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Elementary School Parents[®]

make the difference!

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Inattentiveness can affect your child's ability to learn

Everybody's mind wanders now and then. But if your child regularly "zones out" at school, it can impact his ability to learn and retain new information. Studies show that younger students who can't focus tend to become older students who can't focus. And that can mean big trouble for your child's education.

To help your child keep his eye on the ball at school, strengthen his attention skills at home. Here's how:

- **Break down large assignments.** If he has a book report to write, show him how to divide it into smaller steps. "First, think about what you want to say. Next, make an outline of your thoughts. Then, start writing."
- **Encourage breathers.** Don't force your child to work for long periods

of time. Instead, set a timer for 20 minutes and have your child take a five-minute break when it goes off. Frequent short breaks help your child clear his head and refocus on his work.

- **Remove distractions.** Keep the TV and other screens off while your child works. Keep noise to a minimum. Homework shouldn't have to compete for his attention!

Remind your child to use these tools in class when possible. Even a 30-second break (maybe by closing his eyes and breathing deeply) could help him buckle back down and tackle the worksheet in front of him.

Source: A.J. Lundervold and others, "Parent Rated Symptoms of Inattention in Childhood Predict High School Academic Achievement Across Two Culturally and Diagnostically Diverse Samples," *Frontiers in Psychology*, Frontiers Communications.

Remember the three keys to discipline



Parents and teachers agree that discipline is important for learning. When teachers have to

spend time correcting behavior, they have less time to teach.

The most effective discipline helps your child learn what she did wrong and how she can make a better choice in the future. To keep your discipline productive:

1. **Remain calm.** Giving in to an urge to yell at your child teaches her that it's OK to lose control when she's upset.
2. **Be consistent.** It doesn't take long for your child to learn whether you really intend to enforce rules. Give in just once to watching TV before school and you'll have a battle every morning. Don't set rules unless you plan to consistently enforce them.
3. **Focus on behavior.** Don't criticize. Instead, describe your child's behavior: "It was your sister's turn to use the computer and you wouldn't quit playing your game." Then, remind her of the rule and of the consequence.

Five ways chores can help your child become more responsible



It's a fact: Responsible children do better in school. And they grow up to become productive, responsible adults.

One of the most effective ways to help children develop responsibility is through chores. Chores help your child:

1. **Do better in school.** Learning how to follow directions and complete chores correctly gives your child practice for following directions when taking tests.
2. **Feel like he is needed.** Let's face it—this is something *everyone* needs. So be sure to recognize your child's contribution. "Juan unloaded the dishwasher this afternoon, so cleaning up after dinner tonight will be much faster!"
3. **Feel a sense of investment.** A child who has swept the floor is

less likely to track in mud from outdoors.

4. **Take pride in his work.** This feeling of satisfaction can carry over to times when he faces a daunting task for school, like finishing a long-term project.
5. **Learn basic life skills.** Before your child leaves home, he should know things like how to prepare simple meals, care for his clothes and take out the garbage. The sooner he learns these lessons, the more prepared he will be for the future.

"The greatest gifts you can give your children are the roots of responsibility and the wings of independence."

—Denis Waitley

Put an end to procrastination by doing the crummy job first!



Your child has math homework, a book report and spelling homework. He hates spelling. So you should tell him to do the

spelling first. Here are the reasons:

- **Crummy jobs are a part of life.** We all have to do some things we don't like. Talk to your child about some of the jobs you don't enjoy doing, but have to do anyway. Doing the laundry and cleaning the bathrooms every week isn't fun, but what's the alternative?
- **Putting off a difficult task** just makes it—well, more difficult. Until he gets that spelling finished, it's going to occupy his mind and hang over his head.

- **Finishing that dreaded task** is going to feel wonderful. Help your child learn to focus on how great he'll feel when the job is finished—not how he feels while he's doing it. But let him know that it's also OK to build in a small reward for finishing an unpleasant task, such as spending 10 minutes shooting hoops.

Sometimes, all it takes is a little push. Set a timer for 15 minutes and say, "Work on your spelling for 15 minutes. Then you can stop." Once your child gets started, it may not be as painful as he thought.

Source: R. Emmett, *The Procrastinating Child: A Handbook for Adults to Help Children Stop Putting Things Off*, Walker & Company.

Are you teaching your child to make good choices?



Parents want children to make wise choices. When the time comes, you hope your child will say *no* to negative peer pressure

and *yes* to positive things.

Are you doing all you can now to teach her to make these wise choices? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

- ___ 1. **Do you give your child** plenty of opportunities to make decisions—and expect her to live with the choices she makes?
- ___ 2. **Do you discuss** family decisions together? Do you brainstorm and come up with the decisions together?
- ___ 3. **Do you sometimes think** out loud and talk through how you are making a choice?
- ___ 4. **Do you encourage your child** to ask questions before she makes a choice?
- ___ 5. **Do you teach your child** that every decision has consequences?

How well are you doing?

Each *yes* means you're helping your child make better choices today and in the future. For *no* answers, try those ideas in the quiz.

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The Parent Institute®, 1-800-756-5525,
P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474.
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Family meetings help promote cooperation and communication



Regular family meetings provide opportunities for families to connect and for children to learn important life skills. Led properly,

these meetings can teach your child about responsibility, communication, negotiation and cooperation.

To get the most out of meetings:

- **Meet regularly**—once every week or two. In addition, allow family members to request a meeting if they have something important to discuss.
- **Make an agenda.** Before each meeting, ask family members what they would like to discuss. Schedule enough time to discuss each topic, but try to keep the meeting under one hour.
- **Put someone in charge.** The chairperson must stick to the agenda and give everyone a fair, uninterrupted say. Initially, the chairperson should be an adult. After a few meetings, consider letting your child give it a try.
- **Take turns.** After one person describes an idea or problem, everyone can take turns explaining how they feel about it. Brainstorm solutions, giving each person time to contribute. Choose an idea—or a combination of ideas—to try, with parents having the final say.
- **Write down decisions.** As each decision is made, record the family's plan. Keep notes in a journal or post the highlights on the refrigerator. Plan to revisit certain decisions or solutions at future meetings to discuss whether or not they are working.

A focus on fitness helps your child perform better on tests



Studies of elementary-age children have shown that the more fit they are, the better they do in school.

Fit children have more brain power than their less active classmates. They tend to have greater attention and memory skills. They also tend to complete tasks faster and make fewer errors.

While your child's fitness should be a year-round concern, she can do some things to boost her fitness level on test days. Encourage her to:

- **Get a good night's sleep** before the test. Staying up all night studying increases anxiety, which interferes with clear thinking.
- **Eat for success.** A breakfast that is high in fiber and relatively low in

sugar can give your child just the right start to her day. A whole-grain bagel and a banana is a fast and easy breakfast option.

- **Relax.** If your child is too nervous, she'll forget what she knows. She can stretch and breathe deeply to focus her mind.
- **Wear comfortable clothes.** Pants shouldn't be so tight they keep your child from breathing fully. Her brain needs oxygen.
- **Drink plenty of water.** This is another way to keep her brain alert. Don't forget to give your child a big hug on test day. This will increase her sense of well-being and energy.

Source: C. Storrs, "Math-letes rule! Fit, healthy kids do better in school, especially math," CNN, nswc.com/elem_fitness.

Q: My son has just been diagnosed with asthma. He doesn't want anyone at school to know because he says he still wants to have fun with his friends at recess. How should I work with the teacher—without having my son singled out?

Questions & Answers

A: Asthma is a serious health problem and it's the biggest reason why children miss school. According to the United States Environmental Protection Agency, asthma causes over 10 million absences a year!

So you can't agree to keep your son's illness from his teacher. You need to work with the school to create plans that will protect your child's health and safety. To do so:

- **Check with the school** about rules for medicine at school. See the school nurse or talk to the office to fill out needed forms. You should also be sure that your son knows how to take his medication.
- **Talk with the teacher** about times when your son may be at risk. Overactivity during recess can often trigger an attack. Teach your son to self-monitor so he avoids situations that bring on an attack.
- **Make sure your child** takes precautions during times of the year when asthma attacks are more frequent. Pollen, for example, can often act as a trigger. At these times, your son will need to pay closer attention to how he feels.

Let your son know that he's not alone. On average, one out of every 10 school-age children has asthma. Asthma won't prevent him from having fun at recess or in other physical activity. But he will have to learn to respect his limits so he can stay healthy.

It Matters: Reading

Reading and writing at home boosts success



When kids spend time reading and writing at home, it benefits them in the classroom. What's more, it may pay off

later in life.

According to research, kids who sharpen their literacy skills at home—even with activities that are just for fun—are more successful in school than other kids. And they become adults with strong work ethics who thrive in their careers.

Luckily, it's easy to encourage reading and writing at home. Here are three ideas to try:

1. **Make books a priority.** Don't save stories for bedtime—read them any time of day! Keep books out where your child can get to them. Visit the library often to find new titles. And set a good example: When you have some downtime, reach for a book instead of the remote. Your child will notice.
2. **Start a family journal.** Each weekend, have your child jot down something special about his week. It doesn't need to be long; a couple of sentences will do. After his entry, add your own. By the end of the school year, you'll have a written record of memories!
3. **Play word games.** Each round of Scrabble does more than entertain your child. It hones his reading and writing skills. Best of all, he won't suspect you're "teaching" him anything!

Source: N.L. Alston-Abel and V.W. Berninger, "Relationships Between Home Literacy Practices and School Achievement: Implications for Consultation and Home-School Collaboration," *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation*, Taylor and Francis.

Motivate a reluctant reader with appealing reading material

Some kids just don't like reading. One way to encourage your child to read is to help her find reading material related to things she is interested in.

If your child loves soccer, for example, help her find:

- A **book about the history** of the sport.
- A **how-to book** with tips on improving her game.
- A **biography** of one of her favorite players.
- **Kid-friendly websites** that contain sports-related articles.

If you aren't sure what your child likes, ask yourself:

- **What are three activities** she and her friends are involved in?



- **What are three adult activities** she might like to try some day?
- **What were the last three books** that she seemed to enjoy?

Be a reading role model to build your child's interest in reading



Children who see their parents reading usually grow up to be readers themselves. To show your child that reading

is important:

- **Let him see you reading** every day. Pick up a newspaper, magazine or a book. Your child will see that reading is important to you, and he may want to read, too.
- **Tell him why** you're reading—for information, to check out something you think you know or to just relax.
- **Look up a word** in the dictionary if you come across one you are unsure of. Ask your child if he knows the meaning of the word.

- **Read aloud to him.** When you see an article you think your child might find interesting, read a small part of it to him. He may be motivated to finish reading it himself.
- **Get your own library card** and use it. When you take your child to the library, find something to check out for yourself.
- **Join him.** When you see your child reading, pick up something to read yourself. Bring a snack to share.
- **Give books as gifts.** Show your child how much you value books by giving them as gifts. Encourage your child to give his friends books as gifts, too.