

Helping Children Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School



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Educational Service Unit 10

Develop your child's social skills for success in school—and life

Your child needs more than academic skills to succeed in school. His social skills play a big part, too. Research shows that problems with social skills can interfere with learning. Your child will have an easier time in school if he is able to get along with his classmates.



To reinforce your child's social skills:

- **Set an example.** Children watch how parents interact with others. So, introduce yourself to new people. Get together with friends. Support people you care about. Let your child see you being a good friend.
- **Read books about making and keeping friends.** Ask the librarian to help you find some kids' books about social interactions. After you read aloud, talk with your child about the story.
- **Role-play with your child.** Help him practice what to say when meeting new people. "Hi, I'm Tom. Nice to meet you." Act out situations that call for cooperation, sharing and kindness, too.
- **Provide opportunities to socialize.** Invite your child's friends to play. Visit playgrounds. Sign your child up for kids' programs at libraries, community centers and museums.

If you have concerns about your child's social skills, talk with his teacher and work together on solutions.

Source: V. Vega, "Social and Emotional Learning Research Review," Edutopia, niswc.com/socialskills.



Attendance counts all year long

You care about your child's education. But the weather is lovely and Grandma has been pleading for a visit. Would it really matter if you took your child out of school for a few days? After all, she's only in first grade.

Actually, it *does* matter. Young children don't have to miss much school before their learning suffers. In the early grades, students are mastering reading and basic math skills. Research has shown that these are the skills most affected when children miss school.

When she's absent, your child misses activities that can't be made up with extra homework—such as

a class discussion about a book or a science demonstration.

Your child will use the knowledge she is gaining now for the rest of her life. Being in school consistently is the only way she can develop the strong foundation she will need to support the rest of her learning.

Source: A. Ginsburg and others, "Absences Add Up: How School Attendance Influences Student Success," Attendance Works, niswc.com/absentee.

There's still plenty of time to connect to the school

Even though summer is around the corner, it isn't too late to get involved with school. Starting right now, you can:

- **Keep track of dates** of important tests and special class activities.
- **Attend school functions.** Get to know school staff and other families.
- **Volunteer.** Could you prepare items for a craft, chaperone a field trip or read to the class? Ask the teacher how you can help.
- **Find out what school tasks** the teacher would like you and your child to accomplish at home each day.



Concentrate on directions

It happens all the time: A child knows the answer to a test question but still gets it wrong. Maybe he underlined something he should have circled. Or he chose the true answer instead of the one that was *not* true. To help your child learn the importance of following the directions *exactly*:

- **Follow a recipe** together. Discuss what would happen if you followed the steps in a different order.
- **Have him write** step-by-step directions for a task he knows how to do well. Follow them together. Was anything missing?

Source: G. Durham, *Teaching Test-Taking Skills: Proven Techniques to Boost Your Students' Scores*, Rowman & Littlefield Education.

Brush up on the dress code

As the temperature rises, it's a great time to review the school dress code with your child.



Talk together about ways appropriate clothes express self-respect and respect for others. Avoid morning arguments by posting the rules.



Is there a 'right' time to give my child a cell phone?

Q: My fourth grader wants a cell phone. A lot of her friends have them, and there are times when I'd like to be able to reach her. How can I tell if she is ready for a phone? What should I be thinking about before I give her one?

A: You are the only one who can decide whether or not your child is ready to handle a phone. Is she generally responsible about taking care of her belongings? She will probably be able to keep track of a phone. Does she usually follow your rules? She'll likely be able to abide by the limits you set on her phone use.

Before you give your child a phone, set up a parent-child contract that clearly outlines your cell phone rules. Your child should agree to:

- **Follow school rules** about using cell phones.
- **Put homework time** before phone time.
- **Stick to the limits you set** on talking, texting and downloading apps. (Check into parental controls available from service providers.) Make sure your child understands what is unsafe or otherwise not allowed, such as sending inappropriate photos or saying mean things about other people.
- **Accept your right to look** at any messages she sends or receives, and to take the phone away if you find she has used it inappropriately.

If you decide to give your child a phone, be sure to monitor her account to ensure she uses it appropriately.



Are you making reading appealing?

Some kids would rather do almost anything than read. Luckily, there are things parents can do to encourage children to pick up a book. Are you doing all you can to help your child enjoy reading? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

1. **Do you read aloud** to your child, even if he can read by himself?
2. **Do you encourage** your child to try books in a series? If he likes one, he may be more motivated to try others.
3. **Do you look** for books or magazines about the things that interest your child?
4. **Do you let** your child read comic books or graphic novels if he wants to?
5. **Do you set** limits on recreational screen time?

How well are you doing?

More *yes* answers mean you are finding ways to increase your child's desire to read. For each *no*, try that idea from the quiz.

“A parent's job is not so much to teach a child how to read, but to make him want to read.”

—Priscilla Vail

Have fun with 'quick writes'

Quick writes are a fun way to help children practice writing. To do a quick write with your child, ask an intriguing question. Then set a timer for five minutes, and both of you write down everything you can on the topic. When the timer beeps, share what you each wrote. Here are some topic ideas:

- **What superpower** would you like to have? How would you use it?
- **What laws would you make** if you ran the country?
- **Would it be good or bad** if animals could talk? Why?

Source: L. Rief, *100 Quickwrites: Fast and Effective Freewriting Exercises that Build Students' Confidence, Develop Their Fluency, and Bring Out the Writer in Every Student*, Scholastic.

Exercise boosts brainpower

Not every child wants to play team sports—and that's OK. There are other ways kids can get physical exercise each day. Encourage your child to:

- **Go up and down** the stairs many times.
- **Take a brisk walk** with you.
- **Get moving** to his favorite music.
- **Play tag** with siblings or friends.

Think about points of view

Elementary school students are learning to analyze and see things from different points of view. To reinforce this skill:

- **Have your child sort** small items—buttons, coins, toy cars—by size. Mix them up and have her sort them by color. This teaches her that things can be part of more than one group.
- **Talk about points of view.** What does your child think land looks like to a dolphin? Recognizing different points of view is an important reading and writing skill.



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