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make the difference!

Three fun ways to celebrate your child's achievements

There is no better motivator for a child than setting a goal and reaching it. But sometimes, a major accomplishment also calls for an extra special celebration.

Perhaps your child earned a higher grade in a class this grading period. Or maybe your child finally finished reading that book series. Whenever your child sets and reaches a challenging goal, try one of these fun ideas:

1. **Capture the moment** by taking a picture of your child reaching the goal—holding up a report card or a finished book series, for example. You could also ask your child to draw a picture of the accomplishment. Frame the picture and place it by your child's bed. When children regularly see images of themselves being successful, they will start to see themselves as achievers.
2. **Plan a special surprise.** On one side of a piece of paper, write down a goal your child wants to achieve. On the other side, write down a small reward—such as having a friend over for a sleepover. Roll up the paper, put it into a balloon, and then blow up the balloon. Once the goal is reached, have your child pop the balloon to reveal the reward.
3. **Host a family victory dinner** to celebrate your child's success. Set a "fancy" table and serve some of your child's favorite foods. During dinner, ask your child to say a few words about how great it feels to reach a goal.

Have fun with May learning events, activities

The month of May is packed with notable birthdays and events that offer fun learning opportunities for you and your child. Check these out:

- **May 1** is Mother Goose Day. Read favorite Mother Goose rhymes together.
- **May 4** is National Weather Observers Day. Go outside and observe the clouds together.
- **May 18** is International Museum Day. Talk with your child about the importance of museums. Visit one online or in person.
- **May 20** is National Armed Forces Day. Have your child write a letter to thank someone for their military service.
- **May 21** is when Clara Barton founded the American Red Cross (1881). Go online to learn more about this nurse and humanitarian leader.
- **May 26** is National Paper Airplane Day. Design and make paper airplanes with your child. Which one flies the farthest or stays airborne the longest?
- **May 30** is Water a Flower Day. Celebrate by planting flowers outside or in containers.

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Teach your child these healthy stress-management techniques

In a national survey conducted by Boys and Girls Clubs of America, 70% of youth rated their ability to cope with challenges as medium to very low. And 71% said that when something important goes wrong in their life, they can't stop worrying about it.

As student stress and anxiety continue to rise, it's important to share coping strategies with your child. Discuss these techniques:

- **Deep breathing.** When anxiety strikes, have your child breathe in through the nose and out through the mouth several times.
- **Physical activity.** Ride bikes, shoot baskets and visit the playground. Encourage your child to take up a sport or another active hobby. Suggest your child play outside with friends. They might play catch, kick a ball around or enjoy a game of hopscotch or tag.
- **Spending time outdoors** with the sights, sounds and scents of nature. Go for hikes, explore parks or camp out in the backyard.
- **Creative pursuits.** Drawing, writing, painting, singing or playing a musical instrument can all reduce stress.

Source: The State of Youth Mental Health, Boys and Girls Clubs of America.

> **"The greatest weapon against stress is our ability to choose one thought over another."**
>
> *—William James*

Doing chores develops your elementary schooler's skills

When children are active participants in taking care of their homes, they learn valuable skills and gain a sense of ownership. Chores help children:

- **Become "stakeholders."** When your child contributes to household care, it's an investment in your home. This sense of ownership makes your child more careful and respectful of the shared space.
- **Gain essential life skills.** Each new chore you teach is a practical hands-on lesson, equipping your child with useful skills that build independence.
- **Learn to be less self-centered.** Kids understand that everyone in a family or group has a responsibility to the others. They don't expect others to handle their responsibilities.
- **Improve time management** skills. Accomplishing homework, activities and chores teaches your child to budget time effectively.
- **Develop self-discipline** and persistence. Chores require children to stick with a task even when it's not fun—which helps them develop a strong work ethic and the ability to push through challenges.
- **Gain a sense of pride** and competence. A completed task provides immediate gratification. If your child is responsible for the laundry, the stack of clean shirts is a visible and rewarding accomplishment.

Are you helping your child prepare for year-end tests?

The end of the year often means lots of tests for students. Families play a vital role in helping children prepare for these important academic challenges. Are you setting your child up for test success? Answer *yes* or *no* to the five questions below to find out:

1. **Do you write down test dates** on your family calendar and avoid planning big activities on the day before a test?
2. **Do you encourage your child** to study a little each day instead of cramming the night before a test? Research shows repeated study over time is the best way to learn facts.
3. **Do you make sure your child** regularly gets enough sleep and eats a healthy breakfast before a big test?
4. **Do you encourage your child** to wear comfortable clothing and dress in layers on test days?
5. **Do you say that you have confidence** in your child's ability and effort?

How well are you doing?

Mostly *yes* answers mean you're giving your child support to succeed on tests. For *no* answers, try those ideas.

Elementary School Parents make the difference!

Practical Ideas for Parents to Help Their Children.

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Maintain momentum as the end of the school year approaches

By May, it's common for students to start losing focus. Some "forget" to turn in assignments. Others stop giving their best effort and start avoiding anything that seems too difficult or challenging.

Here's how to help your child stay focused on learning until the last day of school:

- **Review past assignments,** quizzes and tests together. Use them to talk about how much your child has learned this year. Having these papers close at hand will also be useful when your child starts studying for end-of-year tests.
- **Shape year-end learning** around your child's interests. If there is one more project due, suggest choosing a favorite class topic. If there is a report, suggest focusing it on something your child is interested in learning more about.
- **Protect sleep schedules.** As the weather improves and daylight lasts longer, established sleep habits are often disrupted. Maintaining a consistent bedtime is essential for fighting spring fever. A well-rested brain processes information more effectively.
- **Help your child manage** large end-of-year projects. In addition to helping your child break the assignment down into smaller steps, encourage this rule of thumb: Move the deadline for finishing the project earlier by two days. If a report is due on Wednesday, your child should plan to get it finished by Monday. That way, your child will have a cushion if something comes up.

Take advantage of opportunities to strengthen thinking skills

Students boost their thinking skills when they learn how to apply concepts they've learned to various situations. A child who has learned to add, for example, can get out the correct number of plates when setting the dinner table for family and guests.

Here are ways to help your child strengthen thinking skills in common elementary school subjects, such as:

- **Language arts.** Before, during and after reading, encourage your child to ask and answer questions that start with *What, Why* and *What if.* "What do you think the character will do?" "Why is the character doing that?" "What if the character had made a different decision?"
- **Math.** Challenge your child to catch mistakes. Count by twos and say, "2, 4, 6, 7." Can your child figure out what's wrong? Also, do activities together that involve building and sorting. "Let's build a tower where each layer has one more block than the layer before it." "Can you help me reorganize this shelf of food by type?"
- **Science.** Watch nature programs and read books about nature together. Then, ask your child questions: "That tree has needles instead of flat leaves. What's that type of tree called?" "The flowers we planted last year grew back. Are they annuals or perennials?" "Look at that fly. Do flies have four wings or two?"

Questions & Answers

Q: My child is starting middle school next year and won't be attending the same school as friends. What can I do over the next few months to ease my child's anxiety about this change?

A: Middle school is a really big adjustment for all students. Instead of having one teacher, students will have several. Instead of staying in one classroom, they will have to move from room to room. Instead of being in the highest grade level in the school, they will now be in the lowest. And the move often causes upheaval in student social lives.

To reduce anxiety and boost your child's confidence:

- **Sign up for a tour** while classes are in session, if possible. Just walking around the building and seeing students will give your child a better idea of what to expect (and even what to wear) on the first day.
- **Remind your child** that there will be other students new to the school. Everyone in your student's grade will be starting fresh. Let your child know that there will still be opportunities to see old friends, even if they're at a different school.
- **Connect your child** with a current middle school student who would be happy to answer questions.
- **Check out school activities.** Some activities may begin over the summer. Participating in one will help your child make new friends before the new school year starts.

If your rising middle schooler still seems worried, reach out to the teacher or the school counselor for support.

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It Matters: Summer Learning

Help your child create a summer reading habit

Getting children to read in the summer can be tough when outdoor fun is calling. To keep your child reading, simply treat it like any other fun summer activity. Show your child that reading is enjoyable and can happen anywhere, anytime—without feeling like homework.

If you help your child make the connection between reading and the simple pleasures of childhood, the desire to read may last a lifetime.

To take a summer approach to reading:

- **Suggest that your child reread** a favorite book. Then, find another book by the same author. Or, find one on the same topic.
- **Connect books with summer** activities—sports books for a summer league player, for instance, or camping books for a camper.
- **Let your child stay up** past bedtime when a book is just too good to put down.
- **Start your child on a series** of mystery or thriller books. These page-turners hook kids into a reading habit.
- **Encourage a change of venue.** Read books at the beach or pool, in a tent or at the park.
- **Watch movies,** videos and plays based on children's books. Then, read the books together and compare the versions.
- **Share your favorite** childhood books with your child.
- **Encourage your child to retell** or act out stories from books.

Prioritize unplugged activities over recreational screen use

The lazy days of summer can lead to lazy hours staring at digital devices. But experts say it's vital to provide plenty of healthy screen-free activities during the summer.

Encourage your child to:

- **Be the entertainment.** Instead of watching a show, encourage your child to star in one. Have your child choose an exciting story line and act it out with friends or stuffed animals.
- **Play classic games.** Fill a bucket with traditional summer toys, such as sidewalk chalk, balls, bubbles and water sprayers. When the weather is right, have your child take it outside for hours of fun.
- **Be a mad scientist.** Go online to find simple science experiments to conduct together.
- **Hunt for treasure.** Hide several clues, with each one leading to the next. The last clue should lead to a treasure, such as a yummy snack or a fun activity.
- **Create a masterpiece.** Gather supplies such as glue, construction paper, fabric, yarn, washable markers and paint. Ask your child to create something.

Suggest three creative ideas to inspire journal writing

The summer is a great time to begin writing in a journal. All your child needs is an empty notebook and a few fun ideas to get started.

Suggest that your child keep:

1. **A research log.** Have your child pick a subject, such as penguins, and then research and write about it. What do penguins eat? Who are penguins' predators? How do penguins communicate? How do penguins move from one place to another?
2. **A travel log.** Each time you go somewhere special—whether it's far away or close to home—your child can keep a record by taking pictures, drawing or writing notes. What did your child see? Who did your child meet? What did your child think about the place?
3. **An observation log.** Suggest that your child observe something over a period of time, such as a summer vegetable as it grows. Or, pick something to describe in great detail, such as a bug or an animal.