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Elementary School Parents[®]

Harvard Elementary School

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Elementary schoolers need to practice what they learn

You've probably heard the old saying, "Practice makes perfect." Well, it really is true. That's one of the reasons teachers give homework. It provides the extra practice children need to remember what they have learned in school.

It's important to make sure your child does her homework every day. You can help by encouraging her to focus when she is doing an assignment. If she doesn't concentrate, she is more likely to forget what she has learned. And remember, the more practice your child gets, the more confidence she will gain.

Also encourage your child to:

- **Make flash cards**—for math facts, vocabulary words, spelling words. Then use them with a timer to

challenge herself. Can she do the entire "7 times table" in a minute?

- **Read a chapter from a textbook** and then have her tell you the key facts of what she read. Be sure to ask her a few questions, too.
- **Share a fact with you.** You might leave time at the dinner table for everyone to share one new thing they have learned that day.
- **Create a matching game.** Put vocabulary words in one column and definitions in another. Have your child match the word with its definition. You could also do this with math facts by putting math problems ($7 + 4$) in one column and answers (11) in another.

Source: J. Thompson, *The First-Year Teacher's Survival Guide*, Jossey-Bass.

February is a great month for learning!



February includes the birthdays of many famous people. Plan some fun activities to

help your child learn about these heroes, writers, inventors, scientists and artists:

- **February 4**—Rosa Parks. Learn more about this heroine of America's civil rights movement.
- **February 8**—Jules Verne. Read one of his science fiction stories with your child.
- **February 11**—Thomas Edison. Ask your child to create a new invention.
- **February 12**—Abraham Lincoln. Challenge your child to memorize the Gettysburg Address.
- **February 19**—Nicolaus Copernicus. Take a walk together and look at the stars.
- **February 22**—George Washington. In his honor, bake a cherry pie together.
- **February 25**—Pierre-Auguste Renoir. Check out a library book with reproductions of his paintings. Ask your child to paint one of his own.

Six ways to help your child with a challenging writing assignment



A writing assignment can seem like a tough challenge for a child. Good writing involves everything from understanding a subject to knowing how to organize thoughts to checking spelling and punctuation.

But because writing is challenging, it's also a great way for kids to learn. If your child has a writing assignment, you can help at home. Here are some tips:

1. **Have your child** "talk through" some ideas before starting. Clear writing starts with clear thinking. Talking with a parent can help clarify thoughts.
2. **Encourage your child** to make notes before writing. An outline can help get thoughts organized.
3. **Offer plenty of praise.** A parent's praise can help a child keep working. Be as specific as you can. Say, "I really like the way

you've described what led up to this event. I understand it better now."

4. **Don't over criticize.** It's helpful to point out errors now and then, of course. But if kids think you always look for what's wrong, they won't want to share their writing with you.
5. **Remember that good writing** means more than correct spelling. Focus on what your child is trying to say. Later, you can suggest that the piece should be edited.
6. **Be patient.** Good writing takes time. Your encouragement can help your child develop into a skilled thinker and writer.

"The time is always right to do what is right."

—Martin Luther King, Jr.

Give specific examples when you talk to your child about respect



Children who respect their parents will respect their teachers. As a result, they will pay attention to what the teacher says—and learn more.

However, the best way to get your child to show respect is not by talking about an abstract idea that may be hard for him to understand. Instead, try talking about specific actions he can take to show respect.

For example, when your child interrupts you, you might say, "When someone else is talking, it's respectful to listen until the person is finished. Then you can have your turn."

You can also ask if your child can come up with specific behaviors that would show respect. "What can you do to show your teacher respect?" Your child could raise his hand, complete homework on time and pay attention in class.

When your child does something respectful, help him make the connection. "I loved the way you showed respect to your grandmother when she came to visit. You helped her with her luggage and thanked her for the gift she gave you."

Source: P. Denton, "The Power of our Words," *Educational Leadership*, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Are you making the most of your report card talks?



Maybe your child's report card is great. Maybe it's worse than you had feared. Whatever the report card says, it provides a great chance to talk with your child about school and study habits.

Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to see if you are making the most of report card talks:

- ___ 1. **Do you take the report card** seriously and set aside time to talk about it?
- ___ 2. **Do you ask your child** if she agrees with the grades and why or why not?
- ___ 3. **Do you remain calm** and try not to make your child feel worse if she's already disappointed?
- ___ 4. **Do you help your child** figure out a plan to improve or maintain her grades for the next report card?
- ___ 5. **Do you contact the teacher** if you have concerns?

How well are you doing?

Each *yes* answer means you're turning report card time into learning time. For each *no* answer, try that idea in the quiz.

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D-E-A-R time can strengthen your family's reading habits



In some families, saying, “Oh, DEAR!” doesn’t mean something is broken. Instead, it means it’s time for family reading.

D-E-A-R stands for Drop Everything And Read. During DEAR time, everyone in the family sits down for some uninterrupted reading time. The TV goes off. The telephone goes unanswered. The computer is shut down. The cell phones are turned off.

If you’d like to have some DEAR time with your family, follow these suggestions:

- **Be prepared.** Make sure everyone has something to read. You may want to plan a trip to the library. You may also want to keep some

interesting magazines or books on hand.

- **Let everyone know.** You might want to hold a family meeting to schedule your initial DEAR time. If you have a family calendar, be sure to write DEAR time on it. This helps your kids see that reading time is just as important as a medical appointment or athletic practice.
- **Start small.** Many families start with a once-weekly, half-hour session. As family members get into the reading habit, DEAR time becomes more frequent.
- **Take part.** DEAR time only works if *everyone* in the family reads. So grab a mystery novel or the latest best-seller and curl up for a few minutes of reading yourself.

Show your child that education is important to your family



Showing your child that you support education is one of the best ways to inspire her to do her best. When she knows school is important to you, it becomes important to her, as well.

Your child will know school is a top priority the more you do these things:

- **Build a relationship** with your child’s teacher. Kids learn best when they feel that home and school are on the same team.
- **Talk with your child** about school and ask questions about what she is learning.
- **Put important school dates** on your family calendar. Write down the dates of quizzes, spelling tests and when assignments are due.
- **Keep your home stocked** with all of the school supplies your child needs.
- **Volunteer at school** whenever you are able to.
- **Tell your child why** you value education and why it should be important to her, too.
- **Review your child’s homework** every day. Even if you’re not home when your child does her homework, always ask to see it. Your interest sends the message that homework is important.
- **Attend school programs** and events. Invite family members and friends to come along when appropriate.
- **Post school work** and report cards on the refrigerator for everyone to see.

Q: My fifth grader says he hates math. His grades are still fine, but I can see trouble ahead. He rushes through his homework. He makes careless mistakes. When I suggest working with flash cards, he just rolls his eyes and refuses. What can I do to help?

Questions & Answers

A: Fifth grade is a critical year. If your son doesn’t master basic math skills now, he’ll fall farther and farther behind. So it’s critical for you to help your son see why math is important, and also realize that he *can* do it.

Here are a few time-proven strategies to try:

- **Relate math** to the things your son enjoys. Does he like sports? Suggest that he keep statistics on a favorite player. Does he like to be the first one to figure things out? Get him a book of logic puzzles.
- **Help your child** see how people use math in daily life. Put him in charge of figuring out how many miles your car travels on a gallon of gas. Let him do the research on something he wants the family to buy—how much would you save if you bought it on sale?
- **Make math review fun** with a deck of cards. Draw three or four cards and lay them on the table. Using addition, multiplication, subtraction and division, see who can come up with the greatest number of different answers in five minutes.

By helping your fifth grader see that math is both useful and fun, you may see his interest and his grades begin to improve!

It Matters: Discipline

Use teachers' tips to improve behavior at home



Can't get your child to complete homework? Pay attention? Respond to requests? Why not get help from those who get

not just one—but 20 or more—kids to do what's expected? Teachers!

Here's what they suggest:

- **Teach what you want** your child to do. Focus on the tasks you want to be routine—like putting her backpack by the front door.
- **Post a schedule** for activities. Your child will know what to do and when to do it. And she'll feel more independent.
- **Avoid abrupt transitions.** Kids can get really absorbed in an activity. To help your child switch gears, set a timer. Let her know how many minutes she has left before she needs to do something else.
- **Make the mundane fun.** Don't just tell your child to pick up her room. Challenge her to do it in rhythm to music.
- **Use silent signals.** Use a gentle touch on your child's shoulder to get her to pay attention. Flick the lights off and on to give a five-minute warning before bedtime.
- **Provide meaningful things** for your child to do. Stash books that interest her around the house. Keep paper, crayons and craft supplies handy so your child can use them at any time. In the grocery store, put your child in charge of coupons.

Source: P. Kramer, "Teachers' Best Discipline Tricks," *Parents*, Gruner+Jahr USA Publishing.

Work with the teacher if your child is misbehaving in class

It's great to have a sense of humor. But it's no laughing matter if a child constantly disrupts class with jokes and rude body sounds.

If your child is misbehaving in school, take these steps:

- **Look for what's behind** the behavior. Sometimes kids need attention or want to impress their classmates. Sometimes they use humor to cover up academic shortcomings.
- **Work with the teacher.** Together, try to identify when the problem behavior started and what might have triggered it. If your child tends to act up after recess, he may need help settling down. The teacher might help by assigning him a high-profile task like handing out worksheets.
- **Talk to your child.** He might not understand when it's okay to be silly and when it's not. Help him



see there's a time when being "clever" is being disrespectful.

- **Establish clear guidelines.** With the teacher, convey what kind of behavior is not allowed. Suggest what your child might do instead.
- **Set consequences** that you and the teacher will enforce if your child breaks the rules.

Source: K. Levine, *What To Do . . . When Your Child Has Trouble at School*, Reader's Digest Books.

Don't send the wrong messages: avoid common discipline pitfalls



The word *discipline* means "a way to learn." Discipline teaches your child about what's right and wrong, about appropriate behavior, and that actions have consequences.

But experts tell us that we teach children a lot just by *how* we discipline them. To make sure your discipline is sending the right message, avoid these pitfalls:

- **Don't yell.** Your child will learn to "tune you out." A quiet, firm

voice is much more likely to get your child's attention.

- **Don't use sarcasm.** Younger children won't understand. And it may damage an older child's self-esteem.
- **Don't label your child.** Saying, "You're so lazy" will backfire. Eventually, your child will believe it.
- **Don't make idle threats.** If you say, "No TV for a month," but don't follow through, your child learns to ignore your threats.