

# Elementary School Parents

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*make the difference!*



## Ask questions to strengthen reading comprehension

**M**uch of your child's school success will depend on reading comprehension. Comprehension is much more than being able to read the words. It also means understanding the *meaning* of those words.

To boost reading comprehension, encourage your child to:

- **Summarize.** Talk with him about the material. Ask him to recall facts (such as characters, setting and plot), but also ask questions that require deeper thinking: What problems did the characters face? How does the story progress from beginning to end? Why did things turn out the way they did?
  - **Make connections.** Ask your child what he has already learned or experienced that relates to the
- story. Is the story like or unlike others he's read?
- **Solve problems.** Ask your child how the characters were affected by one another's actions. Can he imagine things from different viewpoints? If your child took a character's place, would he make the same decision the character made? How might his choices have changed the story?
  - **Apply knowledge.** Ask your child to explain the message or moral of the story. Did the author have a clear opinion? If so, what was it? Does your child agree? How can your child apply what he's read to his everyday life?

Source: "Reading Comprehension and Higher Order Thinking Skills," K12 Reader.

## A set of house rules can make discipline easy



Children who are expected to follow rules at home are much more likely to follow rules at

school. And when students follow the rules, there is more time for learning!

To make rules memorable, create a short list of house rules. These should be rules and consequences that govern the things that are your biggest concerns. In one family, it might be behavior toward siblings. In another, it might be helping out around the house.

Come up with a catchy phrase that sums up both the rule and the consequence. For example:

- **If you hit, you sit.** Any physical action toward a sibling will result in a time out.
- **If you partake, you take part.** Every family member has responsibility for meal time—from setting the table to clearing the dishes.
- **Pick up or pay up.** If your child doesn't put her belongings away, place them in a closet. Once a week, she can earn them back by completing a small chore.

## Reduce recreational screen time by tracking it and setting limits



Researchers have looked at the difference in children's brain activity when reading a book versus consuming screen-based media. The researchers found that brain activity increased while children were reading and decreased while they were viewing screen-based media. Their findings highlight the importance of limiting recreational screen time for healthy brain development.

The first step is to help your child become aware of how much time she actually spends staring at a screen for fun. Have her track the time she spends watching TV, playing digital games, texting friends and surfing online. She may be surprised how quickly those minutes add up.

If your child is spending less than two hours a day in front of a screen on non-school activities, she is on the right track. More? It's time to set limits.

Studies show that when parents set *any* media rules, kids' screen time drops by an average of more than three hours a day.

**Source:** T. Horowitz-Kraus and J.S. Hutton, "Brain connectivity in children is increased by the time they spend reading books and decreased by the length of exposure to screen-based media," *Acta Paediatrica*.

**"Technology is so much fun but we can drown in our technology. The fog of information can drive out knowledge."**

—Alvin Toffler

## Strong thinking skills enhance learning and problem solving



Your child is feeling overwhelmed by a big history project. Or he's gotten stuck while trying to write a research paper. What do you do?

Helping your child understand how he thinks and approaches problems is one of the best ways to support him. Strong thinking skills bolster your child's learning—and give him the ability to solve real-world problems.

Help your child:

- **Become aware of *how* he thinks.** Educators call this *metacognition*, or the ability to think about the thinking process. Effective thinkers have a plan before they take action. They know if they need more information in order to make a decision. And if they get new information later, they adapt their plan. If your

child is struggling, say things like, "Let's think this through." Also help your child see his strengths as a problem solver. "Remember that when you make a plan, things seem to fall into place."

- **Draw on past knowledge** to address current problems. Your child may not have had an assignment just like this project, but he has worked on other big projects. What did he learn about how he works best?
- **Focus on effort.** "It's not that I'm so smart," Albert Einstein once said, "it's that I stick with a problem longer." So when your child gets discouraged, help him see the progress he has already made, and let him know he *can* reach his goal.

**Source:** A.L. Costa, *Developing Minds: A Resource Book for Teaching Thinking*, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

## Are you helping your child live a healthy lifestyle?



Health and well-being help children learn their best. Are you setting your child up for success by helping him establish healthy habits? Answer *yes* or *no* to each question below to find out:

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you enforce** a regular bedtime? Being well-rested will help your child focus in class.
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you make sure** your child starts the day with a nutritious breakfast? Research shows that students who skip breakfast don't do as well in school as students who do eat breakfast.
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you encourage** your child to eat nutritious snacks, including fruits and vegetables?
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you teach** your child that smoking and substance abuse will hurt his health and ability to learn?
- \_\_\_ **5. Do you help** your child find an outlet for stress, such as exercising or writing in a journal?

**How well are you doing?**

Each *yes* means you are helping your child establish healthy habits. For each *no* answer, try that idea in the quiz.

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The Parent Institute, 1-800-756-5525,  
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# Set the stage for a successful transition to middle school



Will your child be heading to middle school next year? If so, the time to start preparing for that exciting transition is now.

At school, teachers are helping students get ready. At home, you can do the same thing. To support your child's progress and independence:

- **Learn about the middle school.** Read its website regularly. Sign up for notifications on its social media pages. Visit the school. Ask for a tour. The more comfortable you and your child are at the school, the easier it will be to adjust.
- **Build school spirit.** Learn about the school's clubs, teams, classes, colors and mascot. Talk about your child's interests. What new and exciting things do students learn and do in middle school? Attend a student performance or game together.

- **Encourage important habits.** Your child should stick to a daily homework routine and practice staying organized. These skills will be critical in middle school and beyond.
- **Find out about** summer activities for rising middle schoolers, such as library reading programs. Ask the school for suggestions.
- **Attend events** for new students and families. Join the parent-teacher organization and ask about the volunteer opportunities. Introduce yourself to staff and other parents.
- **Find a mentor.** Do any of your neighbors or friends have children currently attending the middle school? Perhaps one could talk to your child about what it's like.
- **Keep communicating.** Talk with your child about any concerns or questions she may have.

# Help your elementary schooler succeed on standardized tests



Standardized tests have been used to measure student achievement and ability for many years. But it's important

to remember that one test doesn't represent a child's total abilities. A student may get high grades on his classwork, for example, but be too anxious on test day to think clearly.

To help your child succeed on tests:

- **Make schoolwork a priority.** Students who do well on tests tend to be the ones who study and finish assignments on time. They also miss less school than other students.
- **Communicate with teachers.** In addition to finding out how your child is doing throughout the year, find out about test details. Ask the teacher questions, such as, "Which skills do the tests measure?" "How should I help my child prepare?"
- **Develop healthy routines.** Your child needs adequate sleep and a nutritious breakfast every day before school. See the quiz on page two for more ways to adopt healthy lifestyle.
- **Promote reading.** Most tests require reading, so make sure your child reads often. Reading skills get stronger with regular practice.
- **Reduce anxiety.** Help him stay calm and positive. If he is nervous, he can take deep breaths and tell himself, "I can do this!" Remind your child that you will love him no matter what test score he earns.

**Q:** My fifth-grade daughter is late for everything. She turns homework in late. She starts projects at the last minute. How can I help her break this self-sabotaging habit?

## Questions & Answers

**A:** Unfortunately, time management doesn't come naturally to elementary schoolers. Instead, parents must teach them how to plan ahead.

Show your daughter how to:

1. **Get organized.** Encourage her to keep her backpack, room and study area neat. A child who can't organize her belongings is likely to have trouble organizing her thoughts and actions as well.
2. **Prioritize.** Help your child list everything she has to do under one of three headings: "Must Do," "Would Be Nice to Do" and "Can Skip This." Remind her that items on the must-do list (like homework) have to come first.
3. **Make a schedule.** After your child sets her priorities, help her figure out when she can actually do those "must-dos." That's where a schedule comes in. Some kids can draw up a schedule for the whole week and stick to it. Others need to make a schedule every day to keep on track.
4. **Stick to the schedule.** This may be the hardest step of all. Few children want to spend a sunny day doing research for an upcoming paper when five of their friends are planning to go on a long afternoon bike ride. Encourage and praise your child for staying on track. And don't forget to leave some time in the schedule for fun!

# It Matters: Social Emotional Learning

## Show your child how to develop social awareness



When children have the ability to understand and empathize with others, they are able to form solid connections

with classmates, teachers and friends. Social awareness allows kids to feel compassion for others—even when their background, beliefs and culture may be different.

It's important for children to see all people as equal and to accept and recognize the strengths of people who are different from them. To guide your child:

- **Remember** that you teach by example. Do you use slurs? Have you formed opinions about people based on their color, religion or culture? If so, your child may, too.
- **Talk about** your family background. Unless you are a Native American, someone in your family came here from another country. Remind your child that at some point, everyone has struggled to find their place.
- **Let your child** know it's never OK to judge, insult or treat someone badly because of their appearance or background.
- **Talk about** prejudice and stereotypes. Remind your child that background does not show how smart a person is, how good they will be at sports, or even what kind of food they like.
- **Explain** that rules and laws have not always treated everyone fairly, and that we are trying to change that.
- **Welcome** people of many backgrounds into your family's life. Encourage your child to do the same.

## Four strategies help you talk with your child about feelings

Children who understand their feelings—and know how to talk about them—are less likely to act out and more likely to express themselves in productive ways. To get a conversation going about feelings:

1. **Make a list** of different feelings: happy, sad, angry, disappointed, frustrated, scared, mad, etc. Have your child draw a picture of each emotion.
2. **Ask your child** how she is feeling every day. Then talk about the things that make her feel that way. Listen carefully and be understanding. Don't ever tell your child that she shouldn't feel the way she feels.
3. **Point out** your child's feelings. Say, "You look happy to be outside," or "You seem frustrated that you haven't figured out the answer to that homework question yet."
4. **Talk about healthy ways** to cope with feelings. If your child is angry, she can take a deep breath and count to ten. If she is sad, she can hug a stuffed toy. If she is discouraged, she can try a different strategy.



## Boost relationship skills by resolving conflicts productively



Whether it's a fight with a friend, a misunderstanding with a teacher or an argument with a sibling—all kids experience conflict in their everyday lives.

To help your child resolve conflicts productively, encourage him to:

- **Avoid name-calling.** Teach him to use "I messages" to explain how he feels instead of "you messages" that blame the other person.
- **Hear the other person** out and try to understand their point of view.
- **Think before he acts.** Many times, a situation gets out of hand because people allow their emotions to control their actions.
- **Consider a compromise.** Your child is more likely to resolve a conflict successfully if he looks for a solution where everyone gives a little and gets a little, too.
- **Ask for help** when he needs it. Sometimes it takes a mediator to resolve a conflict. A parent or teacher may be able to help.
- **Stand up** for the rights of others who may have been wronged in the conflict.
- **Be willing to apologize** when he is at fault.