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

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## Begin the school year with a commitment to attendance

**Y**our child's teachers will do their best to help your child learn and succeed in school. But there's one thing that *only you* can do—get him to school every day.

Children who don't attend school regularly fall behind and score lower on tests. They can also have a hard time making and keeping friends—especially in elementary school.

How often a child is absent in elementary school sets a pattern for absences in later school years. Lots of absences often lead to students dropping out of school completely.

To reinforce the importance of school attendance:

- **Tell your child** that his education matters. His job is to attend school on time every day.

- **Discuss some of the consequences** of missing school: needing to do make-up work, missing friends, not understanding.
- **Keep your child home** from school only if he is sick or there is a family emergency. Don't let him stay home to catch up on homework or sleep.
- **Schedule medical appointments** during non-school hours.
- **Plan vacations** for when school is not in session.
- **Track your child's absences.** Look for any patterns that need to be addressed.
- **Talk to the teacher** or the school counselor if your child regularly doesn't want to go to school.

**Source:** "10 Facts About School Attendance," Attendance Works, [niswc.com/elem\\_attendance-priority](http://niswc.com/elem_attendance-priority).

## A good night's sleep is crucial for learning



When your child doesn't get enough sleep, it's hard for her to learn in school. That's because sleep

affects a child's ability to:

- **Plan and organize.**
- **Solve problems.**
- **Control mood and behavior.**
- **Focus and pay attention.**
- **Retain information.**

To help your child get the recommended nine to 12 hours of sleep she needs each night:

- **Stick to a schedule.** Enforce a regular bedtime and wake time. Establish times for meals, homework and recreation.
- **Encourage her to get moving.** Exercise and fresh air help children sleep better.
- **Set a technology curfew.** Kids should avoid bright screens for one hour before bedtime.
- **Follow a bedtime routine.** She could take a bath, enjoy a story and share her favorite part of the day. Then, it's lights out.
- **Make her feel safe.** Put a night light in her room. Tell her you'll check on her periodically.

**Source:** "Healthy Sleep Habits: How Many Hours Does Your Child Need?" American Academy of Pediatrics, [niswc.com/elem\\_get-sleep](http://niswc.com/elem_get-sleep).

# Encourage independence during your child's homework time



It usually starts with a simple question: "How do you spell *Washington*?" And before you realize it, you've spent the next 20 minutes answering all your child's homework questions.

Your child will often be asked to find and learn facts for homework. It's important for you to encourage him to do this on his own.

First, tell your child that he has to try to answer all homework questions by himself. He should start with the questions he knows the answers to, skipping over any that give him problems. Then have him go back and think about the questions he couldn't answer the first time around.

Then, and only then, is your child allowed to ask you for help. And when he does, keep your goal in mind: You don't want him to just

get the right answer. You want him to learn *how* to get the right answer—by himself.

So if your child asks you to spell something, don't rattle off the spelling. Instead, ask, "Where could you find that?" Then get out the dictionary or his social studies book and have your child figure it out.

Showing your child how to find information by himself is the most effective way to help him learn facts now and be prepared to learn more in the future.

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

—Denis Waitley

# Talk to your child about the importance of showing respect



Respectful behavior is just as important at school as it is at home. To show respect at school, students should:

- **Address the teacher** by name. Smile, look the teacher in the eye and say, "Good morning, Mrs. Jones."
- **Be courteous.** Your child should say *please*, *thank you* and *excuse me* to teachers and classmates.
- **Do what's expected.** Everyone in school has a job to do. If the teacher doesn't plan lessons, no one can learn anything. If students don't do their jobs—homework, listening to the teacher—it makes it harder for everyone to learn.
- **Raise their hands.** Imagine having 30 students in a class, each of whom wants attention right now. When your child raises her hand and waits for the teacher to call on her, she demonstrates self-control and respect for others.
- **Participate** in class discussions on a regular basis.
- **Accept feedback** from the teacher. Teachers want students to learn. That means they have to point out mistakes and areas where students can improve. Your child will be more successful in school if she learns to accept constructive feedback in a positive way.

Source: R.K. Payne, Ph.D., *Understanding Learning: The How, the Why, the What, Aha!* Process Inc.

# Are you teaching your child to bounce back?



Some parents want to wrap their children in a protective bubble so they never have to experience failure. Others know that

overcoming disappointments can teach valuable lessons.

Are you helping your child learn from failure? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

\_\_\_1. **Do you give** your child a chance to solve problems on her own rather than jumping in to help right away?

\_\_\_2. **Do you encourage** your child to think about what she could do differently the next time?

\_\_\_3. **Are you** a good role model? When you fail at something, do you talk about it and about how to fix it?

\_\_\_4. **Do you help** your child keep disappointments in perspective? "You didn't ace your test, but you earned a higher grade than last time!"

\_\_\_5. **Do you show** your child how to be a humble winner and a gracious loser?

**How well are you doing?**

If most of your answers are *yes*, you are helping your child learn to bounce back from disappointment. For each *no*, try that idea in the quiz.

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# Get the school year off to a great start with routines and habits



It's the beginning of the school year—the perfect time to set the stage for learning success. Try these simple strategies:

- **Get a head start.** Many families find that organizing at night prevents morning “rush hour.” You can review school papers, pack and refrigerate lunches, set backpacks by the door and agree on outfits.
- **Establish sleep routines.** Choose reasonable bedtimes so everyone is rested when it's time to wake up. Make sure everyone sticks to their bedtimes.
- **Develop morning habits.** If your child does the same things in the same order each morning, it's less likely that she will forget a step.
- **Choose a homework time.** With your child, pick a time when she will have the most energy and motivation to do assignments. Create a quiet study spot (complete with necessary supplies) where she can work at the same time each day.
- **Use tools for organization.** Teach your child how to use calendars, to-do lists and a filing system for schoolwork and important papers.
- **Set priorities.** Schedule things like schoolwork, family meals and even free time on a calendar. Treat them like appointments. If there are open blocks of time, your child can add activities.

## Reading aloud to your child strengthens reading skills



Even if your child already knows how to read, it's helpful for you to continue reading aloud to him.

Reading aloud gives your child valuable quality time with you—and it exposes him to ideas, concepts and vocabulary he might not get otherwise. Each time you read together, you add to his storehouse of knowledge and strengthen his reading comprehension skills.

To boost your child's vocabulary skills as you read, define the words he doesn't know. Then ask if he can think of words that have a similar or opposite meaning.

From time to time, see if your child can figure out the meaning of an unknown word by how it's used in a sentence. Give examples of how the word might be used in other

contexts. For example, note how the word *sign* can be a noun (Look at the stop *sign*) or a verb (Please *sign* your name here).

As you read, you can also help your child strengthen other skills, such as:

- **Listening and speaking.** After you've read a passage, have your child tell you what he heard. Ask specific questions—What did this character do? Where did he do it? How did it make his mom feel?
- **Memory.** Don't just start reading where you left off in a book the night before. First ask your child to recall where you were in the story.
- **Word recognition.** Stop reading periodically. Ask your child to read a sentence or two to you. Help him sound out new words. Then have him read the sentences again.

**Q:** My first grader is very shy and has a difficult time making friends. I'm worried that this will affect him in school. What can I do to help him come out of his shell?

### Questions & Answers

**A:** Some children have lots of self-confidence and others do not. While you can't change your child's personality, you can help him feel more confident when speaking and working with others. To help your child strengthen his social skills:

- **Role-play with him.** Shy children don't always know what to say to another child. Say, “Let's pretend you're at recess. Juan and Jack are playing a fun game that you'd like to join. What could you say?” At first, you might have your child pretend to be one of the other children. You can pretend to be him. But then change roles and give him a chance to play himself.
- **Read books about friends** together. Talk about what good friends do—and don't do. As your son thinks about what makes a good friend, he may start to look for someone in his class who could be a friend.
- **Build on your child's strengths.** Use these as a way for him to meet other children who share his interests. Does he like art? Perhaps he could take an art class at a community center. Is he athletic? He might want to play on a soccer team. As your child practices the skills that he enjoys, he will develop self-confidence—which may also help him make friends!



# It Matters: The Home-School Team

## Parent-teacher relationships affect learning



Studies consistently show that parent involvement in education is linked to students' academic success. It's powerful

when teachers, parents and students work together!

The family-school relationship is just like all relationships—it requires trust, effective communication and respect. To get off to a great start:

- **Set the tone.** Show your interest by attending back-to-school events. Introduce yourself to the teacher and exchange contact information. Ask how you can support your child's learning at home. Fill out and return school forms promptly. And let your child know that you and the teacher are on the same team.
- **Share information** throughout the school year. Tell the teacher if there are any changes at home, such as a new sibling or a divorce, that may affect your child in the classroom.
- **Communicate respectfully.** Make polite requests rather than demands. A helpful tip is to use the word *we* instead of *you*. "How can *we* stay in touch to help Adam?" The teacher is your partner, not your opponent.
- **Remain positive.** When you talk with the teacher later in the year, you will likely learn about your child's strengths. Be prepared to hear about weaknesses and concerns, too. React calmly and remember: You and the teacher both want your child to be successful.

## Simple activities can help you support your child's learning

**F**amily life is so hectic these days that it may seem impossible to be actively engaged in your child's education. But even on your busiest days, there are things you can do to support your child's learning:

- **Listen and respond** when your child is talking to you.
- **Read together.**
- **Stock your house with books** and other reading materials.
- **Quiz your child** on spelling, math and other facts.
- **Tell family stories.**
- **Share favorite poems** and songs with your child.
- **Look up words in the dictionary** together.
- **Talk about the daily news.**
- **Find places** mentioned in the news on a map.
- **Review your child's homework** every night.



- **Engage in "word play,"** riddles and tongue twisters.
- **Play board games.**
- **Place limits** on your child's recreational screen time.

## Promote discipline at home to improve behavior at school



The staff at your child's school works to teach students discipline, but educators can't do the job alone. Parents can

help promote good discipline, too.

Here's what you can do:

- **Change misbehavior** by setting positive goals. Concentrate on what you want your child to do, not what you want him to avoid.
- **Say what you mean** and mean what you say. Clearly communicate expectations and limits. If you make a rule, enforce it every time.
- **Involve your child** in solving problems. Kids who have helped solve a problem are usually more committed to the solution.
- **Impose logical consequences** for misbehavior.
- **Give choices**—but make sure you can live with them. Limited choices work best, especially for younger children.
- **Show your love.** Firm and kind discipline is an act of love, not a substitute for it. Your child needs to know you love him no matter what he does.