

Elementary School Parents[®] *make the difference!*

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Do you know the ABCs of parent-teacher conferences?

Children learn their ABCs when they start school. You can also use the ABCs to get the most out of your parent-teacher conference.

Here's how:

A Ask questions. Before the conference, jot down a list of questions you want the teacher to answer. Bring the list with you to the conference. Here are the kinds of questions you may want to ask:

- **What skills** will my child be expected to master this year?
- **What will** my child learn this year?
- **What are** my child's strengths and weaknesses?
- **How does** my child get along with other children in the class?
- **How can** I best help my child be a successful learner?

B Be honest. You know things about your child that can help the

teacher help him learn more. So share what you know. She'll want to know his likes and dislikes. She'll also want to know if there are any problems or concerns. If a grandparent has just died or a family member has lost a job, your child may be worrying about those things in school.

C Cooperate. A teacher may share a concern about your child during the conference. If that happens, work with the teacher to come up with a plan to address it. You and the teacher both want what's best for your child. Decide what you'll do at home and how she'll help your child at school. Set a date to meet and review how the plan is working.

Source: Southeast Educational Development Lab, "SEDL Helps Parents Prepare for Parent Teacher Conferences," www.sedl.org/new/pressrelease/20031001_16.html.

Get your family to vote for their favorite books



Even if your community doesn't have an election this year, you can make the month of November "Vote for Books" month at your house. You'll encourage everyone in the family to read—and write—about books they enjoy.

Create a "Book Ballot." Include the title of the book and the author. Then have family members vote—is it one of the best books ever? Only so-so? Not so good? Or a book that should be avoided?

Leave room for a short written description. Why did the book earn that rating? What was the best part of the book? Were there things the reader would have liked to change?

Place a "ballot box" (a shoe box with a hole in the lid) where everyone can see it. At the end of the month, open the box and read the ballots.

Which books are the big winners in your family?

Source: Erika Swarts Gray, "The Importance of Visibility: Students' and Teachers' Criteria for Selecting African American Literature," *The Reading Teacher*, March 2009 (International Reading Association, www.reading.org).

Help your elementary schooler develop an achievement attitude



Attitudes are like mental pictures. Basketball players who can picture themselves scoring a basket can usually do just

that. Students who have a positive picture of themselves being successful in the classroom are more likely to achieve.

As a parent, you have the ability to help your child create positive pictures and positive thoughts about what she can do. Here are some ways you can help your child create an attitude of achievement:

- **Picture success in school.** Help your child create a mental picture of success. “I want you to see yourself getting an A on that book report.”

- **Stress the importance of effort.** If your child is struggling, say, “When you studied hard last week, you got your spelling words right. You can do it.”
- **Give the positive behavior** you see a name. “I was so proud when you were kind to the new boy in class today.”

Source: John R. Ban, *Parents Assuring Student Success: Achievement Made Easy by Learning Together*, ISBN: 1-879-63972-6 (National Educational Service, www.nesonline.com).

“Too often we give children answers to remember rather than problems to solve.”

—Roger Lewin

Teach responsibility, the value of money with an allowance



Allowances are a great way for children to learn responsibility. They give children a chance to learn the value of money.

They can also teach children the importance of waiting and saving to buy something they want.

Since most parents end up buying things for their children anyway, it may make sense for you to give your child some money she can manage herself.

Many families begin giving their children an allowance in the first grade, since that is when children start learning about money. Here are some questions to ask before you start an allowance:

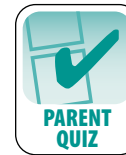
- **How much allowance** should you give? There’s no best answer. Talk

to friends. Ask people with children a little older than yours.

- **What will she pay for?** If the allowance is strictly for “fun” purchases, it will be less than if you want your child to be responsible for buying lunches at school.
- **What can your family afford?** It’s important, even early, for children to learn that families have budgets.
- **How much can your child manage?** To be truthful, all children squander their allowances sometimes. They buy toys that break. That’s part of the learning process. Let your child make decisions about purchases within reason.

Source: Amy Nathan, *The Kids’ Allowance Book*, ISBN: 0-802-78651-0 (Walker and Company, www.walkerbooks.com).

Are you teaching your child how to be grateful?



Kids who learn to be grateful are less likely to whine when they don’t get what they want. They are easier to be around

and get along better with friends and adults. Are you helping your child learn to be thankful? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

___ **1. Does everyone** in your family identify at least one thing for which he is grateful each day?

___ **2. Do you say “thank you”** often? Do you teach your child to thank everyone, from the bus driver to the cafeteria worker?

___ **3. Do you focus** on small reasons to be grateful? Do you take time to admire a beautiful sunset?

___ **4. Do you focus** on things your family can do together instead of thinking about things you can’t afford?

___ **5. Do you and your child** talk about the things you have to be grateful for?

How well are you doing?

Each *yes* means you are helping your child become more grateful. For each *no* answer, try that idea in the quiz.

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Practical Ideas for Parents to Help Their Children. ISSN: 1523-1275

For subscription information call or write:
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P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474.
Fax: 1-800-216-3667.

Or visit our website: www.parent-institute.com.

Published monthly September through May by The Parent Institute®, a division of NIS, Inc., an independent, private agency. Equal opportunity employer. Copyright © 2009 NIS, Inc.

Publisher: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.

Editor: Rebecca Miyares.

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Illustrator: Joe Mignella.

Choose research-based, effective ways to discipline your child



Have you ever met a happy, well-behaved child and wondered what her parents were doing right? Are they super strict? Really relaxed? Hopefully neither, because research shows that being too strict is destructive, and being too permissive isn't healthy, either. The best approach is to strike a balance.

Remember to:

- **Be positive.** Parents are most successful when they motivate children with love, not fear. So avoid punishments and put the biggest focus on what your child does right. Correct in a caring, constructive way.
- **Set limits.** Part of loving a child is protecting her and helping her get along with others. This requires rules. Choose rules carefully, research suggests, and enforce them with empathy. It helps to ask yourself, "Is this rule necessary?"

- **Use consequences.** Consequences are not the same as punishments. The best ones are directly related to behavior. For example, "Uh oh. You left your toy outside again, and it got ruined in the rain."
- **Give choices.** Over time, you want your child to develop self-discipline. When you allow her to make age-appropriate choices, she gains confidence and responsibility. Present only those options that are okay with you. ("Would you like this or that? You choose.")
- **Manage emotions.** It's natural for parents to sometimes feel angry, frustrated and to explode! Ahead of time, plan how you'll handle these feelings safely. Wait to discipline until you're calm. ("I am angry about this. I'm going to calm down in my room, and we'll discuss it later.")

Source: Laura Markham, "Positive Discipline," *Aha! Parenting*, <http://yourparentingsolutions.com/parenting-tools/positive-discipline/timeouts>.

Teach your child to solve math word problems in four steps



Sometimes, the reason kids can't find the answer to a math word problem is that they can't figure out the question. Have your child follow these steps:

1. **Read the question.** Suppose the word problem says "John has nine marbles. Joe has 11. If Joe gives John three marbles, how many marbles will John have?" Write down exactly what question the problem asks: "How many marbles will John have?"
2. **Look for key information.** Every word problem will include facts—

John has nine marbles and Joe has 11. Joe gives John three marbles. Write these facts down.

3. **Rewrite the question** as a math problem. In this case, nine marbles plus three marbles equals how many marbles?
4. **Solve the problem.** Once the word problem is rewritten as a math problem, your child should be able to find the answer. "John has 12 marbles."

Source: Ronald J. Dietel, *Get Smart! Nine Sure Ways to Help Your Child Succeed in School*, ISBN: 0-787-98334-9 (Jossey-Bass, a Wiley Imprint, www.wiley.com).

Q: I'd like my son to get his homework all finished before we eat dinner. That would leave us some time in the evening for family time. But he dawdles, and homework seems to take him forever. He is constantly getting up and moving around. I am tired of fighting with him. What can I do to make homework time easier?

Questions & Answers

A: There's an old saying that parents need to remember: Pick your battles. It sounds as if you are fighting two battles. One (whether or not he will do the homework) is important. But the other (when he does the work) may not be.

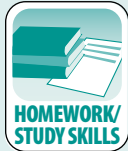
Here are four steps to end homework hassles and find a routine that works for both of you:

1. **Pick a time** when you and your son are not arguing. Talk with him about how he feels when he gets home from school. Is he really tired, so he feels a need to relax for a little while? Or is he so filled with energy that he needs to release with a little active play?
2. **Create a schedule** that works for both of you. Tell your child that the first 45 minutes or one hour are his to schedule. He can relax. He can play outside. (If your family has a rule about TV during the week, stick to that.)
3. **Give him a five-minute warning** when the time is nearly up. Then ring a bell or sound an alarm.
4. **Now it's time for homework.** The good news is that he may spend less time dawdling and more time working. So you'll still have time for family.

—Kristen Amundson,
The Parent Institute

It Matters: Homework

Choose science projects that teach concepts



Your child has to make a project for the science fair, and you're determined that he'll: 1) do it himself (not at the

last minute), 2) learn from it and 3) enjoy it. So where should you start?

Head for the library (there are countless books on kids' science projects) and choose a fun, manageable activity that teaches at least one key science concept, such as:

- **Organization.** Your child might sort things into groups, such as certain kinds of leaves or rocks.
- **Cause and effect.** How does one thing influence another? How does sunlight affect plants?
- **Systems.** Notice parts that make up a whole. What makes an old-fashioned clock tick?
- **Quantity.** Think about measurements, such as weight, size, temperature and proportions.
- **Representation.** Your child can draw a large picture of something tiny to show it in detail.
- **Change.** Some changes can be seen quickly (like ice melting), while others take longer (such as summer turning to fall).
- **Relationships.** How does the appearance of something relate to what it does? (Think about gills on a fish or the neck on a giraffe.)

Once your child has picked a project, divide it into small parts with deadlines. Outline the plan, collect supplies and offer guidance. Discuss what he's learning and encourage him every step of the way!

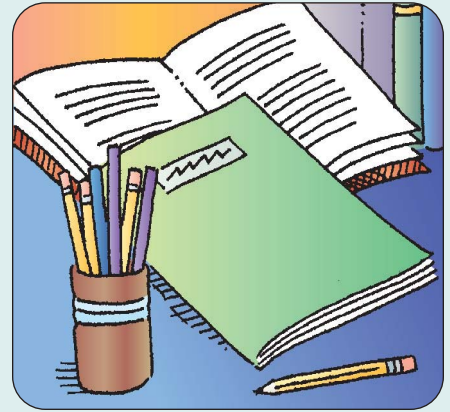
Source: "Helping Your Child Learn Science," U.S. Department of Education, www.ed.gov/pubs/parents/Science/Concepts.html.

Offer your child simple tips to make the best of book reports

Book reports do more than show what students learn. They help students learn, too. Writing a book report encourages your child to review what she has read and think critically.

Help your child get started by asking her questions about the:

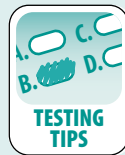
- **Facts.** What's the book's title? What's the name of the author and illustrator?
- **Setting.** When and where did the story take place?
- **Characters.** Who is the main character? What other people are involved?
- **Plot.** What happens in the book? What is the main conflict? How does it get resolved?
- **Main idea.** Does the book have a theme, such as "Don't give up"?



- **Conclusion.** What is your opinion about the book? What did you like or dislike about it? Did you agree with characters' choices?

Source: "How to Write a Book Report (Upper Elementary School)," infoplease Homework Center, www.infoplease.com/homework/wsbookreportelem.html.

Teach your child interesting ways to practice spelling words



Spelling tests can be scary for some kids. You can build your child's confidence by helping her prepare for her next test.

Since reviewing words can get tedious, try a variety of practice methods. Have your child:

- **Use paint or finger paint** to make colorful words.
- **Seal shaving gel** in a clear plastic bag. Use fingers to "write" in the gel.
- **Make letters** with play dough, clay, pipe cleaners or cookie dough.

- **Use light chalk** on dark paper. Or use it on steps, a driveway or the sidewalk.
- **Spray shaving cream** on a flat surface, such as a plate, and write in it with a finger.
- **Write with glue** and add glitter, pasta or other decorations.
- **Take turns "writing"** on someone's back or arm. Can they guess what was spelled?

Sources: Linda K. Rath, Ed.D. and Louise Kennedy, *The Between the Lions Book for Parents*, ISBN: 0-06-051027-7 (HarperResource, www.harpercollins.com); Julie Rebboah, "17 Activities That Teach Writing Without Worksheets!" ESL Teachers Board, www.eslteachersboard.com/cgi-bin/lessons/index.pl?read=2860.