

Elementary School Parents[®]

Harvard Elementary School

make the difference!

May 2014
Vol. 25, No. 9



Help your child maintain a love of learning this summer

Even if your child complains about school, chances are he loves learning. Here are some ways to spark your child's interest in learning all summer long:

- **Make time to talk.** Studies have shown that when families talk often about many subjects, kids have higher IQs. Look for opportunities to talk with your child, such as during meals or in the car.
- **Support your child's interests.** For example, if your child loves playing the guitar, read books about the instrument, go to a free concert, or encourage him to write to a famous guitarist.
- **Try a new activity** you can do with your child, such as a sport. Choose something he's excited about. Show how interested you are in learning, improving and not giving up.
- **Become tourists** in your own town. Check out an exhibit at your city's science center, art museum or library. Explore a different trail at a local park. (Or even hike a familiar trail at an odd time.) Whatever you do, try to see your "same old town" through fresh eyes.
- **Start your own book club.** Let your child pick a book. Read it together and then set a date to talk about it. Suggest that he include some of his friends.
- **Set an example** by learning more about the things you love. If you enjoy cooking, for instance, take a cooking class, check out a cookbook at the library, or try new recipes. Invite your child to help.

Fun learning ideas for the month of May



There's more to May than Mother's Day, Memorial Day and Victoria Day. Here are

some other holidays that offer fun learning opportunities for you and your child:

- **May 1—Mother Goose Day.** Read favorite Mother Goose rhymes with your child.
- **May 4—National Weather Observers Day.** Go outside and observe the clouds with your child. Or make a collage of weather-related pictures cut from magazines.
- **May 17—Armed Forces Day.** Have your child write a letter or draw a picture to thank someone for their military service.
- **May 18—International Museum Day.** Talk with your child about the importance of museums. Make plans to visit one online or in person.
- **May 21—On this date** in 1881, Clara Barton founded the American Red Cross. Head to the library or the Internet to learn more about this compassionate leader of charitable causes.

Giving to others builds your child's sense of responsibility



Children have a natural desire to be helpful and responsible—key ingredients for student success. But that desire may lessen as your child grows older.

To nurture these traits:

- **Talk with your child** about why it's important to help others.
- **Discuss with your child** how she can contribute to your household. Tailor her responsibilities to things she likes to do, but avoid calling them "chores." Involve her in making up a schedule with deadlines. Tell her how much you appreciate her help.
- **Model how to be a contributing member of the community.** Vote in elections. Donate blood. Recycle.

- **Research community service opportunities** your child can participate in. Try to connect them to her interests. If she likes pets, visit an animal shelter. If she likes the outdoors, perhaps she can take part in clean-up day.
- **Decide together** what charities to support—through volunteer work or donations.
- **Praise your child** when she takes on new responsibilities and helps others.

"The habits we form from childhood make no small difference, but rather they make all the difference."

—Aristotle

Help your child remain focused on schoolwork until year's end



Some kids act like summer vacation has already started. They "forget" their homework at school. They stop giving their best effort and start avoiding anything that seems difficult or challenging.

But the school year has not yet ended. Kids need to stay focused on learning until the last day of school. Here's how to help your child:

- **Review old homework papers,** quizzes and tests. Use them to talk with your child about how much he has learned this year. Having these papers close at hand will also be useful as he studies for end-of-year tests!
- **Shape year-end learning** around some of your child's interests.

If he has one more book report due, suggest he choose a book on a topic he loves. If he has a social studies project, he should focus on something he is interested in learning.

- **Help your child manage his** end-of-year projects. Long-range assignments can overwhelm any child. So, in addition to helping your child break a big project down into smaller steps, here's a great rule of thumb: Encourage your child to move the deadline for finishing any big project earlier by two days. If a report is due on Friday, aim to get it finished by Wednesday. That way, he'll have a cushion if (okay, *when*) something comes up!

Source: D. Goldberg, *The Organized Student*, Fireside Books.

Are you helping your child prepare for year-end tests?



The end of the year often means lots of tests for students. Are you helping your child get ready to face those important tests?

Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

___ **1. Do you write down test dates** on your family calendar and avoid planning big activities on the day before a test?

___ **2. Do you encourage** your child to study a little each day instead of cramming the night before a test? Research shows this is the best way to learn and remember facts.

___ **3. Do you make sure** your child gets a good night's sleep and eats a healthy breakfast before a big test?

___ **4. Do you encourage** your child to wear comfortable clothing and dress in layers on test days?

___ **5. Do you tell your child** that you have confidence in her and know she will give her best effort?

How well are you doing?

Mostly *yes* answers mean you're giving your child the support she needs to do her best on tests. For *no* answers, try those ideas.

Elementary School
Parents
make the difference!

Practical Ideas for Parents to Help Their Children. ISSN: 1523-1275

For subscription information call or write:
The Parent Institute®, 1-800-756-5525,
P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474.
Fax: 1-800-216-3667.

Or visit our website: www.parent-institute.com.
Published monthly September through May by
The Parent Institute®, a division of NIS, Inc., an
independent, private agency. Equal opportunity
employer. Copyright © 2014 NIS, Inc.

Publisher: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.
Editor: Rebecca Miyares.
Illustrator: Joe Mignella.

How to handle situations that often result in school absences



Your child woke up late and can't get going. Your sitter is sick and you have nowhere to leave your younger kids.

Things like this happen all the time. Parents wonder if going to school is all that important—especially as the school year draws to a close.

The answer is yes. Attending school is important—right up to the very last day. In fact, kids who miss a lot of school—even in the early grades—are more likely to drop out. They have more problems learning material that will help them succeed.

One school district asked families why their kids missed school. Here are their top answers and some ways you can deal with those problems:

1. **He feels sick.** If your child doesn't have a fever and isn't showing signs of sickness (vomiting, coughing, diarrhea), he can

probably go to school. If you do keep him home, don't make it a vacation. A child who is too sick to go to school is too sick to watch TV, text friends or play on the computer.

2. **He just won't get up.** Make his bedtime earlier. Help him get ready for school the night before.
3. **You need him at home** to help with younger kids. If you work and need child care, be sure to have a plan if your sitter gets sick. Are there friends or family who will agree in advance to help in an emergency? A child shouldn't miss school to care for younger kids.
4. **He's worried.** Talk with your child. Is it a test that worries him? Help him review. If it's something more serious, talk with the teacher.

Source: J. Epstein & S. Sheldon, "Present and Accounted For: Improving Student Attendance Through Family and Community Involvement," *Journal of Education Research*, Heldref Publications.

Remember to pick your battles when disciplining your child



Pick your battles.

If parents could pass down one piece of discipline advice, that's what it would probably be. Don't get into a power struggle with your kids over every single problem. Choose what's important.

And there are battles that are worth having. Here are four good reasons to set limits:

1. **To keep your child safe.** Don't let your child play with matches. Insist that she wear a seat belt in cars. Make sure she uses a bike helmet. Don't let her run into the street. Don't let her walk to school by herself.

2. **To help develop character.** Telling the truth is important. Calling people mean names only hurts their feelings. You should also teach your child not to cheat, and to respect adults (including teachers).
3. **To develop responsibility.** Kids need rules and responsibilities in order to succeed in school and grow into productive adults.
4. **To get along with others.** Children need to learn to wait their turn, to say *please* and *thank you*, and to share.

Source: B. Maslin, *Picking Your Battles*, St. Martin's Griffin.

Q: My son is starting middle school next year. He won't attend the same school as most of his friends. He's very anxious about this move. What can I do over the summer to help him make the adjustment?

Questions & Answers

A: Middle school is a really big adjustment for any child. Instead of having one teacher, your son will have several. Instead of staying in one classroom, he will have to move from room to room. Instead of being in the highest grade level in the school, he will be in the lowest.

It is completely normal for your son to feel anxious about this transition. You can help him feel a little more confident if you:

- **Sign up for a tour** of the middle school. Just walking around the building and seeing students will give him a better idea of what to expect (and even what to wear) on his first day.
- **Buy a combination lock** and have him practice opening it. Lockers are a big source of anxiety. Even if he has to learn a new combination when school starts, he'll feel confident that he can open and close his locker.
- **Remind him** that he won't be the only new kid in his school. Everyone will be starting over. He'll still be able to see his old friends, even if they're at a different school.
- **Check out school activities.** If he can get started on a team (or in the band) over the summer, he'll make some new friends and start school knowing some kids.

It Matters: Summer Learning

Turn reading into an enjoyable summer activity



To keep kids reading over the summer, treat it like any other summer activity. Let it be something kids

can do when they feel like it. Show them how reading can be fun.

And never make summer reading “homework.”

If you help your child make the connection between books and the simpler pleasures of childhood, his desire to read may last a lifetime.

To take a “summer approach” to reading:

- **Suggest that your child** reread a favorite book. Then find another book by the same author. Or find one on the same topic.
- **Connect books** with summer activities—sports books for a summer league player, for instance, or camping books for a camper.
- **Let your child** stay up past bedtime when a book is just too good to put down.
- **Start your child** on a series of fiction or thriller books. These “page-turners” hook kids into a reading habit.
- **Encourage a change** of venue. Read books at the beach or pool, in a tent or at the park.
- **Watch movies**, videos and plays based on children’s books. Read the book and compare it with what you saw.
- **Share your favorite books** and magazines with your child.
- **Encourage your child** to retell stories or parts of stories from the books he reads.

Don’t let your child waste the summer in front of a screen

The lazy days of summer can lead to lazy hours in front of the TV, computer or game system. But experts say it’s important to limit screen time. A good rule of thumb is two hours a day or fewer.

So what can your child do once her two hours of screen time are up? Have her try these ideas:

- **Be the entertainment.** Instead of watching a show, your child can create one! Encourage her to choose an exciting story line and act it out with friends or stuffed animals.
- **Play classic games.** Fill a bucket with traditional summer toys, including sidewalk chalk, balls, bubble stuff and water sprayers. When the weather is right, take it outside for hours of fun.
- **Plan a treasure hunt.** Hide lots of clues, with each one leading



to the next. This can be done outside or inside. The last clue should lead to a treasure, such as fruit-juice popsicles or a fun activity.

- **Get some exercise.** Go for a walk or ride bikes together. Toss or kick a ball around. Consider learning how to play a new sport together.

Inspire journal writing this summer with creative ideas



The summer is a great time for your child to begin writing in a journal. All he needs is an empty notebook and a few ideas to get started.

Suggest that he keep:

- **A research log.** Have your child pick a subject he loves, such as skateboarding. Over the summer, he can research and write about it. What are some cool skateboard tricks? How long are skateboards? Who holds records for skateboarding?
- **A travel log.** Each time he goes somewhere special—whether it’s far away or close to home—he can keep a record by taking pictures, drawing or writing notes. What did he see? Who did he meet? What did he think?
- **An observation log.** Suggest that your child observe something over a period of time, such as a summer vegetable as it grows. Or he can pick something to describe in great detail, such as a bug or an animal.