

Helping Children Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School



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Establish priorities and healthy habits for standardized test success

Many elementary schools use yearly standardized tests to find out how their teachers and students are doing. Sometimes the tests have big effects, such as determining school funding, so kids need to be prepared. Remember though, that one test doesn't measure your child's total abilities.

To enable your child to do his best on standardized tests:

- **Make school a priority.** Students who do well on tests, teachers say, tend to be the ones who study and finish homework on time. They also miss less school than kids who don't do as well.
- **Develop healthy routines.** Kids need plenty of sleep and a nutritious breakfast every day before school. Your child should also pack supplies and choose outfits at night to make mornings less stressful.
- **Talk to the teacher about test details.** Which skills does the test measure? Ask your child's teacher: "Should my child study for this test at home?" and "How can I help?"
- **Promote reading.** Many tests require reading, so make sure your child reads often. (Magazines or comic books still count!)
- **Reduce anxiety.** Some kids like to take timed practice tests at home. But as test day approaches, focus on relaxation. Stay positive and calm. If your child is worried, he can take some deep breaths. Be sure he knows he has your love and support no matter what.



Source: "Standardized Tests," Scholastic.com, www.scholastic.com/parents/resources/article/study-skills-test-taking/standardized-tests-prepare-and-interpret-results.



Tackle the tough times with grit

What do spelling champions, good athletes, and honor roll students have in common? It's a quality known as *grit*—the ability to stick with something even when it's hard.

People who persist when faced with challenges are most likely to be successful, in school and in life. Luckily, grit is something that can be developed and strengthened. You'll encourage your child if you:

- **Emphasize starting.** People with grit don't put off unpleasant tasks. "You work on your math. I'll clean these drawers. Let's see what we can do in 15 minutes."
- **Focus on the outcome.** "We'll get to buy a new television we can all enjoy later since we are saving money now."
- **Reinforce how good it feels** to finish a tough task. "You did your homework. Now you can relax and enjoy yourself."

Source: A. Duckworth and others, "Grit: Perseverance and Passion for Long-Term Goals," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 92, No. 6, American Psychological Association.

Strategy improves reading

Your child will be a better reader if you teach her how to think about what she's reading. Ask: "What does the title tell you?" "Can you predict what will happen?" "Can you summarize the story?" Next time, have her ask—and answer—the questions herself.



Source: "Reading Strategies," Panhandle Area Educational Consortium, www.paec.org/david/reading/general.pdf.

Make time to connect

They say kids spell love T-I-M-E. But how does a busy parent find the time to stay involved with a child's life and learning? Try to:

- **Add in short breaks.** You're working and your child is doing homework. Say, "Let's work until 7:00, then read together."
- **Plan one-on-one time.** Seeing "Mom and Sandy" on the calendar for Monday will help when Saturday is frantic.
- **Send a love note:** with lunch, via email, on his pillow.



Source: R. Silverman, "No Time? 5 Tips to Spend Time with Children When You Have No Time to Spare," <http://tinyurl.com/mnl7o12>.

Planning is good thinking

The ability to make a plan, and then to judge its success and revise it, is a critical skill for children. Research shows that kids who think ahead have stronger reading skills and richer vocabularies than others.

Planning involves choice with intention. (If I want to build a tall tower, I need a stable base.) To help your child make a plan:

1. **Ask questions** about possible pitfalls.
2. **Carry out** the plan soon.
3. **Reflect together** on how it worked.

Source: A.S. Epstein, "How Planning and Reflection Develop Young Children's Thinking Skills," *Young Children*, September 2003.



Just how much 'help' should I give my child on a project?

Q: It's science fair time again. My child actually enjoys working on a project every year. I try to be helpful, but I always remember that it's her project, not mine. The problem is that at our school, most of the projects that win awards are clearly done by parents. (I don't know any third graders who can construct a model of a nuclear reactor.) So what do I do—give in and help her produce a "winning" project? Or let her do the work and be disappointed when she doesn't get a ribbon?

A: It's not going to make your daughter feel better, but she's actually the one who is the big "winner" when she has done the work herself. She has learned how to be responsible for carrying out a project from start to finish. And she's learned something about science in the process.

But tell that to a third grader who just wants a ribbon. And when parents are competing with third graders, the chances are that the parents will come out on top.

You have a couple of choices. Perhaps this year you could get involved with planning the fair. You might even volunteer to coordinate the judging. That way, judges could focus more on projects children did themselves.

You also need to help your daughter set her expectations. Talk about how she really is a winner because of what she's learned. And let her know that you are really proud of her, whether she gets a ribbon or not.



Do you handle arguments effectively?

Arguing kids drive parents out of their minds. And quarrels in school can be disruptive to the class. Are you doing what you can to reduce disagreements with your child in your home? Answer *yes* or *no* to each statement.

1. **I don't engage** if my child starts to argue. I say, "This is not something we are going to argue about."
2. **I give my child choices.** "You may take out the trash or empty the dishwasher."
3. **I don't ask "Will you?"** Instead, I state what I expect my child to do.
4. **I use body language.** Sometimes a look can convey a lot.
5. **I don't get angry.** But I do enforce the rules.

How did you score?

Each *yes* answer means you are taking effective steps to put a stop to arguments in your house. For each *no*, try that tip from the quiz.

"Reading takes us away from home, but more important, it finds homes for us everywhere."
—Hazel Rochman

Stop problem behavior before it starts

When it comes to discipline, don't wait until after a problem arises. Instead, think about ways to prevent it in the first place. Does your child have a bad habit—getting up too late for the bus, for example—that you'd like to change? To move in a positive direction:

- **Predict.** Knowing a behavior is likely to occur lets you think of ways to prevent it.
- **Prepare.** Brainstorm ways to correct the issue—organize clothes the night before.
- **Practice.** Try out your solutions—see if she can beat her best time getting dressed.

Source: L.R. Griffin, *Negotiation Generation: Take Back Your Parental Authority Without Punishment*, Berkeley Publishing Group.

Help your child read to learn

There is a lot of great fiction for young readers to enjoy. But reading for information is also important in school. To help your child get the facts:

- **Save news articles** about his interests.
- **Browse the Internet** for more on a subject he's studying.
- **Add nonfiction** to read-aloud time.



Try bringing books to life

The advantages of reading to your child are many, but research suggests kids learn a lot from "active reading," too. More study is needed, but meanwhile, it's fun to:

- **Play dress up.** After you read, dress up as favorite characters.
- **Put on a play.** Write a short skit with your child using words from a book he likes. Perform it as a puppet show, too.
- **Do a dramatic reading.** Take turns acting the story out.

Source: S. Sparks, "Studies Find Students Learn More by 'Acting Out' Text," *Education Week*, <http://tinyurl.com/6g427w6>.

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