

# Helping Children Learn<sup>®</sup>

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School



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## Don't let your child miss out on the advantages of attendance

December is a busy month for schools, students and families. There's a lot to fit in before winter break arrives. And with so many festive activities going on, you may even be planning to take your child out of school for an extra day or two.



But absences can matter a lot. As early as kindergarten, absenteeism is linked to lower academic achievement. Even if your child can make up the homework assignments, he'll still miss learning that *can't* be made up, such as:

- **Class discussions.** The conversation about the book everyone is reading can't be captured by doing homework.
- **Science demonstrations.** Doing a worksheet or reading a textbook is not the same as seeing science in action.
- **Group projects.** Interaction with peers is a key part of the lesson.
- **Math explanations.** Math builds on previous lessons. Missing any of those lessons may leave your child confused going forward.

Avoid unnecessary absences and help your child establish positive attendance habits. He'll reap the benefits throughout his school years.

Source: A. Ginsburg and others, "Absences Add Up: How School Attendance Influences Student Success," Attendance Works, [niswc.com/nomiss](http://niswc.com/nomiss).



## Study skills at home pay off in school

As students reach the upper elementary grades, their study skills become more important to their academic success. Encourage your child to:

- **Use time wisely.** Show your child how to use short periods of time productively. She could flip through flash cards on the way to an activity, or solve a few math problems on the bus ride home.
- **Get organized.** Help her use a planner to keep track of her assignments. Have her clean out her backpack once a week and file returned papers with her other schoolwork for that subject.
- **Take notes.** Your child may not practice this skill at school yet, but she can try it at home when she reads. Help her write down key words and facts. Then she can summarize the main points.
- **Think ahead.** Have your child make a to-do list for her study time before a test: Take notes, review, do practice problems. Show her how to make a study schedule, and help her stick to it.

## Hunt for fun at the library

To have some reading fun with your child, go on a library scavenger hunt. Make up a list of facts to find—the world record number of hot dogs eaten in a contest, the average temperature at the South Pole, the country with the largest zebra population—then help your child use the library's reference tools to find them. Offer a small reward for finding them all.

## Steer your child's character

Your child's teachers will guide her academic growth. But you are in the best position to teach her the values that will help her learn. To provide a moral compass:



1. **Discuss the values** that are important to your family—honesty, responsibility, consideration, etc.
2. **Be a role model.** Ask, "What lessons is my child learning from my behavior?"
3. **Set high standards.** Expect your child to tell the truth, live up to commitments and cooperate with others.

## Celebrate to motivate

Reaching a challenging goal feels wonderful, and that feeling can be a powerful motivator for your child to tackle other challenges. So when he sets and reaches a major goal, help him celebrate it!

One fun way is to "frame the occasion." Get a snapshot of your child holding that improved report card. Or have him draw a picture of himself and his accomplishment. Put the picture in a frame by his bed. Every time he wakes up, he'll see an image of himself as an achiever.



Source: M. Borba, Ed.D., "Helping Kids Be Goal-Setters," [Micheleborba.com](http://Micheleborba.com), [niswc.com/celebrate](http://niswc.com/celebrate).



## My child has become a 'mean girl.' What can I do?

**Q:** My fifth-grader was picked on by a group of girls last year. She was miserable. So I was horrified when her teacher told me that my daughter is now part of a group who is being mean to another girl. What should I do to stop this behavior?

**A:** It can be just as painful to watch your child being mean as it is to watch her be a victim. While your situation is not uncommon, particularly with girls at this age, it's important to take action.

Here are some things to do:

- **Talk with your child.** Say you understand that she's happy to be part of a group again. But be clear that just as it was wrong for the other girls to be mean to her last year, it is wrong for her to do it now. She knows how it feels to be teased—she should take a stand against such behavior.
- **Review the school's policy on bullying** with your child. She may face consequences if her mean behavior continues. Bullying does not only refer to physical violence—mean words and exclusion count as well.
- **Let the teacher know** what you are doing at home. Ask what the classroom rules are about this type of behavior. Work together to get your child's focus back on learning—and away from being mean to others.



## Are you encouraging reading fluency?

Reading with *fluency* means reading aloud quickly, smoothly and with expression. Fluency helps students understand what they read. Are you helping your child improve his reading fluency? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you ask** your child to read to you regularly?
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you let** your child choose what to read aloud, even if you think his choice is too easy?
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you avoid** interrupting when your child reads a word incorrectly?
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you offer** help if your child asks what a word is, and then encourage him to keep reading?
- \_\_\_ **5. Do you discuss** the reading with your child?

### How well are you doing?

*More yes answers mean you are helping your child build reading fluency. For each no, try that idea.*

"So it is with children who learn to read fluently and well: They begin to take flight into whole new worlds as effortlessly as young birds take to the sky."

—William James

## Home can be a science lab

Turn your child on to the science happening all around her in your home. To help her investigate:

- **Give her a magnifying glass.** Ask what she sees. What's similar and what's different?
- **Ask questions** and help her look for answers: Which cereals get soggy? Why do foods get moldy? Why do some plants need more water than others?
- **Experiment.** Which weighs more, a cup of water or a cup of snow? Why? What if the snow melts?



## Don't give your child a reason to cheat

Some children cheat in school because they are afraid of what their parents will do if they come home with a bad grade. Make sure your child knows that a low grade would never affect your love for him. Tell him you would be concerned, but you would not be angry. Remind him that learning is a process, and he will get better at it.

## Successful students do more than the minimum

When your child is doing homework or studying, encourage her to ask herself what more she could do. For example, she could:

- **Reread the chapter** if she doesn't understand it the first time.
- **Take time to write** out her report neatly, instead of turning in sloppy work.
- **Start on projects early**, rather than waiting until the last minute. Then she'll have time to add an illustration or practice her presentation before delivering it.

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