

# Helping Children Learn<sup>®</sup>

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School



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Title I Cooperative  
Educational Service Unit 10

## Brainstorming can help your child's writing ideas take shape

Some students love to write. But others find writing challenging and get frustrated trying to think of ideas. You can't make your child love writing, but you can turn a reluctant writer around. How? Try brainstorming with him.

Brainstorming ideas can reduce your child's anxiety about writing and help him break through writer's block. It also teaches him to make lists and to break complex ideas down into smaller components.

The next time your child has a writing assignment, help him:

- **Think of potential topics.** Give him some suggestions to get him started: Things I love to do. My favorite toys, animals, places or food. Things I know a lot about. Things adults say.
- **Go beyond reality.** Ask your child questions that will inspire him to think about people, places and events in new ways: What would life be like if you had four hands? What if the wheel had not been invented?
- **Use visuals.** Give him a picture. What ideas does it bring to mind? Or go for a walk together and ask him to make notes about what he sees.
- **Add some action.** Talk about an idea. Then have him build on the concept. What does he think will happen next? How and when?

Source: D. Reeves, *Reason to Write: Help Your Child Succeed in School and Life Through Better Reasoning and Clear Communication—Elementary School Edition*, Kaplan Publishing.



## Enhance your parent-teacher conference

One of the best ways to find out more about the things your child will be learning this year and what you can do to help is to attend a parent-teacher conference. Here are some things you can do to make the most of it:

*Before your meeting:*

- **Ask your child** what you and the teacher should discuss.
- **Make a list** of things to tell the teacher, such as your child's favorite subjects, her difficulties in school and any sensitive issues.
- **Add** things you want to ask the teacher about, such as your child's attitude, strengths and weaknesses.

*During your meeting:*

- **Be positive.** You and the teacher want what is best for your child.
- **Listen carefully.** Make notes of the teacher's suggestions.

*After your meeting:*

- **Talk with your child** about the conference. Stress the good things.
- **Make a plan** to carry out any suggestions for improvement.

## More ZZZ's, please

Even one additional hour of sleep can help students be more alert and remember material with greater accuracy. To help your child get nine to 10 hours of sleep each night:



- **Make sure** he gets lots of exercise.
- **Create** a bedtime routine.
- **Enforce** a regular bedtime.

Source: R. and J. Sommers-Flanagan, *Problem Child or Quirky Kid? A Commonsense Guide*, Free Spirit Publishing.

## Encourage deeper thinking

Your child will need to think critically throughout her school years. To develop her skills, ask her to:

- **Identify patterns.** Ask what she sees in a spider's web, for example.
- **Evaluate how she did** on a test or assignment. Ask, "What did you do well?" "What would you change next time?"
- **Explain her reasoning.** Why does she think she acted as she did?
- **Look for different ways** to solve a problem. Help her list the pros and cons of each possible solution.



## Promote responsibility

Responsible students tend to make better decisions and are likely to make an effort, follow through and succeed in school. To boost your child's sense of responsibility:

- **Update his chore list.** Are you still packing your child's lunch and making his bed? Most elementary schoolers are capable of handling such tasks.
- **Let consequences teach.** When he makes a mistake, don't swoop in to save him (unless he's in true danger). Facing the consequences will help him learn to avoid making the same mistake again.



## How can I help my child make friends at school?

**Q:** My third grader has suddenly decided she doesn't want to go to school. At first, I couldn't figure out why. Then she told me that she has no friends there. Should I be worried? What can I do?

**A:** It's not unusual for children to feel left out at times. And when they do, they often don't want to go to school. But you are right to be concerned. The skills children need to get along with others in school are the same skills they'll need to get along in life. Kids who have no friends may turn to dangerous or negative behaviors in an effort to fit in. Their grades may begin to drop, too.

To help your child find solutions:

- **Assure her you want to work with her** to solve the issue. Be gentle. Kids who are being rejected at school often feel it is their fault.
- **Talk with the teacher.** There may have been recent changes in the class. Perhaps a new student has become best friends with your child's former pal. Enlist the teacher's help to engage your child.
- **Find ways for her to meet other children.** Sign your child up for an after-school activity that interests her. As she feels better about herself, she will find it easier to relate to other kids.



## Is your family at home in the library?

Public libraries have a lot of resources to offer children (and adults!). They are wonderful places for kids to have fun learning. Are you taking advantage of all your library has to offer your family? Answer *yes* or *no*:

- \_\_\_ **1. Have you** signed everyone in your family up for a library card?
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you** have a regular time for library visits? If not weekly, try to go at least monthly.
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you** and your child explore a new section each time you visit the library?
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you** encourage your child to participate in kids' activities at the library?
- \_\_\_ **5. Do you** ask the librarian to recommend books for you and your child to read?

### How well are you doing?

*More yes answers mean you are making the most of your library's resources. For each no, try that idea from the quiz.*

*"That energy which makes a child hard to manage is the energy which afterward makes him a manager of life."  
—Henry Ward Beecher*

## Take anxiety out of tests

A student who doesn't think he will do well on a test probably won't. To help your child approach tests with confidence:

- **Take the pressure off.** Tell him that tests show the teacher what he has learned and what he needs help with.
- **Discourage last-minute cramming.** He should start reviewing days ahead.
- **Help him connect** new material to things he already knows.
- **Encourage positive self-talk.** Your child can say, "I've studied. I know this."

Source: S. DeBroff, *The Mom Book Goes to School: Insider Tips to Ensure Your Child Thrives in Elementary and Middle School*, Free Press.

## Your child needs your help

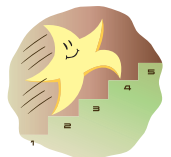
Your support is an essential ingredient in your child's academic achievement. Feeling that someone cares whether she succeeds or fails, and is proud of her successes and efforts, can increase your child's motivation.

Support includes setting boundaries and having realistic expectations. Parents who are firm and loving have kids who do better in school than kids whose parents are too strict ... or too lenient.

Source: P. Scales, "How to Equip Our Children for Success," *Our Children*, National PTA.

## Achieve goals in five steps

Setting weekly goals can help your child take ownership of his learning. Help him:



- 1. Identify a goal,** such as finishing a book.
- 2. Write it down** and post it where he'll see it often.
- 3. Plan how to accomplish it.** He can break the goal down into daily chunks.
- 4. Check progress.** Brainstorm solutions.
- 5. Evaluate his week.** Celebrate progress, and set a new goal!

### Helping Children Learn®

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