

# Helping Children Learn<sup>®</sup>

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School



April 2011

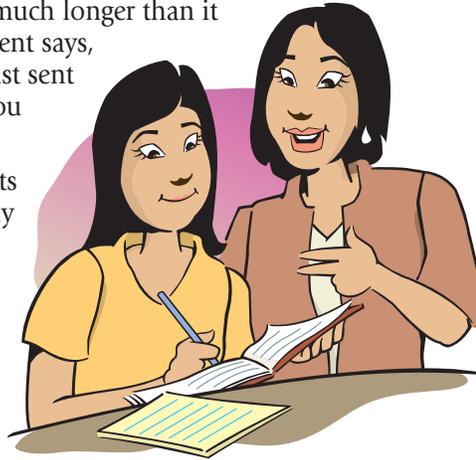
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Educational Service Unit 10

## Be aware of hidden messages your words can send to children

A child is doing a chore and taking much longer than it would take an adult. Finally, her parent says, "Here, let me do that." The parent just sent a message that said, "I don't think you can handle that."

Sometimes, even the words parents say to motivate their children actually turn out to have the opposite effect. To encourage your child to keep trying or to do her best, say:

- **"Give this a try."** Your child will hear, "I think you can do this by yourself."
- **"What would happen if you added more water?"** Your child will hear, "You can solve problems."
- **"I never thought of trying it that way."** Your child will hear, "You made a good decision."
- **"I remember when you did this before."** Your child will hear, "You can be a success again."



Use this same approach when your child is doing schoolwork. If she's stuck on a tough math problem, ask, "How did you solve it the last time?" Or try asking, "Could you explain the sample problems to me?" When you focus on the things your child *can* do, your child is more likely to stay motivated.

Source: Lynn Lott and Riki Intner, *Chores Without Wars*, ISBN: 0-761-51252-7, Prima Publishing.



## Volunteering benefits everyone!

April 10–16 is National Volunteer Week. Whether you volunteer at school or out in the community, your service can have a positive impact on:

- **Your community.** Of course, the group you decide to help will benefit the most!
- **You.** As a volunteer, you can learn important skills. Try to choose an activity that will later help you on the job. Whether you want to improve your computer

skills or learn how to manage a budget, you can probably find a volunteering opportunity that will help you work on that skill.

- **Your child.** Consider finding a service project you can do as a family. Studies show that kids who volunteer are more responsible. They care more about doing their best in school and elsewhere.

Source: "Signature Events and Series," Points of Light Foundation, [www.pointsoflight.org/signature-events-and-series](http://www.pointsoflight.org/signature-events-and-series).

## Poetry is read-aloud fun

April is Young People's Poetry Month. It's a great time to laugh out loud with your child while reading together. Some collections that will get you giggling:

- *Giant Children* by Brod Bagert.
- *If You're Not Here, Please Raise Your Hand: Poems About School* by Kalli Dakos.
- *Tall Tales of the Wild West: A Collection of Cowboy Poems and Songs* by Eric Ode.
- *Where the Sidewalk Ends* by Shel Silverstein.

Ask the school librarian or the librarian at the public library to recommend other titles for read-aloud poetry fun.

## Review three bus stop rules

In warmer weather, kids are more active at the bus stop. Review bus safety rules with your child. Tell him to:

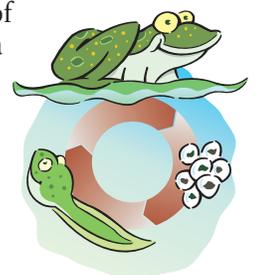
1. **Wait calmly** at the bus stop. Stay off the street and don't play roughly.
2. **Watch** for the driver's directions.
3. **Walk five "giant steps"** away from the bus so the driver can see you when you're getting off the bus.



Source: "Tip #10: School Bus Stops," National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, [www.nhtsa.gov/people/injury/childps/newtips/pages/Tip10.htm](http://www.nhtsa.gov/people/injury/childps/newtips/pages/Tip10.htm).

## Pictures boost knowledge

Whether it's the life cycle of a frog or the three branches of government, drawing a picture may help your child prepare for a test. Ask her to explain her artwork to you. Have her talk about the illustrations in her textbook, too.





## How can parents teach children to control tempers?

**Q:** My second grader has tantrums when he doesn't get his way. I admit that I sometimes give in rather than dealing with his behavior. He's acting the same way in school, and his teacher has asked for my help in getting him to control himself. What can I do?

**A:** Two-year-old tantrums are hard enough to deal with. But eight-year-olds need to learn how to get themselves under control. You can:

- **Keep a record** of your child's tantrums for a week or so. Record what happened just before the tantrum. What happens when he falls apart? How many times do you give in to a tantrum?
- **Create a plan of action** to change his behavior. Set clear boundaries. Suppose he often has a tantrum if you don't let him watch TV. Schedule time for him to watch TV. If he wants to turn on the TV outside of that time and throws a tantrum, say calmly, "It is not time to turn on the TV. It's time for reading."
- **Realize your child may not change** his behavior immediately. Keep talking with him. "I know that you are upset. But this is the rule." Tell him he can control his behavior, too. "You'll feel so much better when you are in control." Then praise him when he does calm down.

Whatever you do, *don't* give in to your child's tantrums. His success in school and with other children depends on learning how to control that temper.



## Are you effective in setting limits?

When parents enforce limits, their children rarely thank them! But children benefit from having clear boundaries. Answer the following questions *yes* or *no* to see if you're effective in setting and enforcing limits for your child:

1. **Do you restrict** the number of limits you set, knowing that kids are more likely to follow limits that are important to parents?
2. **Do you set** limits that are easy for your child to understand?
3. **Do you consistently** enforce those limits?
4. **Do you involve** your child in setting limits and deciding the consequences for violating them?
5. **Do you let** your child know the "why" behind the limits you set?

**How did you do?** Each *yes* answer means you are effectively helping your child understand the boundaries you set for acceptable behavior. For each *no* answer, try that idea from the quiz.

"The art of leadership is saying no, not yes. It is very easy to say yes."  
—Tony Blair

## It's time for spring training

Baseball players know that practicing every day is the best way to prepare for a winning season. With warmer weather, it may be tempting for your child to spend less time on homework, but daily practice of skills is still essential for school success. If spring activities have changed your family routines, work out a plan to make sure homework is still your child's first priority.

## Make time for family time

Busy parents feel pressured to make the most of time with their children. But this is hard when so many things—from work to housework to phone calls to errands—can interfere. Put family activities on your calendar and treat them just like business appointments.

Source: Utah State University, "How To Spend Quality Time With Your Children," Newswise, [www.newswise.com/articles/view/516482](http://www.newswise.com/articles/view/516482).

## Promote interest in science

More careers in the science and technical fields are opening up as time goes on. Encourage your child to take an interest in science now to prepare her for a successful future.

For example, if your child loves the outdoors, she could observe insects and then visit [insects.org](http://insects.org) to research more about them. Here are some other tips:

- **Encourage activities** that aren't *too* hard. You don't want to give your child the idea that science is too difficult rather than fun and interesting.
- **If you don't know** what your child might enjoy, ask! When *your child* chooses something, she'll learn more and have a better time doing it.



### Helping Children Learn®

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