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make the difference!



Show your child that reading is enjoyable and rewarding

Strong reading skills make it easier to learn every school subject. But experts say that to build reading abilities, children must *want* to read. Unfortunately, many kids just aren't interested.

To inspire your child to read:

- **Listen to audiobooks together.** This is an effective way to show a reluctant reader how interesting books can be. You can download audiobooks from the library, or record yourself reading aloud. Encourage your child to follow along with the book while listening.
- **Follow current events.** Is there a developing news story that interests your child? Read the latest reports together each night.
- **Sign your child up for a pen pal.** Kids love receiving mail and learning about life in other countries. Ask your child's teacher or a librarian about how to get involved.
- **Take a virtual field trip.** Challenge your child to research online about attractions in your area, such as museums. Then ask him to be your tour guide through their websites and share what he's learned.
- **Give reading coupons.** Show your child that you think reading is special by giving him reading coupons. Some might be for 30 minutes of reading with you. Others might be good for a new book. Reading coupons also make great rewards for good behavior.

Experts share ways to manage screen time



Technology has helped most students continue learning and stay connected during the pandemic.

This also means kids are spending more and more time on screens.

One study found that eight- to 12-year-olds spend an average of 4 hours and 44 minutes a day on recreational screen time—going online, watching TV, playing video games.

While the American Academy of Pediatrics recommend parents set limits on non-educational screen time, many kids say there are no rules about technology in their homes. Makes sure you:

- **Set screen curfews.** Ask your child to turn off digital devices 30 minutes before bedtime.
- **Designate screen-free times,** such as during meals and while in the car.
- **Offer alternatives.** Go on a walk. Play cards. Do a craft. Show your child that there are plenty of ways to have fun—and engage her brain—without sitting in front of a screen.

Source: S. Pappas "What do we really know about kids and screens?" American Psychological Association, nswc.com/elem_screen4.

Boost writing skills and express thanks with illustrated stories



The children's book *The Secret of Saying Thanks* ends with this thought: "We don't give thanks because we're

happy. We are happy because we give thanks."

Gratitude is not just for one day—it can improve your child's attitude all year long. Encourage your child to think about the reasons he is thankful and put his thoughts in writing. Here's how:

- 1. Brainstorm together.** Ask him to name one thing he is thankful for. He might say, "I am thankful for our dog."
- 2. Have your child write** that statement at the top of a piece of paper. Underneath it, he should write down all the reasons he is thankful for his dog. For example,

he may love the fact that the dog sleeps on his bed. He may like the dog's curly tail. He may love to take the dog on walks.

- 3. Have your child** draw a picture at the bottom of the page.

Repeat this activity once a month with everyone in the family. Post these illustrated stories for the whole family to read.

Source: R. Fletcher and J. Portalupi, *Craft Lessons: Teaching Writing K-8*, Stenhouse Publishers.

"Gratitude makes sense of our past, brings peace for today, and creates a vision for tomorrow."

—Melody Beattie

Simple strategies can help your child master math vocabulary



When children learn math, they also need to learn a whole new vocabulary. If they have to stop to think about

words like *product* or *quotient*, they won't be focused on doing the math.

Just as your child needs to commit basic math facts to memory, she also needs to know many math terms. So make a game of learning them.

Here are a few activities to try:

- Play Math Concentration.** Write a math term on an index card. Write its definition on another card. Then place five or six pairs of cards face down. Your child can only turn over two cards at a time. The goal is to make a match by turning over a math term and its correct definition.
- Link math symbols** to math words. Have your child create flash cards with a symbol on one side and the word it represents on the other. Use the flash cards to help your child review.
- Create visual aids** that show a term doing the thing it represents. The math term *circumference*, for example, is the distance around the edge of a circle. So your child could write the word *circumference* around the edge of a circle.
- Make connections.** Help your child connect new terms to concepts she is already familiar with. Is she learning about *centimeters*? Talk about how there are 100 *cents* in a dollar, 100 years in a *century*, and 100 *centimeters* in a meter.

Are you teaching your child to use time wisely?



Time management is an important skill for school success. The school year is well-underway, so now is a good time to take a few

minutes to think about whether you're helping your child use her time wisely.

Answer *yes* or *no* to each of the questions below:

- 1. Have you reviewed** your child's class and study schedule and made adjustments as necessary?
- 2. Do you use** your family calendar to record dates for tests, projects and family commitments?
- 3. Do you try** to keep a balance between your child's schoolwork and the rest of your lives? Elementary schoolers need plenty of time for exercise, family time and sleeping.
- 4. Do you help** your child break down big assignments into smaller chunks?
- 5. Do you make** sure that your child has some time each day for pleasure reading or relaxation?

How well are you doing?

Each *yes* means you are helping your child learn to use time wisely. For *no* answers, try those ideas in the quiz.

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Fun activities keep learning alive for your child over winter break



Your child looks at the calendar and imagines the joy of having free time for the entire winter school break. You look at the

same blank squares on the calendar and have a mild moment of panic.

To keep from hearing “I’m bored” during your child’s time off from school, here are some activities that will keep her learning:

- **Help your child focus** on someone other than herself. This is the season for the “I wants.” Insist that your family take part in an activity that will help those less fortunate.
- **Prepare food together.** Nearly every culture has some special foods associated with the holiday season. With your child, prepare foods you
- remember from your childhood. Share your memories. Or do some research and cook a dish you’ve never tried.
- **Select a movie** that is based on a book. After you and your child finish reading the book, watch the movie together. Discuss how the two are alike and how they are different.
- **Encourage your child** to learn more about the past and your family history by talking with grandparents, aunts, uncles—even you. Help her come up with a list of questions to ask, such as, “What was school like for you when you were my age?” and “What trends were popular?” She can record the conversations, write them down, or just listen.

Family meetings help promote cooperation and communication



Regular family meetings provide opportunities for families to connect and for kids 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.

Q: Lately, my child has been telling me he hates school. He doesn’t say it every day, but he has said it more than once. I’m not sure how to respond. How can I get to the root of the problem so I can help?

Questions & Answers

A: Not all children who say they hate school actually hate it. Sometimes, they’re just looking for attention—or for a chance to put off doing schoolwork.

However, if your son has said he hates school more than once, there could be something going on. Here’s what to do:

1. **Talk to your son.** Wait for a time when he’s relatively calm and when you have time to talk. Then ask him to tell you how he’s feeling and why. “You’ve said you hate school a couple of times. What’s making you feel this way?”
2. **Identify the problem.** Listen closely to what your child says. Is he struggling in a subject? Does he feel disconnected? Is he feeling overwhelmed with all of the changes this year?
3. **Help your child find solutions.** For example, if he’s struggling in math, encourage him to spend more time on the subject each day and make sure he is turning in his assignments.
4. **Be positive.** Help your child see that nearly every situation has positives and negatives. By focusing on the positive, he can change his entire outlook.
5. **Talk to your child’s teacher.** Let her know how your child is feeling and ask for her for some suggestions and support. When parents and teachers work together, students are more likely to succeed!

It Matters: Motivation

Encourage your child to set new learning goals



Next month is the start of a new year—a traditional time for making resolutions. Challenge your child

to make some learning resolutions to help him finish the school year strong.

Here's how:

- 1. Start a conversation.** Tell your child something you've resolved to change. "I'm going to get more exercise and cut back on my screen time." It'll show him that a resolution is really just a promise you make to yourself.
- 2. Get him thinking.** Are there things he's struggled with in a subject? Nudge him toward making improvements. "You've had trouble completing your assignments on time. What could you do to fix that?" Starting schoolwork earlier, revamping his study routine and organizing his work space are three examples of things he could resolve to do.
- 3. Define the goal.** Make a resolution concrete by turning it into a specific goal. Use his "revamping his study routine" resolution and make it real. "I resolve to spend at least 15 minutes studying each subject every day." When a goal is measurable, it is easier to achieve.
- 4. Be supportive.** Resolutions have a way of fading away. So support your child if he starts to slip. "I know it's hard to stick to a study routine, but you can do it!" Remind him that falling short once in a while doesn't mean he can't get back on track.

Promote a growth mindset to strengthen academic success

School is filled with challenges—and your child's success depends on how she responds to those challenges. Encourage her to develop what researchers call a *growth mindset*.

A growth mindset determines how kids think about problems. Suppose, for example, your child is having trouble understanding a concept in science. Some kids would throw up their hands and say, "I'm not good at science"—and quit trying. But other kids would take another view. "This is a challenge and I love a challenge."

Children in the second group have a growth mindset. They believe that even if they don't understand something now, they will be able to learn it in the future. They're more likely to stick with a problem—and solve it.



You can encourage this mindset by praising your child's effort. "That was challenging, but you kept trying different things until you got it!"

Source: C. Romero, "What We Know About Growth Mindset from Scientific Research," Mindset Scholars Network.

Build your child's enthusiasm about school and learning



A child's attitude about school affects his desire to learn. And with all of the uncertainty and changes this year, your child's motivation may be lagging.

To encourage enthusiasm for education:

- **Be a role model.** If you have a positive attitude about school, your child is more likely to feel the same way. In addition to saying good things about school, make it a point to attend virtual parent-teacher conferences and

school meetings for families. Supervise your child's work time when possible and show interest in what he's learning.

- **Compliment success.** When your child works hard, be sure to speak up! This helps him make a connection between effort and the good feeling of success.
- **Link lessons to real life.** Show your child how what he learns can help him in real life. Math skills may help him spend money wisely. A vocabulary word may show up in a favorite book.