

Helping Children Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School



May 2015

Title I Cooperative
Educational Service Unit 10

The year in review: Celebrate successes and plan ahead

May is an ideal time for you and your child to put this school year into perspective. Understanding how things went can make a positive difference in how your child does next year. So look back, look forward, give thanks and celebrate. Here's how:



- **Talk to your child's teacher.** Ask for her thoughts on your child's strengths and weaknesses. How has he improved? Where does he need to put in more effort? Ask what you can do to help him this summer.
- **Talk to your child.** What does he think went well this year? Help him figure out what changes he could make to work more effectively next year.
- **Review your child's successes.** Together, look over schoolwork you've saved during the year. Point out how much he's learned—how many new words, for example. Or how he can add or divide. Or how his writing has improved.
- **Help your child come up with learning goals** for the summer. Guide him based on what you've learned from his teacher.
- **Encourage your child to thank people** who have made the year a good one—the teacher, bus driver, cafeteria worker, etc. Help him write thank-you notes to them. This will make him realize how many people have helped him.
- **Celebrate his efforts** with a special activity. Take your child out for some one-on-one time.



Recommit to helpful homework habits

With only weeks left to go in the school year, many children start acting as though they are already on summer vacation. But there is still learning and homework to do! Try these time-tested ways to keep your child focused:

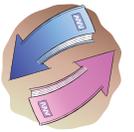
- **Stick to a schedule.** Perhaps you've let your set homework time slide a little. Get back to a regular time every day.
- **Help her get organized.** Does your child have to hunt for a pencil before doing her math? Collect her supplies in one place.
- **Break big tasks down.** Don't let her get overwhelmed. Divide projects into smaller chunks.
- **Talk about homework** before your child starts it. Help her think about what she has to do and plan how to use her time best.
- **Recognize effort.** Give her a high five or a hug for sticking with her homework until it's finished.

Source: J. Walker and others, "Parental Involvement in Homework: A Review of Current Research and Its Implications for Teachers, After School Program Staff, and Parent Leaders," Harvard Family Research Project, niswc.com/chunks.

Swap boredom for books

One great way to encourage your child to keep reading this summer is to help him organize a book swap. Here's how:

- **Invite kids to donate** a book they liked in exchange for one they haven't read.
- **Sort donated books** by category—*fiction, nonfiction, mystery*, etc.
- **Swap and read!**



How to say *no* positively

There are times when you must say *no* to your child. He can't postpone writing his report or stay home from school when he's not sick. But the way you say it can help him accept the answer. Try to:

- **Hear your child out.** Even if the answer will be *no*, let him finish asking.
- **Think out loud.** Children need to learn how adults make decisions.
- **Acknowledge your child's feelings.** Sometimes, just saying "I know you're disappointed" can help.

Source: "Positive Ways to Talk and Listen," PBS Parents, niswc.com/sayno.

Volunteer with your child

When kids volunteer, they learn that every person makes a difference, and that when people work together, the results can be amazing! That gives them confidence to take on challenges.



To find an activity that fits your child:

- **Discuss her interests.** If she likes math, for example, you might work together on a fund-raiser.
- **Consider her skills.** A great reader could read to younger children.
- **Ask about need.** Does the school need help? The homeless shelter?
- **Think about time.** Set realistic goals that leave room for other priorities.



Is my child's behavior linked to fear of middle school?

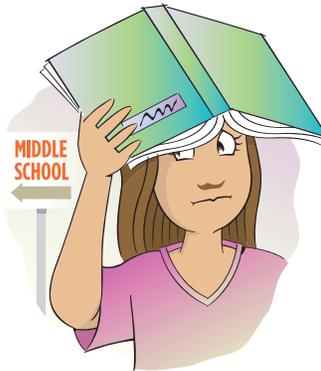
Q: As the end of the year gets closer, my daughter is acting out more and more. She's headed to middle school next year and I know she's anxious about that. But she loves her teacher and, until recently, has rarely misbehaved at home. Why is she causing trouble now? And what do I do?

A: Transitions are hard on all kids. And some kids have a rougher time with them than others. The move from one school to another can be scary. Your child has a lot of worries—will she still see her friends? Will she be able to do the work?

See if you can get her to start expressing her fears out loud. A low-key approach usually works best. To open up a conversation, you might say, "I bet you're wondering about who will be in your classes next year."

Once your child tells you about her worries, you and her teacher can start to address them. Could the teacher lead a few class discussions about life in middle school? Can you arrange a meeting for your daughter and someone she knows who is already at the school, so they can talk about what it's like?

Why is your child acting out with you and her teacher? Because she feels safe. Knowing that won't make it any easier to deal with her. (And you still need to be sure she is following the rules at home and school.) But letting her get the fears out in the open will be a first step in dealing with them.



Your time matters most

Investing time in your child's education pays off. One study that followed more than 10,000 children found that family involvement at home was more effective than a positive school environment at increasing academic achievement. Try to:

- **Talk about school** and its importance.
- **Visit the school** and attend school activities when you can.
- **Check that your child** is completing homework and getting it back to school.

Remember, when schools and families work together, children are most successful.

Source: "Parenting More Important Than Schools to Academic Achievement, Study Finds," Science Daily, niscw.com/invest.

Writing, your child's way

To keep your child writing and thinking this summer, encourage him to keep a journal. But not just any journal! He'll enjoy it more if you let him pick a type he likes. An album of photos and captions? A scrapbook of mementos and stories? Reviews of his favorite movies? A collection of drawings and observations?



Source: "Fun ways to stop summer brain drain," KDFW Fox 4, niscw.com/journaling.

Take learning on the road

Start planning now to avoid hearing the dreaded "I'm bored!" when your child is out of school. In addition to stockpiling supplies such as books, recipes and games, think about scheduling some field trips. Consider:

- **Museums.** Call or check online for exhibits. What would your child enjoy?
- **A local garden** or arboretum.
- **The zoo.** Read about animals you'll see.
- **The library.** Get a calendar of summer events and pick some to attend.



How will your child stay fit over break?

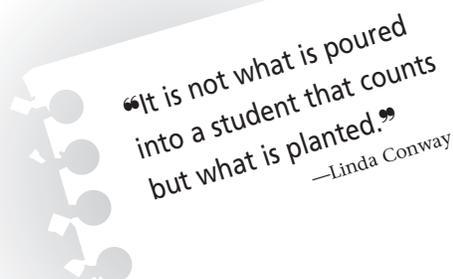
Kids who stay active over the summer are more likely to go back to school ready to learn. Are you making sure that your child will have plenty of opportunities for safe physical activity this summer? Answer *yes* or *no*:

1. **Have you talked** with your child about the kinds of exercise he enjoys? There's something for everyone!
2. **Have you helped** your child set personal fitness goals for the summer?
3. **Do you limit** your child's screen time? Have everyone get up and move during TV commercials.
4. **Have you checked** out activities being offered at local recreation centers, pools or parks?

5. **Have you mapped** out some routes for family walks?

How well are you doing?

More *yes* answers mean you and your child are on track for a healthy summer. For each *no*, try that idea.



Helping Children Learn®

Published in English and Spanish, September through May.

Publisher: Phillip Wherry.

Editor: Alison McLean.

Staff Editors: Rebecca Miyares & Erika Beasley.

Production Manager: Pat Carter.

Translations Editor: Victoria Gaviola.

Layout & Illustrations: Maher & Mignella, Cherry Hill, NJ.

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1-800-756-5525 • www.parent-institute.com • ISSN 1527-1013