

Helping Children Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School



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Sullivan Elementary School
Title I- Nikki Garcia

Encourage a learning habit with regular visits to the library

One of the best ways to excite your child about reading and learning is to make frequent trips to the library together. One survey found that 97 percent of regular library patrons consider themselves “lifelong learners.” Research also shows that children who regularly visit libraries read more. To help your child enjoy the library:



- **Sign him up** for a library card. He’ll feel important, and using it will teach him about responsibility.
- **Explore the building**—not just its books. Check out its nooks and crannies, its toy areas, its stairways and cozy places to sit. The library should be a place that feels like home to your child.
- **Encourage him to interview the librarian.** Help him think of questions to ask, such as, “Why did you become a librarian?” If your child asks for an autograph, he’ll have a way to remember the librarian’s name.
- **Have him pick a favorite subject**—rockets, penguins, whatever he likes—and ask the librarian for help finding resources about it.
- **Go on hunts through the children’s section.** Can your child find a book whose author’s name starts with the same letter as his?
- **Have him make a special bookmark** to use with his library books. Make sure he brings it along when you visit.

Source: L. Rainie, “Libraries and Learning,” Pew Research Center, niswc.com/libraryhabit.



How to react when grades disappoint

Your child doesn’t seem to be struggling in school, but when her report card comes home, it is not good. Remember that getting angry with your child or showing your displeasure won’t help. Instead, when you are calm:

- **Ask your child** for her thoughts about her grades. Why does she think she received these marks? Ask about her work in class. Does she complete it? Is she confused about anything she’s learning? What does she think she could do differently?
- **Enforce a regular study time** at home. If your child doesn’t have homework, she can review material from class or answer practice questions from her textbooks. Monitor her efforts, and provide help if needed, but don’t ever *do* the homework for her. Let her take responsibility—it gives her practice she needs for success.
- **Set up a meeting** with the teacher. Ask for her ideas about what may be affecting your child’s progress. Discuss ways you can work together to help your child boost her performance.

Start your child off right

Students can’t complete a task successfully if they keep putting it off. So help your child get started by setting an example. Say things like, “You work on your social studies worksheet and I’ll clean out these kitchen drawers. Let’s see how much we can accomplish in 15 minutes.”

Predict and practice to prevent behavior problems

It’s usually easier to *prevent* a behavior issue than it is to handle it afterward.



If you can predict that your child will dawdle and be late for the bus—because it happens often—don’t wait for him to straggle down to the breakfast table. Instead, think of ways to prevent the problem. Perhaps he needs to go to bed earlier so he isn’t so tired in the morning. If he’s late because he can’t find what he needs, help him get organized the night before.

Have your child practice the solutions you devise. You’ll be able to celebrate his success, rather than punish misbehavior.

Source: L.R. Griffin, *Negotiation Generation*, Berkley Books.

New world straight ahead

If your child will be moving on to middle school in the fall, start now to smooth her transition. Call her new school and schedule a tour. You can also:



- **Find out** about summer activities for rising middle schoolers. Is there a reading program or an orientation event your child can participate in?
- **Get involved.** Attend events for new students and families. Join the parent-teacher organization.



Screens are taking over my child's life. What can I do?

Q: My child spends hours playing electronic games. Some of them are educational, but she wants to play them all the time. As a result, she has trouble getting ready in the morning, she rushes through her homework and she barely speaks to the rest of the family. How can I fix this?



A: When kids use them responsibly, digital games can be a fun way to relax and even to learn. But your child's game playing is cutting into her time for schoolwork, reading, family and other more productive activities. That's why the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) urges parents to limit recreational screen time. Here's how:

- **Tell your child** you will be setting limits on the amount of time your family spends with screens.
- **Establish times** when screen use is not allowed for anyone in the family. These should include meal times, homework time and at least 30 minutes before your child's bedtime.
- **Provide alternatives.** Plan daily family activities, such as reading aloud, taking a walk or playing board games.
- **Get more ideas** by creating a personalized family media plan on the AAP's website (www.healthychildren.org/English/media).



Are you building your child's vocabulary?

Helping your child increase his vocabulary improves his communication and comprehension skills. Are you creating opportunities for your child to learn and use new words? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

1. **Do you discuss** the meanings of words with your child? When you read together, do you explain unfamiliar words?
2. **Do you introduce** new words for familiar ideas? "I'm proud of your *diligent* efforts on your homework."
3. **Do you pick** a Word of the Day that family members try to use at least twice?
4. **Do you encourage** your child to write the new words he encounters in a personal "dictionary"?

5. **Do you play** word games as a family? "What's a five-letter word for love (*adore*)?"

How well are you doing?

More *yes* answers mean you are giving your child word power. For each *no*, try that idea.

"The limits of my language mean the limits of my world."
—Ludwig Wittgenstein

Get set for spring tests

For many elementary school students, spring is a time for standardized tests. To help your child do her best:

- **Make time for daily reading.** The more your child reads, the more she builds fluency and comprehension, which will help her with tests.
- **Talk with the teacher.** Ask about test formats and how your child should prepare at home.
- **Reduce anxiety.** Help your child stay positive and calm. Teach her to tell herself, "I can do this!"

It is also helpful to remember that one test doesn't represent your child's total abilities.

Form a language connection

If you are not comfortable speaking English, you may wonder how you can be involved at school. Consider forming a parent group for people who speak your native language. Share ideas and explore ways to partner with the school and help the staff meet the needs of all students and their families.

Post math self-help ideas

Teaching your child how to help himself is a big part of helping him learn. Have him create a colorful poster listing all the strategies he can think of to find the answer to a math problem. He could include:

- **Reread** the problem.
- **Restate** the problem in my own words.
- **Draw** a diagram.
- **Guess** an answer and then check it.
- **Think** about how I solved other problems like this one.



Hang the poster in your child's study area— one glance will give him ideas to try the next time he's confused.

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