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make the difference!
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Explore household math & science tools with your child

Your child's classroom is full of tools like rulers, maps, calculators and magnifying glasses. Using similar tools at home helps your child become familiar with them, which builds confidence in school.

Here are three simple ways to turn everyday activities into hands-on learning opportunities:

1. **Bring a "tool kit" on family walks.**
   - » *Use a magnifying glass* to observe insects, leaves, pinecones and acorns.
   - » *Use a tape measure* to find the *circumference* (distance around) tree trunks.
   - » *Use an outdoor thermometer* and compare temperatures in sunlight and shade.
2. **Give your child tools for playtime.**
   - » *A calculator* to play restaurant.
   - » *A ruler* to measure block towers.
   - » *A stopwatch* to time friendly competitions. How quickly can your child run across the yard? How many times can your child jump rope in one minute?
3. **Involve your child in daily tasks.**
   - » *Use a stud finder* and a level when hanging pictures.
   - » *Read a map* and point out how the speedometer shows your speed when on the road.
   - » *Use a scale* to weigh produce at the grocery store.
   - » *Use measuring cups and spoons* to follow a recipe.

Source: M.E. Ennes and others, "Children and Parents' Perceptions of Access to Science Tools at Home and Their Role in Science Self-efficacy," *Research in Science Education,* Springer.

Word games strengthen writing skills



If your elementary schooler struggles to form and punctuate sentences, turn writing into a fun game. Try these simple activities to sharpen skills:

- **Fill-in-the-Blanks.** Review the different parts of speech then write a story. Leave out some words and indicate their part of speech. "The dog stepped on a (noun)." Take turns filling in the blanks with silly words. Then, read the story aloud.
- **Punctuation Point.** Write a short story without any punctuation. Reading it will be tricky, which demonstrates why punctuation is vital for clear writing. Next, have your child edit the story by adding punctuation that makes it easy to read. Swap roles and let your child write a story for you to punctuate.
- **Story Starters.** Give your child a creative writing prompt and write the first sentence of a story. Then, have your child add the next sentence. Keep taking turns until your story is complete.

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Talk to your child about showing respect for teachers, classmates



Respectful behavior is essential for education. When students show respect for teachers and classmates, they help create the positive academic environment all children need to be successful learners.

Encourage your child to:

- **Address the teacher by name.** Simply saying "Good morning, Mrs. Jones" is an easy way to show respect.
- **Be courteous.** Your child should say *please* and *thank you* to the teacher and classmates.
- **Raise a hand.** When students avoid interrupting and wait to be called on, they demonstrate respect for others.
- **Do what's expected.** Everyone in the class has a job to do. If the teacher doesn't plan any lessons, no one can learn anything. If students don't do their jobs—completing assignments, listening to others—it makes learning more difficult for themselves and others.
- **Listen to the teacher's comments.** Teachers want students to learn and improve. That means they must point out mistakes. Students do much better in school when they can recognize and accept constructive feedback.

"Respect for ourselves guides our morals; respect for others guides our manners."

—Laurence Sterne

Help your child practice being conscientious with schoolwork



Conscientiousness is a student's ability to set and meet goals, make informed choices, and fulfill their responsibilities to others.

While this trait develops as your child grows, studies show schoolwork is an easy way to help it bloom!

To help your child strengthen conscientiousness:

- **Create a study routine.** Help your child set a regular time to do assignments in a quiet, organized space. Having a plan makes it easier to stay on track.
- **Encourage your child** to take it slow and to complete every task carefully. Quality work is more important than finishing quickly.
- **Review work together.** After finishing an assignment, have your child spend a few minutes looking it over to confirm answers are correct, then show it to you.
- **Cheer your child on.** If an assignment is challenging, encourage your child to keep going. Conscientious students do their best to meet deadlines, even when the going gets tough.
- **Focus on the learning process**. Praise your child for effort, focus and organization. When you make it clear you value hard work, your child is more likely to stay dedicated to tasks.

Source: R. Göllner and others, "Is doing your homework associated with becoming more conscientious?" *Journal of Research in Personality,* Elsevier Inc.

Do you help your child deal with disappointment?



At some point, every child experiences disappointment. Are you helping your child learn to handle these moments? Answer *yes* or *no* to each question below to find out:

1. **Do you help your child** understand what can't be changed and what can? "We can't stop the rain, but we can change our plans."
2. **Do you encourage your child** to look on the bright side? "Your Lego tower fell, but now you get to build something new!"
3. **Do you help your child** learn from mistakes? "Next time, studying for a few more days could help."
4. **Do you enforce the rule:** It is OK to feel disappointed, but it is not OK to sulk? Your child's feelings are valid, but sulking does not solve problems.
5. **Do you help your child** brainstorm next steps—instead of trying to fix the problems yourself?

How well are you doing?

If you answered mostly *yes*, you're demonstrating how to cope when things don't go your child's way. For *no* answers, try those ideas.

Elementary School Parents make the difference!

Practical Ideas for Parents to Help Their Children.

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Show your child how to follow four steps to achieve any goal



Children gain confidence when they set goals and achieve them. Having goals also motivates students to work through challenges. When they feel discouraged or stuck, they can focus on a mental picture of what they are working toward.

When your child sets a goal, suggest choosing one that is achievable in a short amount of time. Then, help your child follow four steps to reach the goal:

1. **State the goal.** Make sure your child's goal is clear, written down and displayed where it will be seen daily. "My goal is to learn my multiplication facts by winter break."
2. **Plan how to meet the goal.** "I will make flash cards and study them for 15 minutes every night. I will ask Dad to quiz me on Fridays."
3. **Talk about the goal** with others—including teachers. This creates accountability and allows others to support your child's hard work.
4. **Do each step in the plan,** one at a time. If problems arise, talk about possible solutions. Perhaps your child is too tired or busy certain evenings to review flash cards. Suggest studying them in the mornings while eating breakfast instead.

Remember to praise your child's effort during every step of the journey. "I am proud of you for studying your multiplication facts this morning." And when your elementary schooler hits the goal, celebrate how much hard work paid off!

Chores can help your elementary schooler develop responsibility



Responsible children do better in school and grow up to become productive, responsible adults. One of the best ways to help your child practice responsibility is through family chores.

Chores help your child:

1. **Build school skills.** Learning to follow directions and complete tasks correctly provides practice for following instructions on school tasks.
2. **Feel needed.** Everyone wants to feel that their contribution matters. Be sure to acknowledge your child's help, such as: "Elena unloaded the dishwasher, so cleaning up after dinner will be much faster tonight!"
3. **Develop planning** and time management skills. Figuring out how to finish chores on schedule helps your child learn how to prioritize tasks and manage time appropriately.
4. **Feel a sense of ownership.** A child who has taken the time to sweep the floor is naturally less likely to track mud back inside.
5. **Take pride in effort.** The satisfaction of a job well done can carry over to schoolwork and motivate your child to tackle a long-term project or start writing a research paper.
6. **Learn essential life skills**. Before leaving home, your child should know things like how to prepare simple meals, care for clothing, manage money and keep things clean. The earlier children learn these lessons, the more prepared they will be for the future.

Questions & Answers

Q: My elementary schooler studies before test time but can't always recall the facts. Are there techniques that can improve my child's memory?

A: There are many memorization tricks that may help your child remember facts. Here are a few:

- **Acronyms.** Your child can make a word out of the first letter of each word in a series to represent a list, phrase or name. Many kids use the acronym ROY G. BIV to recall the colors of the rainbow: Red, Orange, Yellow, Green, Blue, Indigo, Violet.
- **Sentences.** Help your child use the first letter of each word to make a silly sentence, such as "My very educated mother just served us noodles" for the planets in order of their distance from the sun: Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune.
- **Grouping.** Have your child group things into manageable chunks. Instead of memorizing the capitals of every state, your child could divide them into geographic regions and memorize each region.
- **Rhymes.** Have your child think of rhymes for facts, such as "In 1492, Columbus sailed the ocean blue."
- **Visualization.** Your child can draw or imagine a picture of the material and then recall that image during the test.
- **Personalization.** Have your child relate the information to everyday life. An important date in history might also be a relative's birthday.
- **Singing.** Your child can replace words in a familiar song with facts to remember.

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It Matters: Schoolwork

Make study time calm and productive



Turn study time into a calm and productive part of your daily routine. These simple, effective strategies will help you support learning and set your child up for lasting success:

- **Remember the goal.** Schoolwork helps students practice what they're learning. Assignments and projects don't need to be perfect.
- **Make schoolwork a priority.** If your child can't finish work because of other activities, there is a problem. Adjust your child's schedule to allow enough time to concentrate on assignments.
- **Show interest.** You don't need to hover while your child works but ask questions to show you care. If your student is writing a report, for example, show excitement. Say things like, "You learned a lot about Ancient Greece. Tell me more!"
- **Expect some frustration.** Your child shouldn't melt down over every assignment, but a little complaining is completely normal. Stay calm and say that you believe your child can figure it out.
- **Encourage teamwork.** If your child has a question, suggest ways to find answers. This teaches your child to take responsibility for work instead of relying on you.
- **Let your child do the work.** Trust your child to handle school assignments independently. This builds confidence and shows that you believe in your child's ability to succeed.

Encourage your child to pay close attention to graphics

Many students skip the images in their reading assignments, but photos, maps and graphs can help them understand the material much better. These visuals also help students connect what they already know to the new information they are learning.

Before reading, have your child look closely at the graphics and answer these questions:

- **What do you see?** Have your child point out specific details.
- **What is this reading about?** Your child can make a prediction.
- **Why did the author include these?** Encourage your child to think about the purpose of the visuals.

Studying images before reading is a smart habit that gets your child's brain ready to learn and leads to better comprehension. This simple step turns your child into an active reader who hunts for meaning instead of just skimming the page.



Understand the four reasons teachers give assignments



Understanding the purpose behind an assignment can make it more rewarding—for students and families. Teachers usually assign work for one of these four reasons:

1. **Preparation.** Some assignments get your child ready for upcoming topics. If the teacher plans a lesson about the Civil War for instance, your child may be asked to read a passage about the period beforehand. Preparation assignments typically require reading or research.
2. **Practice.** Doing the same kind of work repeatedly—writing journal entries or solving similar math problems—reinforces your child's skills. This may sometimes seem tedious, but it works.
3. **Demonstration.** It's challenging for students to use different skills to show what they've learned. Projects such as preparing an oral report, writing a paper or putting on a play encourage creativity and let students demonstrate their understanding of concepts.
4. **Extension.** This type of work involves applying knowledge to a new situation. Your child might be asked to compare and contrast two historic events, do a science experiment or solve a real-life problem.