

Helping Children Learn[®]

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

Romulo D. Martinez Elementary

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Look for opportunities to help your child think like a scientist

You don't have to be a rocket scientist or have a laboratory to help your elementary schooler discover the rewards of science. There are many things parents can do at home to promote scientific thinking and exploration. Try some of these ideas:

- **Encourage collecting.** A collection—whether it's seeds, rocks, shells or bottle caps—can give your child practice sorting, categorizing, organizing and researching.
- **Promote investigation.** Give your child a magnifying glass. Ask him, "What do you see? What is similar and what is different from what you've seen before?"
- **Talk with your child about the science** that happens in your home. For instance, why does cereal get soggy? Why do foods in the refrigerator get moldy? Why do some plants need more water than others?
- **Demonstrate an interest in science** for your child. Predict the weather. Observe the stars and the phases of the moon. Weigh snow. Mix paints to see what colors result.
- **Nurture curiosity.** Ask your child questions like, "Why do you think ... ?" "What might happen if ... ?" and "How can we find out ... ?"
- **Visit the library** with your child and check out some books and DVDs on different science topics.



Source: T.S. Bickart and others, *What Every Parent Needs to Know About 1st, 2nd & 3rd Grades: An Essential Guide to Your Child's Education*, Teaching Strategies, Inc.



Encourage more than minimal effort

When Mia took the recycling to the curb, she did something extra: Rather than leaving the papers to blow in the wind, she put a heavy rock on them. Mia demonstrated a great lesson in responsibility—doing more than the bare minimum. To teach it to your child, have her ask herself questions, such as:

- **Did I leave** the kitchen clean after making my snack?
- **Did I add** peanut butter to the grocery list (or ask someone else to) when I used the last of it?
- **Did I refill** the pitcher when I poured the last of the water?
- **Did I put my backpack** in my cubby instead of leaving it where someone could trip over it?
- **Did I write my report** neatly instead of turning in sloppy work?
- **Did I start my project early** and plan my time instead of waiting until the last minute?

Encourage your child to ask herself the same kinds of questions about school, too. For example:

Source: S. Turansky and J. Miller, *Say Goodbye to Whining, Complaining, and Bad Attitudes in You and Your Kids!*, WaterBrook Press.

Give a gift of service

Working with your child on a community service project shows him that he can contribute to the benefit of those around him.

This holiday season, your child might select a gift to donate to a child in need. Or collect books for a homeless shelter. Don't stop after the holidays; teach your child he can make a difference all year long.

React with care to cheating

What do you do if your child is caught cheating? Talk to your child, find out why she cheated, then address her concerns. Did she cheat because she:



- **Fears your reaction** to a bad grade? Reassure her that you would be more concerned than angry, and you will love her no matter what grade she gets.
- **Thinks cheating** is no big deal? Tell her cheating is unfair to honest students, and it cheats her of knowledge.
- **Was asked to?** Remind her that a real friend would never ask her to cheat.

Source: J. Craig, Ph.D., *Parents on the Spot! What to Do When Kids Put You There*, Hearst Books.

Group facts seven at a time

Research shows that around age nine, kids can remember lists of about seven items at a time. When your child has to memorize a list of facts, whether spelling words or state capitals, have him:



- **Divide it** into groups of seven. When he masters one group, he can try another.
- **Practice, practice, practice.** Learning facts one time won't solidify them in his memory. He should review them often.

Source: P. Wolfe, *Brain Matters: Translating Research into Classroom Practice*, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.



How can I ensure my child takes homework seriously?

Q: My daughter is in fifth grade and has a lot of homework. She tends to put it off until the last minute. Then she rushes to finish and often gets a bad grade. How can I help her stop procrastinating?

A: Homework battles can be among the toughest challenges parents face. Start by having a talk with your daughter. Ask her why she puts off doing homework until the last minute. Help her realize the consequences of what she's doing.

Then work together to set up a new way to study. To start:

- **Establish a study hour** at your house every night for your child. One parent should be at home to supervise. During study time, there should be no TV, no phone use and no interruptions. Agree on a place where she can do her homework and you can supervise.
- **Consider a contract.** For example, "I agree to study for _____ minutes each night. I know that Mom will tell me five minutes before study time begins. I agree to study during the entire time." Ask your child's teacher how much time she should be spending on homework each day—probably about 50 minutes in fifth grade.

What if she sits and stares into space? Don't get into a power struggle. Just make sure study hour lasts the entire time you've agreed on. It may take a while, but your daughter will get the picture—study hour is here to stay.



Are you promoting creative thinking?

Creativity sharpens thinking and problem-solving skills. What's more, it is a skill that can be learned. Are you doing all you can to boost your child's creativity? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

- ___ **1. Do you encourage** your child to find new ways to solve problems?
- ___ **2. Do you keep** supplies on hand for creative activities—construction paper, markers, crayons, fabric scraps, old magazines?
- ___ **3. Do you challenge** your child to think of other ways to use ordinary objects?
- ___ **4. Do you look** for ways to be creative in the kitchen with your child, such as decorating cookies?

- ___ **5. Do you give** your child old toys or broken tools to take apart and put back together?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are nourishing your child's creative side. For each no, try that idea.

"Where parents do too much for their children, the children will not do much for themselves."
—Elbert Hubbard

Plot now to get graphing

Graphing is a useful math skill for showing information at a glance. Here are some things your child might enjoy graphing for practice over winter break:

- **The cars in your neighborhood**, grouped by color.
- **The number of pieces** of mail you receive each day for a week.
- **The number of T-shirts owned** by each member of your family.
- **The high and low temperatures** outside each day for a week.
- **The numbers of family members** with each eye color.

Hunt up some reading fun

If your child hasn't yet discovered the joy of reading, suggest you and he:

- **Go on a library scavenger hunt.** Make up a list of fun questions, then search for answers at the library.
- **Listen to audio books.**
- **Make a paper chain**—one link for each book he reads. Can he make it stretch across his room?

Write, inflate and motivate

Goals are a powerful source of motivation for students. Sometimes, just reaching a goal is enough in itself. But other times, an accomplishment calls for a celebration. To combine motivation and celebration:



- 1. Write your child's goal** and a surprise reward on a slip of paper.
- 2. Put the paper** in a balloon, then blow up the balloon.
- 3. Let your child pop** the balloon and claim her reward when she meets her goal.

Source: M. Borba, Ed.D., *Parents Do Make a Difference*, Jossey-Bass.

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