

Helping Children Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School



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Share strategies with your child to boost success on tests

The tests your child takes in school are an important way for her to show what she knows. Teach her these strategies to help her get every point she deserves. Tell your child to:

- **Pay attention to the directions.**

Whether they are written or spoken, your child should make sure she understands the directions before she begins.

- **Write down key facts.** If she has struggled to memorize a formula, a date or the spelling of a word, your child should jot it down as soon as she gets the test. Then she can refer to it when answering questions.

- **Read through all the questions before starting.** Then your child should answer all the questions she is sure of first. She can circle the ones she needs to come back to and spend more time answering.

- **Remember the true/false rule:** If any part of an answer is false, the whole answer is false.

- **Use multiple-choice strategies.** Your child can try to answer the question before looking at the choices. Or, she can eliminate the answers she knows are wrong, then choose among those that are left.

- **Allow time to go back** and double-check her answers.



Bring geography home

To spark your child's desire to learn about places she hasn't yet seen:

- **Help her collect** items from distant places, such as post-cards or stamps.



- **Go around your home** and talk about where various items are made. Help her locate the places on a map.

Celebrate notable women

It's Women's History Month. Consider your child's interests and help him find a biography of a famous woman to match. If your child likes:

- **Computers,** he might like a biography of Ada Lovelace, a British countess who was the first computer programmer.

- **Sports,** he may be interested in learning about track and field athlete Alice Coachman, the first African American woman to win an Olympic gold medal.

- **Animals,** he may enjoy reading about Jane Goodall, who lived and worked with chimpanzees in Tanzania.



March weather offers a variety of learning opportunities

In many parts of the country, March brings changeable weather—so it's a great time to explore wind, rain and other weather phenomena with your child. Try these ideas together:

- **Make wind chimes.** Help your child punch a hole in the bottoms of four clean, empty cans (make sure the edges are smooth). Then have him tie a knot at the end of four pieces of string. Thread one string through the hole in each can and tie the cans to a hanger. Hang the chimes outdoors. Have your child chart the days he hears the wind activate the chimes.

- **Measure the rain.** Help your child use a ruler to mark off each quarter inch on the side of a straight-sided jar. Put it outside. Keep track of the March rainfall.

- **Go online** to learn more about weather. Weather Wiz Kids (www.weatherwizkids.com) and The Old Farmer's Almanac for Kids (www.almanac4kids.com/weather) offer information and activities.

Model smartphone limits

Today's parents use smartphones for just about everything. Research shows that this can lead to more stress and less time interacting with their children. Experts recommend that parents:



- **Make mealtimes,** bedtime and family downtime "no-device" times.

- **Enjoy activities** with their kids rather than trying to capture them in photos.

- **Wait until children** aren't around to use phones for tasks that may be stressful, like checking the news or email.

Source: J. Radesky, M.D. and M.A. Moreno, M.D., "How to Consider Screen Time Limits...for Parents," *JAMA Pediatrics*, nswc.com/smartphone.



My child is in trouble at school. How can I fix this?

Q: My fifth grader shoved another kid to the ground. As a result, he will be suspended for a day. I understand that this is the school policy. But my son says the other child called him bad names first. Should I try to get this decision overturned?

A: When kids make poor choices, what matters is the lessons they learn from them. Trying to remove the consequences of your son's action can teach the wrong lesson. Instead:

- **Talk with your child** about what happened. Does he admit that he pushed the other child? It is important that he learn to tell the truth about what he has done.
- **Make it clear that pushing is not acceptable**—even if people call him names. Discuss other ways he could have reacted. He could have ignored the child, for example, or walked away.
- **Say that if the name calling continues**, he should tell his teacher or the principal. If he won't, then you should. Repeated name-calling is a form of bullying, and the school needs to be aware of it in order to stop it.
- **Let him experience the consequences.** On the day of his suspension, have him study during the time he would have spent in school. At day's end, let him know that the incident is over, and that you love him.



Do you encourage independent work?

When your child struggles with schoolwork, does she immediately call on you for help? Building her self-reliance can help her achieve. Are you encouraging her to try to work things out herself? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

- ___ **1. Do you tell** your child that you believe she can figure things out?
- ___ **2. Do you help** her break problems and projects down into smaller, more manageable pieces?
- ___ **3. Do you remind** her of all the things she has learned to do in the past?
- ___ **4. Do you ask** questions to help her think instead of providing easy answers?
- ___ **5. Do you praise** your child when she solves a problem on

her own, even if you would have done it differently?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are teaching your child to be an independent learner. For each no, try that idea.

"Education is not an affair of 'telling' and being told, but an active and constructive process."

—John Dewey

Review results to empower your child to improve

When your child brings home corrected tests, homework or projects from school, take time to review his work together. Discuss:

- 1. The things he did right.** Notice these first. Talk about what he did well, even if the grade is disappointing.
- 2. The teacher's comments.**
- 3. The things he got wrong** and why he thinks he did. Does he need more practice with a skill? Did he misunderstand a question? Did he make careless errors?

Knowing why he got the results he did will help your child know what to do next time.

Pan for history gold on the internet



Have some fun as a family practicing internet research skills. Choose an event from history and give family members 15 minutes to search for interesting facts about the event. After each person takes a turn, share what you learned. Vote for whose "nugget" of information turned out to be gold!

Four steps help students stop procrastinating

Don't let your child get into the habit of putting off homework until the last minute. This four-step process can give him a jump start. Have your child:

- 1. Choose just one assignment** to focus on.
- 2. Set a timer** for 20 minutes, and use the time to work on that assignment.
- 3. Avoid breaks** while the timer ticks.
- 4. Reward himself** with a quick break when the timer rings.

Encourage him to repeat the process until the homework is complete.

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