

# Helping Children Learn<sup>®</sup>

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School



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## What's the big idea? Boost your child's reading comprehension

As students progress through elementary school, they shift from *learning to read* to *reading to learn*. In higher grades, your child will be expected to read and understand increasingly complex text. To ease this transition, share these strategies with your child:

- **Look for clues** to the main idea. Before she starts to read an assignment, your child should think about what she will be reading. What is the title of the chapter or passage? Does it offer any hints about the reading? What other clues can she find in subheadings, pictures, graphs or words in boldface or italics?
- **Take notes.** Taking notes while she reads makes it easier for your child to comprehend and remember information. It also makes reading active and engaging. Encourage your child to write down the most important ideas in the reading assignment. She can also write down any words she doesn't know and anything that she is confused about, so she can remember to ask the teacher.
- **Make connections.** One effective way for your child to remember new information is by relating it to something she's already learned. When she finishes a reading assignment, have her answer questions such as: "How is this topic similar to something else I have learned?" "What key ideas did I already know?" "What did I learn that was new to me?"



## Add value to homework

Homework gives your child the opportunity to practice skills and learn responsibility, perseverance and initiative. To help him get the most out of homework:

- **Help your child manage time.** Establish a regular homework time when he will be most alert.
- **Help him prioritize.** Studying for tomorrow's test should come before math problems due next week.
- **Let your child do the work.** Offer guidance, but don't do the assignments. Homework builds independence.

Source: "Homework Tips for Parents," U.S. Department of Education, [niscw.com/homework](http://niscw.com/homework).

## Fit in some exercise

Physical fitness contributes to school success. Regular activity is linked to both higher self-esteem and attentiveness.



Get creative and find fun ways to get your child moving. Suggest games like tag or Simon Says. Turn on some fast music and race to finish a chore. Or just stop by the playground on the way home.

## Inspire inner motivation

Rewards can motivate kids. But when the rewards stop, often the desired behavior does, too. Students who are motivated from within are more likely to stick with a task and retain what they've learned longer. To spark inner motivation:



- **Ask your child** to think about what she wants to learn about a subject.
- **Help her see** her progress.
- **Ask her to teach you** what she learns.
- **Give positive feedback** and urge her to congratulate herself on a job well done.

Source: "Research summary: building self-motivation," The Journey to Excellence, [niscw.com/intrinsic](http://niscw.com/intrinsic).



## Show your child how listening is done

Your child isn't taking a class called "listening." That's because listening is an important part of *all* his subjects. One of the best ways to develop your child's listening skills is to model them for him. Here's how:

- **Don't try to fake it.** He knows if you're really listening by the way you respond. Stop what you are doing and pay attention.
- **Listen with your eyes** as well as your ears. Look your child in the eye as he speaks.
- **Notice nonverbal messages.** Tone of voice, facial expression, posture and energy level often say as much as your child's words.
- **Give it time.** All people think faster than they speak. And because children have smaller vocabularies and less experience expressing themselves, they can take even longer to say what they mean. When your child is speaking to you, be patient and let him take the time he needs.

Source: C. Smith, "How Can Parents Model Good Listening Skills?" KidSource Online, [niscw.com/listening](http://niscw.com/listening).



## How do I teach my child that schoolwork is not a race?

**Q:** My fourth grader is extremely competitive in sports and in school. He rushes through every assignment, hoping to be the first one finished. He never stops to think about details like neatness or checking his work. I know this haste hurts his grades. How can I help?



**A:** It sounds like your child has a bad case of "hurry-itis." He turns every task into a competition, and he wants to be first across the finish line.

Here's how to help him slow down and get back on track:

- **Talk to his teacher.** Let her know you would like to work on ways to help your child focus more on quality than speed as he works.
- **Talk to your child.** Put his competitive nature to work by using an example from a sport, such as basketball. Sometimes it's necessary to get down the court fast. But when a player is shooting free throws, accuracy is more important. Doing schoolwork is more like shooting free throws.
- **Make a plan.** Tell your child that you're going to look over his homework each night. If it's sloppy or carelessly done, encourage him to spend some more time on it. Soon your child will figure out that when he slows down, he'll get the work done well the first time—and that takes less time in the long run!



## Are you a leader on your child's team?

School has been underway for a few months, so it's a good time to make sure you are doing all you can to build an effective school-home team to support your child. Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

- \_\_\_ **1. Have you met** your child's classroom teacher at least once this year?
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you talk** with your child about school each day and review all of the information she brings home?
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you monitor** your child's homework? If she's struggling, do you ask the teacher how you can help at home?
- \_\_\_ **4. Have you reviewed** the school rules with your child and let her know you expect her to follow them?

- \_\_\_ **5. Do you get** your child to school on time each day?

### How well are you doing?

*More yes answers mean you are actively working with the school. For each no, try that idea from the quiz.*

*"Our greatest weakness lies in giving up. The most certain way to succeed is always to try just one more time."*

—Thomas Edison

## Chalk one up for math!

You can make math fun for your child with a little sidewalk chalk. Try these activities:

- **Line walk.** Together, draw a number line on the pavement. Call out a subtraction problem. He can solve it by moving down the line from the higher number.
- **Add 'em up.** Number each square in a large three by three grid. Take turns tossing two stones on the grid and adding the numbers on which they fall.
- **Shadow time.** Have your child stand in the sunlight. Mark where his feet are, and where his shadow ends. Repeat every 30 minutes, with his feet in the same spot. Measure the shadow's changes.

## It's all in the notebook

An assignment notebook can be a useful tool for helping your child get organized. Any small notebook will do. When the teacher gives homework, your child should write answers to three questions:

- 1. What's the assignment?**
- 2. What materials do I need?**
- 3. When is it due?**



Remind your child to check her notebook each day before leaving school so she will know what to bring home.

## Discipline leads to learning

Disciplining children can be a challenge, but some techniques really work. Try to:

- **Change misbehavior positively.** Focus on what you want your child to do, not what you want him to avoid doing.
- **Communicate expectations clearly.**
- **Keep corrections simple.** Say your child's name and repeat the correction ("Homework now") over and over.
- **Show your love.**

### Helping Children Learn®

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