think will happen next?” or “Why do you think she said that?”

Are you helping your child have healthy habits?



The beginning of the school year is a great time to establish some healthy habits. Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions

below to see if you are promoting wellness for your child:

1. **Do you enforce** a bedtime? Research shows that elementary school kids need at least 10 hours of sleep each night to function at their best.
2. **Do you make sure** your child eats breakfast every morning? Kids' brains need fuel to learn.
3. **Do you stock** your refrigerator with nutritious snacks for your child to eat after school?
4. **Do you encourage** your child to get moving every day? Studies show that exercise improves kids' memory and focus.
5. **Do you remind** your child to wash her hands frequently? Hand washing kills germs and reduces absences due to illness.

How well are you doing?

More *yes* answers mean you are helping your child stay on track for health right through the school year. For *no* answers, try those ideas.

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Communication is the key to a strong parent-teacher team



Research shows that parent involvement in education is connected to student success at school. When teachers and parents work together, the results can be powerful.

But parent-teacher relationships are like any other—they require good communication. At the start of the school year, make a point to:

- **Set the tone.** It's natural to have questions when the school year begins. To build a strong parent-teacher foundation, let the teacher know that you appreciate her work. Ask key questions respectfully. Show support for your child and the class, and encourage the teacher to keep in touch.
- **Be positive.** When you talk with the teacher, enjoy hearing about your child's strengths. But also prepare to hear about weaknesses or misbehavior. Remember to react helpfully. You and the teacher both want your child to do well. Addressing struggles is the only way to find solutions.
- **Role-play.** Some parents are shy about talking with the teacher. If this describes you, imagine meeting with her. What would you say? How would you respond to questions? Practice with someone you trust. Take turns presenting both points of view. Still worried? Using email may put you at ease.
- **Choose words carefully.** Make polite requests rather than demands. A helpful tip is to use the word *we* instead of *you*. ("How can *we* stay in touch to help Chloe?" is less off-putting than "*You* should tell me if Chloe is falling behind.") The teacher isn't your opponent; she's your teammate.

Show your child that reading for information can be fun



Children ask a lot of questions. Helping them find answers to those questions is a great way to encourage their curiosity. So be sure to add some nonfiction books to your child's reading list. Reading these books can help your child learn more about subjects that interest him.

Here are some fun activities to get your child reading more nonfiction:

- **Look for books** about how things work. How does the wheat in a field end up in the pasta on his plate? How does the football game get onto your TV screen? Books can help your child learn the answers to these questions.
- **Turn your reader into a writer.** Have him choose something he does well and then write step-by-step instructions to create his own "how-to" manual. He can explain how to kick a soccer ball past a goalie. Or, he can narrate a creative way to catch a fish. You can "publish" his manual by adding photos or drawings he makes himself.
- **Read nonfiction books yourself.** Help your child see that learning takes place everywhere and at any time—not just in school.

Q: School has just begun and homework is already a hassle—for me! First my fourth grader and I argue about when to start. Then he says he did his reading at school. Next he "doesn't understand" the math. What can I do to reduce both my son's frustration and mine?

Questions & Answers

A: Homework hassles can affect the entire family. You can easily eliminate them using these four simple steps:

1. **Establish a homework time.**
Don't fight about when he'll do his homework. He will benefit from a routine. Some kids work best right after school. Others do better if they work right before or after dinner. Give him some choice in the matter—but once he picks a time, that's it. Homework is as routine as brushing his teeth.
2. **Insist that homework time** happen every day. This will solve the problem of "I did that at school." What if he says he really, truly has nothing to do? He can read ahead. He can do extra math problems for practice. But he will spend that time doing something that will help him do better in school.
3. **Ask your child questions** when he says he doesn't understand something. For example, instead of explaining the math, ask, "How did you solve that last math problem? Could you do that here, too?"
4. **Don't ever do his work** for him. One way the teacher sees how much your child is actually learning is by checking his homework. If you do the work, she may not know if she needs to reteach something.

It Matters: Responsibility

Overprotection hinders essential school skills



When children are born, they really are helpless. And it's the job of parents to protect them in every way they can. Once they reach elementary school, they become more capable and are able to do lots of things for themselves.

Unfortunately, many parents still try to protect their elementary schoolers from *everything*. And all of that well-intended "protection" actually smothers their children's budding independence.

Overprotective parenting makes it difficult for children to learn essential skills for success in school and life, such as communication, negotiation, perseverance, responsibility and decision making.

To avoid the many pitfalls of overprotective parenting:

- **Don't do everything** for your child. Let her do things for herself. Will she make mistakes? Probably. But she will learn from those mistakes.
- **Don't be so quick** to rescue your child when she forgets things. If she leaves her homework or gym shoes at home, let her face the consequences.
- **Don't try to negotiate** a better grade for your child. If you or your child are confused about a grade she receives, let your child talk to the teacher about it first.
- **Don't call the parent** of a child your child is complaining about in school. Give your child a chance to work it out. If it's a serious problem, call the school.

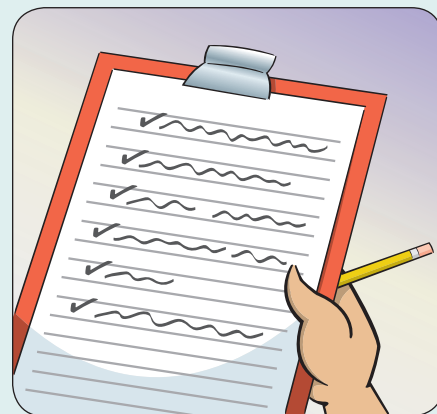
Use a checklist to help your child develop responsibility

Whether it's remembering to turn in homework or keeping track of backpacks and books, teachers need children to be responsible.

The best way to *teach* your child responsibility is to *give* him responsibilities. The new school year is the perfect time to sit down with your child and decide on a few tasks he's ready to handle on his own. Then make a checklist of everything you expect him to do. Agree on rewards for a job well done, and consequences for times your child shirks responsibility.

Here is a starter checklist of responsibilities you can adapt:

- Getting up on time
- Fixing breakfast
- Selecting an outfit
- Packing lunch



- Completing homework
- Returning signed forms
- Maintaining grades
- Getting along with siblings
- Keeping room clean
- Completing assigned chores
- Getting to bed on time
- Taking care of personal hygiene
- Feeding/caring for pets

A small allowance can teach children some big lessons



An allowance can help your child develop responsibility. Even a small amount of money given to a child to spend as she pleases helps her feel important and trusted. And kids who handle money regularly learn to handle money well.

Many experts agree that a child should be given an allowance simply because she is part of the family. Why? Because giving money only for chores, or for good grades, tells a child she's only important for *what she does*, not *who she is*.

Follow these guidelines:

- **Start with a small allowance** and increase it as your child grows more responsible.
- **Insist that your child contribute** to the family and do chores she doesn't get paid for.
- **Help your child create** a weekly budget and encourage her to save a little money each week for items she wants to purchase.
- **Give your child the freedom** to spend her allowance as she chooses. And when it's gone, it's gone—that's an important lesson, too!