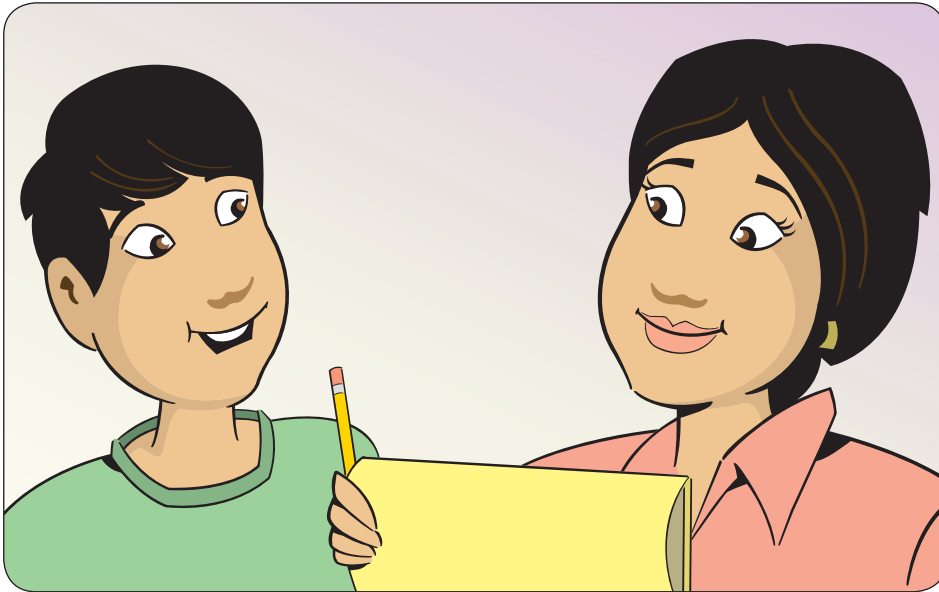


# Elementary School Parents<sup>®</sup> *make the difference!*

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## Regular review helps your child strengthen math skills

**S**uccess in math is built on mastering basic skills. Your child's chances of acing more math tests can improve if you do these things:

- **Regularly quiz your child** on basic math facts:  $2 \times 9$ ,  $12 - 4$ ,  $6 + 6$ , etc. Together, make a set of flash cards with the math facts he needs to know. Use them to quiz him—at the breakfast table, in the car or while you wait at the doctor's office. Your child has mastered a math fact when he can give the correct answer in less than three seconds.
- **Resist telling your child** the answers. He will learn better if you show him how to find them instead. For instance, if he doesn't know what  $3 \times 5$  is, have him draw three parallel horizontal lines. Cross them with five vertical lines. Then have him count the intersections to get the answer.
- **Have your child practice** writing numbers neatly. One quarter of the math errors students make are due to messy number writing. Your child should make sure his numbers are neatly lined up, too.
- **Encourage your child** to work more problems than the teacher assigns. Good math skills come with practice.
- **Challenge your child** to do math "in his head." See if he can figure out a problem without using pencil and paper or a calculator.

## Give your child practice making decisions



The best way to learn how to make good decisions is by making lots of them. So give your child as many opportunities as you can to make choices.

Young children can decide which healthy items to pack in their lunch, for example. Older children can make decisions about more significant things.

Of course, you must still set the boundaries. Your child can decide whether to do her science or her social studies homework first, but she can't decide to watch TV before she starts her homework.

Gradually give your child more freedom to make decisions. Keep in mind that children don't always connect outcomes with the choices they have made, so help your child think about the consequences of her decisions.

If she makes a poor decision, sit down and talk about what worked and what didn't. Ask, "What would you do differently next time?" The next time she has to make a decision, she will be able to draw on what she learned.

## Discover ways to build family time into your daily schedule



To reach their full potential in school and in life, kids need frequent, meaningful, undivided attention

from parents. But finding quality time to spend together can be challenging.

Here are some ways to build more family time into your busy schedule:

- **Turn off the TV.** Simply limiting TV time can result in several hours of free time each week.
- **Volunteer.** If your child is involved in a club, team or other group activity, offer to help out. This is a great opportunity to spend time together.
- **Get moving.** It's important to squeeze exercise into your

routine. Be active as a family—go for walks, play tag or kick a soccer ball.

- **Write it on the calendar.** Treat family time like an appointment. If you can, schedule some one-on-one activities that appeal to each child.
- **Gather for dinner.** Sit-down meals help kids and parents connect and can lead to great conversations. Strive to have at least one family meal every day.

**“Nothing you do for children is ever wasted.”**

—Garrison Keillor

## Celebrate the month of April with these fun learning activities



April may bring showers—but it also brings many days of learning opportunities.

Here are some fun things you can plan to do with your child:

- **April 2** is International Children's Book Day and Hans Christian Andersen's birthday. This day is designed to inspire a love of reading. Head to the library and grab some books!
- **April 13** is the birthday of Thomas Jefferson. Go online to learn more about this president. Take a virtual tour of his home Monticello at [explorer.monticello.org](http://explorer.monticello.org).
- **April 17** is income tax deadline day. Talk about the purpose of taxes. Practice calculating percentages with your child.
- **April 22** is Earth Day. As a family, think of something you can do to protect the earth. Perhaps you could plant a tree or set up a recycling station at home.
- **April 23** is the day Shakespeare's birthday is celebrated. Ask your child to write a scene for a play and act it out with friends or family members.
- **April 26** is the birthday of John James Audubon, who was known for his studies, drawings and paintings of North American birds. Encourage your child to draw pictures of the birds she sees.
- **April 30** is International Jazz Day. Find a radio station that plays jazz and listen to it with your child. Then each of you can describe how the music makes you feel.

## How well are you listening to your child?



Communication between you and your child is very important. You want him to know that he can talk to you

about school problems or difficult situations he may be facing. But when your child talks, are you really listening? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you give your child** some uninterrupted listening time every day, like when he comes home from school or at bedtime?
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you avoid interrupting** your child when he is speaking to you?
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you tell your child** if you are unable to listen that you want to hear what he has to say, then set a time when he can have your full attention?
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you ask questions** if you don't understand what your child is saying?
- \_\_\_ **5. Do you sometimes rephrase** what your child has said to make sure you understand?

### How well are you doing?

If most of your answers are *yes*, you have strong listening skills. For *no* answers, try those ideas.

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# Read aloud to build your child's listening skills and memory



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

Reading aloud gives your child important 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 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 ... do? Why? Where ... ? How ... ? What color was ... ?
- **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.

# Everyone wins when parents volunteer and get involved!



Have you ever thought about volunteering at school? National Volunteer Week,

which begins April 23, is the perfect time to give it a try.

Here are five reasons to get involved:

1. **Your child will benefit.** Even if you're not in his classroom, your child will know you're at school. He'll feel important and he'll know you think learning is important, too.
2. **You'll get to know** your child's teachers and other school staff. That makes it easier to ask for help when your child needs it.
3. **The school will benefit.** Whether you read to a class, help in the cafeteria or tutor students in the library, you'll be freeing school staff to spend more time with kids who need it. And that leads to more learning.
4. **Volunteering is easy.** Many schools offer training to volunteers. And there are volunteer jobs that can be done at home, at night or on weekends. So every parent can get involved.
5. **Volunteering is fun.** You'll meet other parents in your neighborhood. You may learn new skills. And you'll get a good feeling from knowing you've done something worthwhile.

**Q:** My eight-year-old daughter has tantrums when she gets angry or frustrated. She's acting the same way in school, and her teacher has asked for my help in getting her to control herself. What can I do?

## Questions & Answers

**A:** Elementary-age children have more stress in their lives than most parents realize. When they don't have the skills to cope with stress, they may resort to toddler-style outbursts and crying fits.

However, your daughter's success in school and with other children depends on her learning how to control her behavior.

To minimize temper tantrums, first try to figure out what triggers them. Keep a record of your child's behavior for one week. What happens just before a tantrum begins? Do you notice patterns? Then, help her avoid some of the situations that lead to stress.

Next, give your child tools to manage her behavior. When she has a meltdown at home, suggest that she:

- **Take time out.** Have her remove herself from the situation for a five-minute breather. Let her return when she feels composed enough to talk calmly.
- **Use calming techniques.** Teach her to breathe deeply, while slowly counting to 10. Have her dribble a ball, pet an animal, or tell herself, "I can work through this."
- **Throw it out.** Have her write or draw her angry feelings on paper. Then have her wad the paper up and toss it away.
- **Talk it out.** Help your child become more self-aware. Note when she's having a bad day. Help her name her feelings.

# It Matters: Motivation

## Encouragement is more effective than praise



Most parents praise their children with phrases like “Great job!” and “That looks amazing!” But experts agree that *encouragement* has a bigger effect than *praise* on a child’s motivation. So what is the difference between the two?

Praise:

- **Discusses results.** “Great job on the science quiz! You got an A!”
- **Uses opinion words** such as *good*, *great*, *terrific* and *wonderful*.
- **Is typically given** when your child has performed as you had hoped she would.

Encouragement:

- **Notifies effort and progress.** “Look at that project! I can tell you’ve spent a lot of time on it! It must feel good to know you worked so hard!”
- **Uses descriptive words.** “You picked up your room without being asked. Look at that *clean* floor and *organized* desk!”
- **Can be given** regardless of your child’s performance. “That didn’t work out the way you planned, did it? I can tell you’re disappointed, but I know you’ll try again next week. What do you think you might do differently next time?”

The big difference is that words of praise lead your child to rely on *your* assessment of her accomplishments, while words of encouragement lead her to form her *own* positive assessment of herself. Encouragement makes motivation soar!

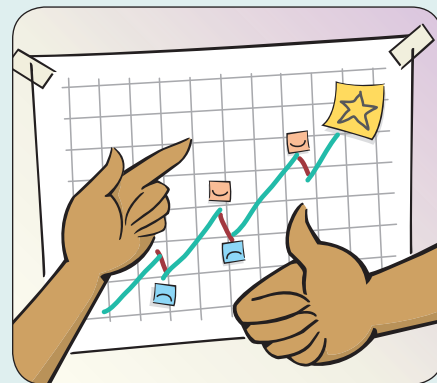
## Motivate your child to achieve by setting high expectations

**E**xpect your child to succeed, and her chances for success improve greatly. Expect her to come up short, and the odds are that she will.

Children are usually keenly aware of how their parents view them, and they often tailor their actions to those views. So it’s very important to have high expectations—and to express them to your child.

To set effective expectations:

- **Make sure what you expect** is within your child’s abilities. If you set expectations that are either too high or too low, your child may do poorly.
- **Let your child know** what you expect of her. Make a list of expectations. Cover places and situations such as home, school, homework, etc.



- **Be consistent.** Don’t lower your expectations to make your child happy. Don’t raise them because you’ve had a rough day.
- **Set your child up for success.** Give her the ways and means to meet your expectations. For example, provide a well-lit study space and necessary school supplies.

## Five strategies can increase your child’s motivation to learn



Kids who are motivated to learn are likely to be more successful in school than those who are not.

To motivate your child:

1. **Be a learner yourself.** Let your child see you read books. Watch educational programs. Attend school functions. Try new things. Show curiosity.
2. **Share what you learn.** Talk about new ideas or scientific discoveries with your child. Discuss things you read or hear.
3. **Show an interest** in what he is learning. Ask questions simply to learn and share—not to check up on your child.
4. **Let him know** you believe he can learn. If you show faith in your child’s ability to learn, he will have more confidence in his ability.
5. **Stay positive.** If your child has problems in school, help him see that problems can be solved. Meet with the teacher to figure out ways your child can improve. Then discuss ways you can work together to help him succeed.