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make the difference!



Regular review helps your child strengthen math skills

Success in math is built on mastery of basic skills. Help your child establish math review habits that reinforce these skills. Here's how:

- **Regularly quiz your child** on basic math facts: 4 x 5, 12 - 4, 6 + 6, etc. Together, make a set of flash cards with math facts your child needs to know. Review them together often—at the breakfast table, in the car or while waiting at the doctor's office. Your child has mastered a math fact when it takes less than three seconds to give the correct answer.
- **Resist providing the answers.** Your child will learn better if you demonstrate how to find them instead. For instance, if your child doesn't know what 3 x 5 equals, draw three parallel horizontal lines. Cross them with five vertical lines. Then, have your child count the intersections to get the answer.
- **Have your child practice writing** numbers neatly. Many of the math errors students make are due to messy number writing. Your child could use graph paper to make sure numbers are neatly lined up. A sharp pencil and a clean eraser can help, too.
- **Encourage your child to solve** more problems than the teacher assigns. Strong math skills come with lots of practice.
- **Issue mental math challenges.** See if your child can figure out a problem without using pencil and paper or a calculator. Ask questions that encourage estimating, too.

Three strategies improve reading comprehension



As students get older, they must shift from *learning to read* to *reading to learn* more complex texts. To support this development, share these reading comprehension strategies with your child:

1. **Get an overview.** Before starting to read an assignment, have your child think about the material. What is the title of the chapter or assignment? Does it offer clues about the content? Suggest your child look for other clues, such as subheadings, words in boldface or italics, pictures or graphs.
2. **Take notes.** Taking notes while reading will make it easier for your child to comprehend and remember information. It will also make reading active and engaging. Your child should write down the most important ideas and any unfamiliar words to look up later.
3. **Make connections.** When your child finishes reading, ask questions such as: *How is this topic similar to something else you know? What key ideas did you already know? What new information did you learn?*

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Build your child's desire to read with these five strategies



When children like to read, they do it more often—which boosts reading skills and overall school success. To nurture your child's love of reading:

- **Enhance.** Instead of simply checking out books at the library, make an event of it. Select interesting books, then choose a special place to enjoy reading together.
- **Explore.** Help your child discover an appealing book series. Kids often can't resist picking up the next book in a series to continue the adventure.
- **Investigate.** Ask a question and encourage your child to find the answer by doing some research in a book or online.
- **Play.** Turn something you just read together into a fun challenge: Ask your child to summarize the story using only three sentences. Can your child use the characters from the story in a new story?
- **Experiment.** Read a variety of books together. If your child is used to reading fiction, try reading a biography or how-to book, for example.

"A reader lives a thousand lives before he dies … . The man who never reads lives only one."

—George R.R. Martin

Help your elementary schooler maximize vocabulary growth



Reading at home is one of the best ways to build your child's vocabulary. That's because reading exposes your child to new ideas, concepts and words.

Here are some effective strategies for increasing your child's vocabulary:

- **Look for words** your child might not know as you read. "It says here that George Washington went to school to become a *surveyor*. What do you think that word means?" Then, look up the definition together.
- **Listen for new words** as you're watching TV. News programs often include words your child may not know. "Have you ever heard the word *tsunami* before? Let's look it up to see what it means."
- **Use descriptive words** in your everyday speech. Instead of saying, "That's a nice shirt," say, "That's a vibrant scarlet shirt." Instead of "I'm tired," say, "I'm exhausted" or "weary."
- **Consult a thesaurus.** Together, find synonyms for words your child uses often when writing or speaking.
- **Create word walls.** Post vocabulary words and their definitions on a whiteboard. Seeing the words often helps reinforce their spelling and meaning throughout the week.
- **Play word games.** Games like Scrabble and Boggle encourage your child to experiment with new words in a fun, low-pressure setting.
- **Help your child create** a personal dictionary. When your child encounters a new word, suggest writing it and its definition in a notebook. Together, review those words from time to time.

Are you helping your child deal with frustration?



Elementary schoolers don't always have the skills to cope with life's minor hassles. Are you helping your child learn to deal with frustration? Respond *yes* or *no* to each statement:

1. **I understand** that it isn't my job to protect my child from all of life's ups and downs.
2. **I encourage my child** to keep trying when stuck on a problem. I ask questions to help my child think of solutions to try.
3. **I help my child link effort** to success. Sometimes I say, "Learning is not always easy. But you'll get it if you stick with it."
4. **I point out real-life stories** of successful people who have overcome challenges.
5. **I put my child's feelings** into words. "It's frustrating when learning something is taking longer than you hoped. But you'll get there."

How well are you doing?

If most of your responses are *yes*, you are encouraging your child to work through frustration. For each *no*, try that idea in the quiz.

Elementary School Parents make the difference!

Practical Ideas for Parents to Help Their Children.

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Celebrate the month of April with fun learning activities



April may bring showers—but it also brings learning opportunities. Here are some enjoyable things you can plan to do with your child this month:

- **April 2** is International Children's Book Day and Hans Christian Andersen's birthday. This day is designed to inspire a love of reading. Head to the library and check out some books!
- **April 13** is the birthday of Thomas Jefferson. Go online to learn more about the third U.S. president.
- **April 15** is income tax deadline day. Talk about the purpose of taxes. Practice calculating percentages with your child.
- **April 22** is Earth Day. As a family, think of something you can do to protect the planet. Perhaps you could plant a tree, reduce water usage or choose products with less packaging.
- **April 23** is the day Shakespeare's birthday is celebrated. Ask your child to write a scene for a play and act it out with friends or family.
- **April 26** is the birthday of John James Audubon, who is known for his drawings and paintings of North American birds. Challenge your child to draw pictures of the birds around your home.
- **April 27** is National Tell A Story Day. Take turns making up and sharing stories.
- **April 30** is International Jazz Day. Listen to some jazz with your child. Then each of you can describe how the music makes you feel.

Strengthening social skills can give learning a big boost



Students learn much more in school than academics. In every class, kids practice an important skill—getting along with others.

Research shows that problems with social skills can interfere with learning and make it difficult for kids to succeed in school and in life.

To reinforce social skills:

- **Be a role model.** Children notice how family members interact with others. Let your child see you being a caring neighbor. Introduce yourself to new people. Stay connected with friends and support people you care about.
- **Read books about friendship.** After reading, talk about the character interactions in the story.
- **Rehearse.** Kids need help practicing manners. With your child, pretend you're meeting new people. "Hi, I'm Charlie. Nice to meet you!" Also focus on sharing and kindness.
- **Socialize.** Give your child plenty of opportunities to spend time and interact with other kids. Head to a local playground. Participate in children's events at your local library. Sign up for a free class for kids at a community center.
- **Relax.** Children don't need lots of friends. Just one good buddy is fine, as long as your child cooperates well with others. If you have any concerns, talk with the teacher and work together on solutions.

Source: K. Steedly, Ph.D. and others, "Social Skills and Academic Achievement," *Evidence of Education,* National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities.

Questions & Answers

Q: My fourth-grader earns average grades, but I know they could be higher. Several of my friends pay their children for earning good grades. Is this something I should consider doing with my child?

A: Families want their children to do their best in school—and they are constantly looking for ways to motivate their kids to achieve. But there are some serious drawbacks to offering money for grades. Paying for grades:

- **Doesn't allow children** to enjoy the satisfaction of learning. Kids shouldn't need bribes to want to learn. They are natural learners. As they master new skills or memorize new facts, they gain self-esteem and self-confidence. However, when you pay your child for grades, you actually run the risk of decreasing your child's pleasure in learning.
- **Doesn't recognize effort.** Students should focus on doing their best. The goal is to keep trying and make progress. If your child is trying but still struggling with the material, talk to the teacher.
- **Decreases intrinsic** motivation. Students who get paid for doing some things may lose interest in doing things they aren't paid for. Pretty soon, your child will demand a reward for every task you assign—from mowing the grass to taking out the recycling to feeding the dog.

So what can you do to get your child's grades up? Help your student focus on learning and celebrate newly acquired skills. Offer praise for genuine effort.

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It Matters: Building Character

Help your child learn to take accountability



Is there such a thing as being too supportive when it comes to your elementary schooler's negative emotions? Experts say *yes*.

One study showed that families who are overly sympathetic about their children's troubled feelings think their kids are more socially well-adjusted than others. Those same kids' teachers, however, rate them as being less well-adjusted than their peers.

Why the disconnect? It could be that when families indulge every bad mood their child has, the child never stops to consider that there may be little justification for that mood.

This doesn't mean you should ignore your child's feelings. But rather than rush to agree every time your child feels wronged:

- **Ask for details.** If your child says a friend was mean, find out more before agreeing. Say, "Tell me what happened. What were you doing?" This way, you're encouraging your child to open up but not automatically agreeing that your child was treated badly.
- **Challenge your child.** If your student is upset about a quiz grade and says the quiz was really "unfair," ask questions. "Why wasn't it fair?" If the real story is that your child didn't study for it, then point that out. Your student was irresponsible, not mistreated.

Source: V.L. Castro and others, "Changing tides: Mothers' supportive emotion socialization relates negatively to third-grade children's social adjustment in school," *Social Development,* John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Teach your child to persevere when faced with challenges

If your child has set a major goal, such as earning an A on a project or making the competitive soccer team, achieving it will probably take hard work. And there may be times your child will feel like giving up. That's why it's important to encourage perseverance, especially when things are difficult. Here's how:



- **Discuss past successes.** Did your child master a challenging skill? How did your child do it? What did success feel like? What did your child learn?
- **Choose small goals** along the way. Make them something that can be reached quickly. If your child wants to read an entire series of books for example, start by setting a goal for your child to read the first book.
- **Listen for ideas.** Kids often mention goals without pinning them down. ("I'd love to be in the talent show" or "I hope I finish my report on time.") Together, create a step-by-step plan for success.
- **Brainstorm different strategies** to try if your child doesn't meet a goal. If the goal was too ambitious, help your child adjust it.
- **Be a cheerleader.** Say things like, "You are really sticking with this!" Even if your child misses the mark, praise any progress made.

Focus on four traits that create upstanding students



While children are born with unique personalities, their character—the choices they make and the values they hold—is shaped by their experiences and the lessons they learn.

To guide your child's character development, focus on teaching:

1. **Kindness.** Teach your child to imagine how others might feel and to treat them with consideration. Make caring for others a priority in your family.
2. **Flexibility.** Encourage your child to listen to the opinions of others. Teach and model the power of negotiation and compromise.
3. **Responsibility.** Let your child know that responsibilities are like promises. They are things that must be done—especially when others are counting on your child.
4. **Self-control.** Explain that while people can't control others' actions, they can control their own behavior. Encourage your child to always think before acting.