

# Helping Children Learn<sup>®</sup>

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School



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## Teach organization to encourage responsibility for learning

Your child's organizational skills affect her performance in school. As students get older, their ability to keep track of their schoolwork, and to plan and follow through on assignments, becomes increasingly important. To help your child stay organized, have her:

- **Record all assignments** in a planner or notebook. Review her planner with her each day. You both will be able to see what she has to do for each subject, all in one place. Encourage her to write her assignments in complete sentences so she will be able to understand them later.
- **Create checklists.** Whether it's a list of items she needs to bring for an activity in class or things to check when she proofreads her writing, making a checklist will help her remember everything.
- **Break long-term projects into smaller pieces.** Help her figure out what she needs to do and plan how much time each step will take. Then, help her schedule the time she needs.
- **Write her due dates, test dates and activities** on your family calendar. If everyone's commitments are in one place, you will be able to spot any conflicts in time to make adjustments.



## Education is a family affair

Years of research have shown that parent practices affect children's achievement in school. To support your child:

- **Make learning a family priority.** Show your child that it is worthwhile!
- **Enforce daily routines** for sleeping, reading and studying, etc.
- **Look for answers together.** When your child has questions, help him use resources to find answers. Use his questions as opportunities to investigate related ideas, too.

## Provide perspective when social problems crop up

It's tough when friends turn out not to be friends, and it can distract your child from learning. Remind her that she is worthy of



*real* friends. Kids who talk mostly about themselves, or who want your child to help them cheat, or who say one thing and do another, aren't real friends.

## This month, learn about presidents

George Washington's birthday is celebrated on February 19 in the United States. The holiday is an ideal time to help your child think about history and what it means to be president. Try these activities:

- **Take a virtual tour** of George Washington's home, Mount Vernon ([www.mountvernon.org/site/virtual-tour](http://www.mountvernon.org/site/virtual-tour)). Learn about the first president and life at his 18th-century Virginia estate.
- **Find a book or go online** to see pictures of U.S. presidents. Give your child a penny, a nickel, a dime and a quarter. Can he use the pictures to name the presidents on the coins?
- **Ask your child to imagine** being president. Have him write down his answers to questions like: What would he want to do for the country as president? What would his day be like? What powers should a president have or not have?
- **Tell your child** that Washington was praised for his honesty. Ask what other qualities he thinks a president needs.

## Talk with your child about thinking strategies

In order to improve their thinking skills, children need to consider *how* they think. Let your child know that good thinkers:

- **Plan.** Careful thinkers get information before they act. If they receive new information, they adapt their plans.
- **Draw on past knowledge** to address current problems.
- **Look for other ways** to solve problems if the first way doesn't work.



Source: D. Wilson and M. Conyers, *Teaching Students to Drive Their Brains*, ASCD.



## A weight issue is becoming a school issue. What can I do?

**Q:** My son doesn't have many friends at school. I think it is because he is overweight. We have met with his doctor, and my son is on a diet. In the meantime, though, he is losing interest in school. What can I do?

**A:** One in five school-aged kids in the U.S. struggle with obesity, and they miss more days of school than students of lower weights. Working with a doctor is important. Follow the doctor's guidelines for your son and concentrate on making positive changes for the whole family. In addition:

- **Help your child focus on health.** He shouldn't fixate too much about the number on the scale. Instead, he should concentrate on establishing habits that will help him feel healthy and strong.
- **Make it easy for him to get active.** Plan frequent family walks to interesting places. Involve everyone in active weekend activities—kick a ball around the park or create a scavenger hunt.
- **Talk to your child's teacher.** Let her know what your son is going through and ask for her help in supporting him at school.



Source: "Childhood Obesity Facts," Healthy Schools, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, [nswc.com/healthykids](http://nswc.com/healthykids).



## Are you helping your child persevere?

Obstacles are a fact of life. The ways your child deals with them aren't. Are you helping your child address challenges in positive ways? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

1. **Do you offer** your child plenty of opportunities to make decisions by herself? This skill takes practice.
2. **Do you help** your child appreciate her strengths?
3. **Do you remind** your child of the obstacles she has overcome in the past when she struggles with a new problem?
4. **Do you listen** when your child is talking about a problem without solving it for her?
5. **Do you tell** your child about the problem-solving

process you use when you face obstacles?

### How well are you doing?

More *yes* answers mean you are preparing your child to meet challenges head on. For each *no*, try that idea.

"You just can't beat the person who never gives up."  
—Babe Ruth

## Get to the heart of math

February is American Heart Month. Ask your child to estimate how often her heart beats:

- **In a minute.** Have her count the beats for 15 seconds, then multiply by 4.
- **In an hour.** Have her multiply the number of times her heart beats in a minute by 60 minutes.
- **In a day.** Have her multiply the beats per hour by 24 hours.
- **In a week.** Can she guess the formula?

Source: "How fast does your heart beat?" Figure This! Math Challenges for Families, [nswc.com/heartbeats](http://nswc.com/heartbeats).

## Mix up some grammar fun

Here's a game to build your child's grammar skills:

Write a simple sentence, such as "My dad gave me an orange." Cut out the words and mix them up.



Can your child put them in the right order? Use terms such as *subject* and *verb* to guide him. As his skills improve, make the sentences more complex.

## Try three ways to motivate

How can you boost your child's motivation to learn? Experts say that it helps if parents:

1. **Foster a positive attitude.** Tell your child you know she can succeed in school. Correct mistakes in a positive way: "You spelled everything right except these two words. I bet you can fix them!"
2. **Encourage independence.** Let your child make age-appropriate decisions. Allow more freedom as she demonstrates responsibility.
3. **Stay involved.** Monitor homework. Communicate with the teacher regularly, and ask for help if your child is struggling.

Source: "Student Motivation—An Overlooked Piece of School Reform," Center on Education Policy, George Washington University, [nswc.com/motivate](http://nswc.com/motivate).

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