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

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## Boost learning by promoting your child's thinking skills

**Y**our 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.

## Improve school performance with breakfast



It takes a lot of energy for students to concentrate in school. So it's no surprise that

kids who go to school without breakfast often lack focus.

Studies consistently show that breakfast affects how well kids do in school. One Harvard Medical School study looked at how breakfast affected students' attendance and academic performance. They found that children who ate breakfast had:

- **Better attendance.**
- **Fewer episodes of tardiness.**
- **Higher math scores.**
- **A stronger ability to concentrate in class.**

With today's hectic schedules, there isn't always enough time for a sit-down breakfast. So make sure you have a few healthy grab-and-go options available. An apple and a piece of cheese will get your child off to a good start. So will a whole-grain bagel and cream cheese. In a pinch, even a piece of last night's pizza will do!

**Source:** M. Levin, MPH, "Research Brief: Breakfast for Learning," Food Research & Action Center, [nswc.com/elem\\_breakfast](http://nswc.com/elem_breakfast).

# Planning ahead is a challenge for many young students



Your child can't do her homework if she left the book she needs at school. She can't turn in homework if it's ...

well, who knows exactly where it is?

Parents know that young children can have a very hard time planning ahead. Here are three reasons why—and what you can do about each.

Most kids:

1. **Have difficulty resisting** the temptation to do something fun instead of something hard. Make a simple rule: No TV or games until homework is finished.
2. **Lack organization skills.** Show your child how to use a calendar to track her assignments, test dates

and activities. Establish a “launch pad” where backpacks “live” and where homework is placed once it's completed.

### 3. Have very little sense of time.

Often, they really do think that one day is enough time to finish that big project. Help your child break big projects down into smaller steps.

**“Loving a child doesn't mean giving in to all his whims; to love him is to bring out the best in him, to teach him to love what is difficult.”**

—Nadia Boulanger

# Ask questions to strengthen your child's comprehension



Much 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 strengthen your child's reading comprehension, encourage him to:

- **Summarize.** Talk with your child 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? If the story is about a mouse, for example, what does he know about mice that matches or doesn't match the information in the story?

- **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, [niswc.com/elem\\_reader](http://niswc.com/elem_reader).

# 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 there is a clear connection between a strong 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 together, 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 family members try to use at least three times during that day?

\_\_\_ 5. **Does your child have** a personal dictionary where she 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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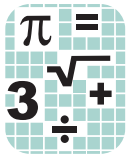
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# Parents can instill a positive attitude about math and science



Take a look at any list of high-paying jobs and you are likely to see they have one thing in common: They require a knowledge of math and science.

So why don't more students—especially girls—prepare for careers in math and science?

Researchers took a look at how parents influence their children's views on math and science. The study found that, in general, parents are more likely to encourage boys to take an interest in math and science. And this tends to start as far back as elementary school, when students' attitudes toward math and science seem to be set. As a result, girls tend to lose interest in these subjects by high school.

So what can parents do to make sure their sons *and* daughters stay

interested in math and science?

Here are some suggestions:

- **Play games that encourage math and science.** If you're in the car, see who can add the numbers on the license plate in front of you. If you're at the store, see if your child can calculate the change.
- **Help your child see herself** as someone who is good in math and science. Teach her that brains, like muscles, get stronger with practice. Remind her that "smart is something you *get*, not something you *are*."
- **Find role models.** Look for TV shows or news stories featuring a wide diversity of people who are doctors, engineers and scientists.

**Source:** S. Zielinski, "Adults can sabotage a student's path in science or math," *Science News for Students*, Society for Science and the Public, [nswc.com/elem\\_math\\_science](http://nswc.com/elem_math_science).

**Q:** My son is quite overweight. I have talked with his doctor, and we are working on improving our diet at home. But meanwhile, his grades are dropping and he has almost no friends. What can I do to help my child?

## Questions & Answers

**A:** Your son is not alone. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, more than one-third of children under the age of 18 are overweight.

Studies show that overweight kids often do poorly in school. Many overweight children don't speak up in class because they are afraid the other kids will make fun of them. They may also lack confidence in their abilities.

Kids who are overweight are also more likely to spend time by themselves. And when they're alone, they're often less active than other children.

First, help your son focus on the right thing. He shouldn't worry about the number on the scale. Instead, he should concentrate on establishing habits that will help him feel healthy and strong.

Next, make fitness a family priority. Plan frequent family walks. Look for things you can do on the weekends. Go to a park and kick a ball around.

Follow the guidelines your son's doctor sets for his diet. But don't turn yourself into the "food police." Instead, make healthy changes for the whole family, like drinking water instead of soda or juice with dinner.

Finally, talk with your child's teacher. Ask her to support your son in school. She may also have ideas about students your son could spend time with.

# Celebrate Presidents Day with engaging learning activities



February 18 is Presidents Day in the United States. Try these enjoyable learning activities to help your child discover more

about U.S. presidents:

- **Find a book** with pictures of U.S. presidents. Have your child match those pictures to the faces on coins and bills. Give him pennies, nickels, dimes and quarters. He can also match pictures to one-, five- and twenty-dollar bills.
- **Take a virtual tour** of Washington's home. Visit [www.mountvernon.org/the-estate-gardens/the-mansion/mansion-virtual-tour](http://www.mountvernon.org/the-estate-gardens/the-mansion/mansion-virtual-tour).
- **Ask your child** to imagine he's president for a day. Then help him write a short essay, answering several questions: What is his day like? What powers does he have as a president? What laws is he planning to create or change?
- **Share the legend** of George Washington cutting down the cherry tree. Talk about how Lincoln was known as "Honest Abe." Discuss the value of honesty. Ask your child what other qualities a president needs.
- **Write a letter.** Does your child have something he'd like to say to the President? Encourage him to write a letter. Be sure to follow the guidelines at [www.whitehouse.gov/get-involved/write-or-call](http://www.whitehouse.gov/get-involved/write-or-call).
- **Find crafts, coloring pages,** word searches and more fun activities to do with your child at [www.dltk-kids.com/crafts/presidents.html](http://www.dltk-kids.com/crafts/presidents.html).



# It Matters: Motivation

## Six strategies can keep your child motivated



You don't just want your child to learn. You want your child to *want* to learn! Motivation is part

of being a successful student.

Here are six strategies that can motivate your child to do his best:

1. **Stay involved.** When parents are involved in education, kids do better in school. Make sure you monitor study time and communicate with the teacher regularly.
2. **Have a positive attitude.** Let your child know you believe he can succeed in school. And if he struggles, work with the teacher to find solutions.
3. **Promote independence.** Give your child age-appropriate freedoms. Let him choose between two places to study, or whether to do homework before or after dinner, for example.
4. **Correct mistakes** in a positive way. Don't say, "You seem to struggle with spelling." Try, "You spelled everything right except these two words! I bet you can learn them with practice."
5. **Give specific compliments.** Don't say, "I like your handwriting." It's better to say, "Your report is written so neatly. I can tell that you really took your time."
6. **Add more to learning.** Let school lessons spark *your* imagination. Visit some age-appropriate, educational websites with your child. Take a trip to the state capital, do a science experiment or figure out a waiter's tip together.

## Too much praise has a negative effect on students' motivation

**S**tudents who receive too much of the wrong kind of praise from their parents may develop traits such as vanity, selfishness and self-centeredness. Experts note that unearned praise also has a negative impact on students' motivation.

While it's important for parents to encourage their children, it's more important to make sure praise is:

- **Detailed.** Highlight behaviors you want your child to repeat. "You studied every day for your test and earned an A!"
- **Honest.** You want your child to be able to trust what you say. Rather than saying, "You're the best piano player ever!" try, "You kept working until you got that song right!"
- **Focused on effort.** Support your child's efforts to try new things. Put special emphasis on things your child works hard to do, even



if they aren't a big deal to others. Perseverance is something to acknowledge and reward!

- **Meaningful.** Save compliments for times when your child really deserves them.

**Source:** C. Wilson, "Too Much Praise May Make Kids Narcissistic," *New Scientist*, [nswc.com/too\\_much\\_praise](http://nswc.com/too_much_praise).

## Ask questions to make sure your expectations are realistic



High expectations are linked to high accomplishment. But how can you tell if your expectations

for your child are also realistic? After all, you want to motivate him, not set him up for failure.

When setting expectations, ask yourself these questions:

- **Are they appropriate?** Take your child's development into consideration. In addition to his age, think about his personality and maturity. Goals shouldn't

be too easy or too difficult for him to reach.

- **Are they easy to understand?** State your expectations in simple and clear terms. For example, "I expect you to start your homework by 4:00 each day."
- **Are they important?** Make sure you choose expectations that focus on the behaviors you want your child to develop. If you want him to be respectful and to succeed in school, set expectations that promote those outcomes.