

# Elementary School Parents<sup>®</sup>

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## make the difference!



## Stay positive when talking with your child about grades

The report card came home—and it was disappointing. You know your child has the ability to do well. His teachers have told you that every year. But he doesn't work up to his potential. What should you do?

The most important thing to remember is to keep your emotions in check. Getting angry or showing your disappointment just won't help. Instead, look for ways to encourage your child to do the best he can.

After you have had time to "digest" your child's report card:

- **Ask him to talk** about his grades. What does *he* think is going on? Does he complete his classwork in school? Is he turning in his homework on time? Does he understand the lessons? Are there things he could do differently?
- **Talk with his teacher.** Ask if she has noticed any issues at school. Discuss ways you can work together to boost your child's performance. Perhaps your child could stay after school for extra help.
- **Set up a time each day** when your child will do his homework. During that time, the TV should be off and the computer should be used only for studying. Set a timer for 20 minutes and let him take a short break before getting back to work.
- **Offer support.** Provide help if necessary, but don't *ever* do your child's homework for him. Let your child take responsibility for completing his work. It's the only way he will get the practice he needs to succeed in school and in life.

## Speak the language of involvement!



If English is not your first language, you may hesitate to get involved at school. But studies

show that there are many ways you can be involved in your child's education. Here are just a few:

- **Attend conferences** and other events at the school. Don't be afraid to request translated documents. Or ask a friend who speaks your language and English to come with you to interpret what's being said.
- **Ask the teacher** what you can do to help. Many of the most important things you can do to support your child can be done in any language: Ask your child about school. Schedule a regular homework time. Encourage your child to read every day.
- **Connect with other parents.** Form a group to share ideas and opportunities for better communication. Discuss ways you can partner with the school to help school staff meet the needs of all students and their parents.

## Predict, prepare and practice for the most effective discipline



No parent would wait until their child burned down the house to talk about the danger of playing with matches. Yet when it comes to discipline, parents often wait until *after* a problem arises to take action. Brainstorming ways to prevent a problem in the first place is much more effective.

Think about a behavior that you would like to change. Perhaps your child gets up so late in the morning that she often misses the bus. This is predictable—it happens at least twice a week.

Since you can predict the behavior, you can also think about ways to prevent it. Instead of waiting until your child straggles down to the breakfast table, think of ways to avoid the late start. Is she tired in

the morning because she's been up too late at night? An earlier bedtime could change that.

Is she rushing around trying to get organized for school? Spending time the night before could save precious minutes in the morning.

Then practice. Get out a timer and see how quickly she can pack her backpack. If you predict, prepare and practice, you can prevent many behavior problems from recurring.

**Source:** L.R. Griffin, *Negotiation Generation: Take Back Your Parental Authority Without Punishment*, Berkley Books.

**“The child supplies the power but the parents have to do the steering.”**

—Benjamin Spock

## 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 her classwork, for example, but be too anxious on test day to think clearly.

To help your child succeed on tests:

- **Make school a priority.** Children who do well on tests tend to be the ones who study and finish homework on time. They also miss less school than other kids. These are habits you can encourage.
- **Develop healthy routines.** Your child needs plenty of sleep and

a nutritious breakfast every day before school.

- **Communicate with teachers.** In addition to knowing how your child is doing throughout the year, pay attention to test details. Ask your child's teacher questions, such as, “Which skills do the tests measure?” “How should my child prepare?”
- **Promote reading.** Many tests require reading, so make sure your child reads often.
- **Reduce anxiety.** As test day approaches, help your child stay positive and calm. If she is nervous, she can take deep breaths and tell herself, “I can do this!” Remind her that she has your love no matter what.

## Are you helping your child develop ‘word power’?



Knowing just the right word to use can give a child real power. A strong vocabulary improves your child's thinking and communication skills. And studies clearly show a connection between vocabulary and academic success.

Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to see if you are giving your child “word power”:

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you talk about words?** When reading books, discuss the meanings of unfamiliar words.
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you use new words for familiar ideas?** “Let's tidy your room by *categorizing* your toys.”
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you play family word games, such as Scrabble®?**
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you have a “Word of the Day”** that everyone tries to use at least three times during that day?
- \_\_\_ **5. Does your child have a personal dictionary** where he writes new words and their meanings?

**How well are you doing?**

More *yes* answers mean you are giving your child word power. For *no* answers, try those ideas from the quiz.

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# Set the stage for a successful transition to middle school



If your child will graduate from elementary school this year, congratulations! The move to middle school is exciting and rewarding—and will be easier if you start preparing now.

At school, teachers are already getting students ready for this big transition. At home, you can do the same thing. After all, research shows there's a strong connection between parent involvement and student success!

To support your child's progress and independence:

- **Learn about the middle school** ahead of time. Read its website regularly. 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?
- **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.
- **Ask for advice.** Find out about summer activities for rising middle schoolers, such as library reading programs. Ask the school for suggestions.
- **Stay informed.** Attend events for new students and families. Join the parent-teacher organization and ask about volunteer opportunities. Introduce yourself to staff and other parents.
- **Keep communicating.** Talk with your child about concerns and hopes. Solve problems together. When middle school begins, keep in touch with teachers, too.

**Q:** My daughter spends hours playing online games. From the minute she walks in the door until she falls asleep, she wants to be playing one of her games. She is rushing through her homework and her grades are suffering. How can I get her to start living in the real world again?

## Questions & Answers

**A:** Used responsibly, online games can be a fun way for kids to relax. Some games promote physical activity, some encourage play with others and some even build important academic skills.

But studies show that children are spending more and more time in front of screens. In fact, many are spending more than eight hours a day staring at some sort of screen. The American Academy of Pediatrics strongly urges parents to limit children's recreational screen time.

Clearly, the amount of time your daughter spends playing online games is interfering with her responsibilities. If her grades are suffering and she is spending little or no time with friends and family, it's time to take action:

- **Talk with your child** and let her know that you will be setting limits on the amount of time she spends online.
- **Establish times** when online games are never allowed, such as during homework time, meal time and family time.
- **Provide alternatives.** Plan daily family activities, such as reading aloud, taking a walk or playing a board game. All these will replace some of the screen game time with more productive activities.

# Researchers say 'grit' is key to your child's school success



What do spelling champions and West Point cadets have in common? It's a quality known as *grit*—the ability to stick with something even when it's hard.

Current research shows that grit is important. People who persist when a task gets challenging are most likely to be successful.

To promote grit:

- **Teach your child to focus** on how good it feels to finish a tough task. "You did your homework. Now you can relax and enjoy yourself."
- **Emphasize starting.** People with grit don't put off unpleasant tasks. So help your child develop the habit of getting started. "You work on homework and I'll clean these drawers. Let's see what we can finish in 15 minutes."
- **Stress effort over ability.** Tell your child that success requires dedication and effort as much or more than intelligence. Notice every bit of hard work your child does and every small step of progress he makes.

**Source:** A. Duckworth and others, "Grit: Perseverance and Passion for Long-Term Goals," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, American Psychological Association.

# It Matters: Reading

## Acting out text helps students learn more



Reading is often thought of as a calm, cozy activity. But research suggests that children can

improve their comprehension and memory by moving around and acting out what they've read.

Acting out text helps children make connections between the words on a page and real actions. Physically crawling, for example, might help a child understand the word *crawl* better.

Here are some strategies for you and your child to try after reading a story together:

- **Play dress up.** Dress up as favorite characters. Use props from around the house and reenact exciting scenes. Make it a point to use words from the story. "I'm climbing to the *peak* of the mountain! The very top!"
- **Put on a play.** Help your child write a short skit based on the story. Gather friends and family to participate or sit in the audience.
- **Do a dramatic reading.** Read the story aloud and act it out. Take turns with your child or let him perform the whole thing. Use enthusiastic actions and tones that bring the story to life.
- **Plan a puppet show** and act out a few scenes from the story with your child. If you don't have puppets, make some from old socks or small paper bags.

**Source:** S.D. Sparks, "Acting Out' Text Found to Promote Pupils' Learning," *Education Week*, Editorial Projects in Education.

## Transform a reluctant reader with a trip to your local library

Experts believe *all* kids can enjoy reading. It's just a matter of finding the right materials. Before your next library visit, think about these five things:

1. **Your child's hobbies.** She might find an irresistible book about soccer, video games or cooking. Ask the librarian for suggestions.
2. **Different genres.** Perhaps your child would like to read a mystery, a how-to book or a biography. Consider everything!
3. **Company.** Kids who "don't like" to read often take pride in reading to others. Bring along a younger sibling, a grandparent, or a favorite stuffed animal.
4. **Alternatives to books.** Your child might prefer shorter materials, such as articles,



comics or recipes. All of these count as reading!

5. **Activities.** See if your local library hosts read-aloud times, or has reading-related computer games for kids.

## Help your elementary schooler develop strong reading habits



What do good readers have in common?

There are certain things they do before, during and after reading

assignments. Here's how you can help your child develop these habits:

- **Before reading,** encourage him to think about the text. What clues does he notice? What do the titles, pictures or headlines tell him? What does he already know about this subject? What does he think he'll learn?
- **While reading,** he should check his comprehension. Your child should ask, "Does this make sense?" "What information am I missing?" If he's confused by a word or idea, he should read it twice. Still confused? Keep reading, and then go back. Its meaning may become clear. If it doesn't, he should look it up or plan to ask the teacher about it.
- **After reading,** have him make connections. Your child should summarize the information or story by drawing a picture or chart. Did his predictions come true? Were all of his questions answered? If not, he should reread or try to find answers elsewhere.