

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

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## Make reading a priority for your elementary schooler

**A**sk any educator to name the single most important thing parents can do at home to help children learn and do well in school and they will likely say, “Encourage your child to read!”

Here are some ways to make reading a priority for your family:

- **Read together.** Your child may enjoy reading to you or taking turns reading chapters aloud.
- **Go to the public library.** Help your child sign up for a library card. Each week, have him browse and check out new books.
- **Offer suggestions.** Think about your child’s interests. Find books or articles about them. Ask the librarian for help.
- **Start a family book club.** It doesn’t have to be formal. Just set aside one night each week to talk about

something you’ve all read. Better yet, do it during dinner—you’ll get the benefit of each other’s company and a good discussion.

- **Create a reading nook.** Some kids love to read anywhere. But a cozy reading spot can make reading more appealing.
- **Suggest a series.** When there are several books about a character they like, kids may keep reading, book after book.
- **Let your child see you reading.** If your child sees you with your nose in a book, he’ll be more likely to want to read himself. Be sure to talk to him about what you’re reading: “I just read the strangest story in the newspaper.”
- **Talk with the teacher.** Ask about your child’s reading progress and suggestions for improvement.

## A good night’s sleep is linked to school success



Studies prove that getting even one more hour of sleep each night can help your child do

better in school. She’ll be more alert and able to pay attention. She’ll remember material with greater accuracy.

To help your child get the recommended 10 hours of sleep each night:

- **Follow a schedule.** Try to have designated times for meals and snacks; homework; reading and other recreation; and bedtime.
- **Get your child active** and outdoors. Exercise and fresh air help kids sleep better.
- **Avoid bright screens** for one hour before bedtime.
- **Create a bedtime routine.** Brush teeth, take a bath, put on pajamas and read a brief story. Review something positive from the day. Then, lights out.
- **Make your child feel safe.** Put a night light in her room, if necessary. Tell her you’ll check on her periodically.

**Source:** “Sleep, Learning, and Memory,” Division of Sleep Medicine, Harvard Medical School, [nisdw.com/elem\\_sleep](http://nisdw.com/elem_sleep).

## Here's how to make the most of your parent-teacher conference



Preparation is the key to a successful parent-teacher conference. Here's what to do before, during and after:

*Before the conference:*

- **Make a list** of things you should tell the teacher: your child's favorite subjects and activities, difficulties in school, medical needs and sensitive issues.
- **Make a list** of things to ask the teacher about: your child's work habits, attitude, behavior, strengths and weaknesses.
- **Let your child know** you are having a conference. Ask her what you and the teacher should discuss.

*During the conference:*

- **Be on time.** Teachers have many conferences, and a five-minute delay can throw off the schedule.
- **Listen carefully** and take notes about your child's progress.

- **Be positive.** Remember: You and your child's teacher both want what's best for your child.
- **Make a plan** with the teacher to address any concerns and schedule a time to follow up.

*After the conference:*

- **Let your child know** how the conference went.
- **Stress the good things** the teacher said. Talk about the suggestions she made for improvement—and how you plan to help your child carry these out.

**“Coming together is a beginning; keeping together is progress; working together is success.”**

—Henry Ford

## Teach your child how to become a more confident test-taker



Test anxiety often comes from self-doubt. If your child doesn't think he will succeed on a test, he probably won't.

You can help him become more confident before a test if you:

- **Take off the pressure.** Tell your child that tests just show the teacher what he's learned so far, and what he needs help with.
- **Avoid last-minute panic.** Your child should begin to study several days before the test. Cramming the night before a test rarely works.
- **Teach efficient studying.** Help your child focus on the material he hasn't mastered yet.
- **Help your child connect** new material to what he already knows. These connections can help him recall the material during the test.
- **Encourage positive self-talk.** When your child gets stuck during a test, he can quietly say to himself, “I know this. The answer will come to me.”
- **Build your child's confidence** by reminding him of his strengths.
- **Help your child visualize** success. Have him close his eyes and picture himself knowing the answers.

**Source:** S.M. DeBroff, *The Mom Book Goes to School: Insider Tips to Ensure Your Child Thrives in Elementary and Middle School*, Free Press.

## Are you helping your child deal with frustration?



Teachers say that today's kids don't always have the skills to cope with life's minor hassles.

Are you helping your child learn to deal with frustration? Answer *yes* or *no* to each question:

1. **I understand** that it isn't my job to protect my child from all of life's ups and downs.
2. **I encourage** my child to stick with it when she gets stuck on a homework problem.
3. **I help** my child link effort to success. Sometimes I say, “It isn't supposed to be easy. But you'll get it if you stick with it.”
4. **I point out** real-life stories of successful people who have overcome challenges.
5. **I put** my child's feelings into words. “You're frustrated that learning to ride a bike is taking longer than you hoped. You'll get there.”

**How well are you doing?**

If you answered *yes* to most of the questions, you are giving your child opportunities to work through her frustration. For each *no* answer, try that idea in the quiz.

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# Brainstorming is the solution for your child's writer's block!



Some kids don't like to write because they think it's boring. Others find it too challenging. They get frustrated trying to think of ideas.

You can't force a child to *love* writing. But you can turn a reluctant writer around. How? Try a little brainstorming.

Brainstorming is fun and sparks creativity. It also reduces stress and anxiety, and can help your child break through writer's block.

Brainstorming also teaches other skills that help with writing. By creating lists, for example, your child learns to break down complex ideas into smaller components. Your child can use brainstorming to figure out a topic for a paper or to think of ideas for a short story.

The next time your child can't think of what to write about, have him:

- **Make lists.** Here are a few topics to help him get started: Things I love. My favorite animals, places, toys or food. Things I know a lot about. Scary characters. Things adults say.
- **Exaggerate.** Ask your child some questions that will spark new ways to think about people, events and scenes. "What would it feel like to be a car, a house or a dog? What would life be like if you had four hands?"
- **Use visual images.** Have your child look at a picture and write down what it brings to mind. Or he can take a walk and make notes about what he sees.
- **Think about actions** he could add to his ideas: What will happen next? How quickly?

**Source:** D.B. Reeves, Ph.D., *Reason to Write: Help Your Child in School and in Life Through Better Reasoning and Clear Communication—Elementary School Edition*, Kaplan Publishing.

# Set the stage for success by promoting respect at school



Respectful behavior is just as important at school as it is at home. Encourage your child to show respect at school by:

- **Being courteous.** He should say *please* and *thank you* to his teacher and classmates.
- **Doing 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.
- **Raising his hand.** Imagine having 30 students in a class,

each of whom wants attention right now. When your child raises his hand and waits for the teacher to call on him, he demonstrates self-control and respect for others.

- **Addressing the teacher** by name. Just saying "Good morning, Mrs. Jones" is an easy way to show respect.
- **Listening to the teacher's** comments. Teachers want students to learn. That means they have to point out mistakes. Your child will do much better in school if he can recognize and accept constructive feedback.

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

**Q:** My fourth-grade daughter is very competitive in sports. Her teacher says she is competitive in the classroom, too. She rushes through assignments, hoping to be the first one finished. She doesn't take the time to be neat or to check her work. I know this hurts her grades. How can I help?

## Questions & Answers

**A:** It sounds like your daughter has a habit of turning tasks into competitions—wanting to be first across the finish line. But being first isn't what matters when it comes to schoolwork.

Start by talking with your child's teacher. Let her know you would like to work together on a plan to help your daughter focus more on *quality* work, not *speedy* work.

Then, talk to your child. Put her competitive nature to work for her by using a comparison from a sport, such as basketball. Explain that sometimes it is important for a player to get down the court as fast as she can. But when a player is shooting free throws, her accuracy is more important than her speed.

Doing schoolwork is more like shooting free throws. Tell your child that you're going to look over her homework each night to check her work for neatness and accuracy. If it's not up to an appropriate standard, tell her you'll ask her to do it over.

In school, the teacher can try the same approach, looking over work before it's handed in.

Soon your child will figure out that when she slows down, she'll get the work right the first time—and that actually takes less time in the long run!

# It Matters: Building Responsibility

## Responsibility leads to success in the classroom



Kids who learn to be responsible do better in school. They get along better with teachers and peers. They make better decisions. They're more apt to try, follow through and succeed.

Here's how to boost your child's sense of responsibility:

- **Revamp his chore list.** Are you still packing your child's lunch? How about making his bed? If so, pass the torch. Most elementary schoolers are capable of handling such tasks. Don't overload him with too many chores, but work toward giving him meaningful responsibilities.
- **Expose him to money.** If he does not have an allowance, consider giving him one. By letting your child manage his own money, he may develop more respect for it. Include him when you're working on your budget. Don't share specific financial details, but let him see what budgeting looks like. Say things like, "I'd love to order pizza tonight, too, but it'll have to wait. Payday isn't until Friday."
- **Use consequences to teach.** When your child makes a mistake, don't swoop in to save him (unless he's in true danger). By allowing him to experience the consequences of his actions, he's more likely to learn not to make the same mistake again. If you're always running to his rescue, he'll learn that he doesn't have to take responsibility for anything.

## Encourage your child to take responsibility for learning

Setting weekly goals allows your child to take more responsibility for her learning. To help your child set goals and achieve them:

1. **Ask her to identify** one goal at the beginning of the week. It might be finishing a book she has been reading for school.
2. **Have your child write** the goal on a piece of paper and post it on the refrigerator or bulletin board.
3. **Talk about how to accomplish** the goal. Help your child break the goal down into smaller steps. For example, "You could read two chapters every day."
4. **Check your child's progress** in a few days. If problems arise, talk about possible solutions. If your child falls behind in reading, a



10-minute extension of bedtime might help her catch up.

5. **Help your child evaluate** how she did at the end of the week. Did she achieve her goal? Why or why not? Regardless of the outcome, praise your child for trying. Then set a new goal for next week.

## Help a disorganized child take responsibility for belongings



You bought your child a special notebook where he is supposed to write down homework assignments—but he forgot to bring it home. He needs to turn in his math worksheet—but he left it sitting on his desk at home.

Some kids never seem to learn how to take responsibility for their schoolwork. Here's how you can help:

1. **Ask your child** to help develop a plan. Talk with him about what he needs to do to get more organized. You might say, "You're having trouble getting to school with all your homework.

Can you come up with a plan that would help you remember? Why don't you think about it, and we'll discuss it at dinner."

2. **Let your child** try to make his plan work. That means you won't rescue him. If he leaves his homework at home, don't rush to school to take it to him. Let him face the consequences.
3. **Offer suggestions** of how to make changes, but let him be responsible. "How about if we try placing a box here by the door? Then you can put everything that needs to go to school in the box. What do you think of that idea?"