

Helping Children Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School



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Plan enjoyable ways to help your child avoid a summer setback

After a busy year in school, most kids are eagerly anticipating the long, lazy days of summer. But educators know that students can lose more than a month of learning over summer break. This “summer setback” contributes to an achievement gap among students. And it also means that teachers must spend valuable class time reteaching in the fall.



To help your child avoid learning loss, encourage him to read, write and do math and science all summer long. Here are a few ways to make it fun:

- **Sign your child up for a reading contest.** Many libraries sponsor contests to inspire reading. Or you can create your own. Award points for each book your child reads. Decide how many he’ll need to win a prize, such as a trip to the ice cream shop.
- **Help him find a pen pal** so he can practice his writing skills. Do you have a friend who lives far away with a child who is your child’s age?
- **Let him set up a lemonade stand.** Help him use his math skills to budget for ingredients and find the best buys. Then he can measure as he prepares the lemonade, and add and subtract as he makes change for the customers.
- **Encourage him to start a collection** of natural items—shells, rocks, feathers, fossils, etc.—and to do research to learn more about his finds.



Use goal-setting to inspire persistence

Researchers have studied successful people in fields from athletics to science to business. What do they have in common? It isn’t intelligence or talent. It is *persistence*—the ability to keep going when things get challenging.

If your child is losing motivation to do schoolwork:

- **Remind her that practice** is as crucial for success with reading and math as it is for scoring a winning soccer goal or playing the clarinet.
- **Help her set goals** for what she wants to accomplish before the end of the year. Would she like to improve at solving word
- problems in math? Get all the way through a challenging book?
- **Ask her to write** her goals down and post them where she will see them every day.
- **Have her imagine** how good it will feel to reach her goals, knowing that she earned her success with her own hard work.

Source: A. Duckworth, *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance*, Scribner.

Reading leads to learning

All kinds of reading materials can help your child maintain and build reading skills—including hobby magazines and even cookbooks.

Ask your child if there is something she would like to learn over the summer. Maybe she wants to learn to identify insects or bake an awesome caramel cake. Help her find reading material that will show her how.

Don’t drop the ball on attendance

Summer is coming, but it isn’t here yet! It is still vital that your child be in school every day. Here’s why:



- **Learning** hasn’t stopped. Kids who miss school will miss out. And students who were absent just 10 percent of the school year in the early grades are *still* behind their peers in high school.
- **Group projects**—which promote cooperation, problem solving and responsibility—often take place at this time of year.
- **Regular attendance** teaches kids to be dependable—an important life skill.

Review the year together

With most of the school year over, now is an ideal time to review it with your child and to think about next year. Together:



- **Look back.** What does your child think went well? Look over his schoolwork and point out how much he has learned.
- **Look forward.** Where does your child need to improve? Help him figure out what changes he should make next year.
- **Celebrate your child’s efforts** this year with a special activity and some one-on-one time together.



Is bad behavior a symptom of middle school worries?

Q: My fifth grader is usually well-behaved. Lately though, she has been acting out at school and at home. I know she is anxious about moving on to middle school. Could that be behind her change in behavior? And what should I do about it?

A: Anxiety could indeed be at the heart of your child's misbehavior. Many kids struggle with transitions, and moving to a new school can be scary.

To help your daughter cope:

- **Talk with her.** See if you can get her to express her fears out loud. Try to keep your conversation low-key. You might begin by saying, "I bet you're wondering what school will be like next year."
- **Address her concerns.** When you know specifically what your child's worries are, talk to her teacher about them. Perhaps the teacher could lead some class discussions about middle school life. Or, if your daughter knows someone who is already at the middle school, arrange for a get-together so your child can ask about what it is really like.
- **Let your child know** that you take her worries seriously and you want to help. But remind her that being worried is not an excuse for misbehavior. She still needs to follow the rules at home and at school.



Are you helping your child plan ahead?

In order to manage schoolwork and other responsibilities, students have to plan ahead. This is a challenge for many elementary schoolers. Are you helping your child develop this skill? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

- ___ **1. Do you help** your child break tasks down into individual steps?
- ___ **2. Do you encourage** your child to make checklists of the things he needs to do each day?
- ___ **3. Do you help** your child plan how to earn and save money when he wants to purchase something special?
- ___ **4. Do you insist** that your child do his homework before he relaxes in front of the TV or electronic games?

- ___ **5. Will you have** your child help you plan activities to do as a family this summer?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are helping your child build planning skills. For each no, try that idea.

"Planning is bringing the future into the present so you can do something about it now."

—Alan Lakein

Promote screen-free fun

Experts say that too much screen time can negatively affect children's health, schoolwork and interest in learning new things. Limiting screen time is easier when you offer fun alternatives, such as:

- **Acting.** Instead of watching a show, challenge your child to create one.
- **Scavenger hunts.** Give instructions that make your child think. "Find three things that are spheres."
- **Outdoor play.** Fill a bucket with sidewalk chalk, jump ropes and water sprayers.

Source: American Academy of Pediatrics, "More time on digital devices means kids less likely to finish homework," EurekAlert! niswc.com/limits.

Focus on your child's health

Ensure your child is in good physical shape to finish the school year strong. Help her:

- **Stay active.**
- **Eat healthy foods.**
- **Stay hydrated.**



Over the summer, work with your child's doctor to prevent illness. Discuss topics such as summer safety, vaccines, vision, hearing and allergies. Keep your child's medical records up to date.

Go on a family field trip

Expand your child's horizons and prevent boredom this summer by taking an educational field trip. Local destinations are often free and fun to visit. Consider going to:

- **A garden or animal park.** Bring a camera or sketchbook so your child can capture images of the plants and animals.
- **An airport.** Can your child spot the control tower? Planes taking off and landing? When you get home, help your child find out how planes can fly.
- **A historical site.** Before you go, have your child read about the time period.

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