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make the difference!
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Spark your child's interest in reading by being a role model

Research shows that when children see family members reading, they're more likely to read themselves. By being a reading role model, you can show your child that reading is both fun and informative. For the best results:

- **Create a reading-rich environment.** Surround your home with reading material so it's easy for your child to pick up something to read.
- **Let your child** see you reading something every day. Make it clear that you think reading is worth your time. Invite your child to join you.
- **Tell your child** *why* you are reading. Are you reading for information, to double-check something you think you know, or for enjoyment?
- **Look up a word** in the dictionary when you come across one you are unsure of. Ask if your child knows the meaning of the word.
- **Read aloud** to your child. When you come across something interesting, share a small part of it. This can motivate your child to finish reading it independently.
- **Use your library card**. When you take your child to the library, find something to check out for yourself.
- **Join your child.** When you see your child reading, pick up something to read yourself.
- **Give books as gifts.** Show your child that books are special by giving them as gifts. Suggest your child give books to friends, too.
- **Ask relatives** to support your child's reading habits. Could they record themselves reading a book aloud?

Look for lines of symmetry in nature



If you fold a picture of a butterfly in half, you'll notice that the two halves match exactly. That's because butterflies, like many things in nature, are *symmetrical*.

Looking for lines of symmetry together is a great way to practice recognizing patterns. It is also a fun family activity that can give your child a new way of looking at nature.

To get started:

- **Look for natural objects** that are symmetrical and take photos of them. Flowers, leaves, spider webs and shells may all have these lines.
- **Have your child predict** where the line of symmetry will be. Then, fold the photo along that line to see if the two sides match up exactly.
- **Find lines of symmetry** in other places, such as in the pages of a magazine or book. Remember that lines of symmetry can be vertical (as in the letter A) or horizontal (as in the letter B). They can even be diagonal. Sometimes, things may have more than one line of symmetry.

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Get more out of conversations with your elementary schooler



Are you tired of asking your child questions about school and getting little response? Try this effective strategy:

Instead of asking lots of questions when your child gets home from school, share a few things about your day first. For example: "I've had such a busy day. I had a meeting with my boss in the morning. I took Grandma to her doctor's appointment this afternoon. Then I stopped by the store to pick up groceries. It was good to get home."

After you've finished, ask your child to tell you a little bit about the school day. Give open-ended prompts if necessary: "What was the best part of your day?" "Tell me about what you learned today."

You can also use this strategy to start discussions about schoolwork. If your child brings home artwork from school, look at it and make some observations about what you see. Comment on the colors. Say what you like about it. Tell what it reminds you of, etc. Then, ask your child, "What does it mean to you?"

> **"The way we talk to our children becomes their inner voice."**
>
> ***—Peggy O'Mara***

Responsibility boosts your child's ability to succeed



Educators agree that responsible children do better in school. Luckily, families have countless opportunities to foster responsibility.

Here are just a few to start with:

- **Enforce a few age-appropriate** rules and consequences. State them clearly so your child knows the exact behavior you expect.
- **Trust your child** with meaningful tasks. School-age children are capable of handling responsibilities such as picking up their rooms, setting the table and helping with the laundry.
- **Discuss ways to help others.** Talk about what it means to be a responsible member of a community. Consider different ways your family can contribute, such as by volunteering your time for an important cause or donating gently-used clothing to a charity.
- **Talk about financial responsibility.** If your child has money from an allowance or gifts, teach about budgeting, spending, saving and giving.
- **Let your child make decisions,** such as how to solve a problem with a school friend. Help your elementary schooler think through the pros and cons.
- **Help your child develop** time-management skills by using a planner or calendar to keep track of responsibilities.
- **Adjust rules and responsibilities.** As your child matures, abilities will change. Consider assigning more grown-up chores. Or perhaps your child can make new and exciting decisions. Talk about how great it feels to be responsible!

How well are you listening to your child?



Communication between families and children is important for developing a positive relationship. You want your child to know that you are always available to talk about any school problems or difficult situations. But when your child talks, are you really listening? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

___**1. Do you give your child** some uninterrupted listening time every day, like after school or at bedtime?

___**2. Do you avoid interrupting** when your child is speaking to you?

___**3. Do you say that you want** to hear what your child has to say—and if you're not able to listen, set a time when you can give your full attention?

___**4. Do you ask questions** if you don't understand what your child is saying?

___**5. Do you sometimes rephrase** what your child has said to confirm that you understood?

How well are you doing?

If most of your answers are *yes*, you are promoting effective communication with your child by demonstrating strong listening skills. For *no* answers, try those ideas.

Elementary School Parents make the difference!

Practical Ideas for Parents to Help Their Children.

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Everyone wins when families volunteer and get involved!



Becoming more involved in your child's school offers valuable opportunities for both you and your student. It's not too late in the year to give it a try. Here are six reasons to get involved:

1. **Your child will benefit.** Being involved in your child's school promotes academic success. Even if you're not volunteering in the classroom, your child will know you're there and see that you value learning. This makes it more likely your child will, too.
2. **You'll get to know teachers** and other school staff. That makes it easier to ask for help when your child needs it.
3. **The school will benefit.** Schools that have a strong school volunteer base perform better. Whether you read to a class, help in the cafeteria or tutor students in the library, you'll be freeing school staff to spend more time with students who need it.
4. **You'll get to know other families.** They can be valuable resources and provide advice when needed.
5. **Volunteering is easy.** Many schools offer training to volunteers. And there are volunteer jobs that can be completed at home, at night or on weekends. So everyone can get involved.
6. **Volunteering is fun.** You'll meet lots of interesting students and adults. You may learn new skills. And you'll get a good feeling from knowing you've done something worthwhile.

Celebrate the lives of notable people born in February



February is filled with birthdays of notable people. Plan some fun activities to help your child learn about:

- **February 7**—Charles Dickens. Read one of his classic tales together. Many have been adapted for children, making them more accessible.
- **February 8**—Jules Verne. He is often referred to as the father of science fiction. Read one of his science fiction stories together.
- **February 11**—Thomas Edison. Ask your child to invent something to improve daily life.
- **February 12**—Abraham Lincoln. He delivered one of the best known speeches in American history, the Gettysburg Address. Challenge your child to memorize the speech.
- **February 15**— Susan B. Anthony. Go online to learn more about this activist who fought for women's right to vote.
- **February 17**—Michael Jordan. He is known as one of the greatest basketball players of all time. Challenge your child to a one-minute basketball shoot out.
- **February 19**—Nicolaus Copernicus. Take a walk together and look at the stars this early astronomer studied.
- **February 21**—Nina Simone. Listen to the singer's music with your child. Talk about how her songs make you feel and think about different things.
- **February 25**—Pierre-Auguste Renoir. Look at his paintings online or in a book. Ask your child to create a painting in Renoir's style.

Questions & Answers

Q: My fourth-grader is very competitive in sports. The teacher has noticed this competitive spirit in the classroom, too. Instead of taking the time to be neat or to check work, my child rushes through assignments, hoping to be the first one finished. I know this habit will affect my child's grades. How can I help?

A: It sounds like your child has a habit of turning tasks into competitions—and wants to be first across the finish line. But being first isn't what matters when it comes to schoolwork.

To change this habit:

- **Talk with the teacher.** Say you would like to work together on a plan to help your child focus more on *quality* work, instead of *speedy* work.
- **Talk to your child.** Put that competitive nature to work by using a comparison from a sport, such as basketball. Explain that sometimes it is important for a player to get down the court as fast as possible. But when a player is shooting free throws, accuracy is more important than speed. Doing schoolwork is more like shooting free throws.
- **Look over your child's** assignments each night and check the work for neatness and accuracy. Let your child know that if it is not up to an appropriate standard, it will have to be redone. In school, the teacher can try the same approach, looking over work before it's handed in.

Soon your child will figure out that slowing down results in higher quality work the first time—which actually takes less time in the long run!

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It Matters: Motivation

Encouragement is more effective than praise



Most adults praise children with phrases like "Great job!" and "That looks amazing!" But experts agree that *encouragement* has a more significant effect than *praise* on a child's motivation. So what is the difference between the two?

Praise:

- **Focuses on results.** "You did a great job on your science project! You earned an A!"
- **Uses opinion words** such as *good, great, terrific* and *wonderful.*
- **Is typically given** when children do what is expected of them.

Encouragement:

- **Recognizes effort and progress.** "Look at that project! I can tell you've spent a lot of time on it! It must feel good to know you gave it your best effort!"
- **Uses descriptive words.** "You picked up your room without being asked. Look at that *clean* floor and *organized* desk!"
- **Can be given** regardless of a child's performance. "That didn't work out the way you planned, did it? I can tell you're disappointed, but I know you'll try again next week. What do you think you might do differently?"

The big difference is that words of praise lead children to rely on *your* assessment of their accomplishments. Praise promotes a dependency on affirmations. Words of encouragement, on the other hand, lead children to form their *own* positive assessment of themselves—which makes them feel capable.

High expectations motivate students to succeed in school

When adults expect elementary schoolers to succeed, students' chances of doing so improve greatly. Expect kids to come up short, and the odds are that they will.

Children are usually keenly aware of how their families view them, and they often tailor their actions to those views. So it's very important to have high expectations—and to express them to your child.



To set effective expectations:

- **Make sure what you expect** is within your child's abilities. If you set expectations that are either too high or too low, your child may do poorly.
- **Post a list of expectations.** Include expectations for behavior in places and situations such as home, school, study time, etc.
- **Be consistent.** Don't lower your expectations to make your child happy. Don't raise them because you've had a rough day.
- **Set your child up for success.** Offer support to help your child meet expectations. For example, provide a well-lit study space and keep distractions to a minimum.

Offer your elementary schooler motivation to keep learning



Students who are motivated to learn are likely to be more successful in school than those who are not. Motivation comes from within your child, but the right words and actions from you can help nurture it. Try these ideas:

- **Be a learner yourself.** Let your child see you read books. Watch educational programs. Attend school functions. Try new things. Show curiosity.
- **Share what you learn.** Talk about new ideas or scientific discoveries with your child. Discuss things you read or hear.
- **Show an interest** in what your child is learning. Ask questions to learn and share—not to check up on your child.
- **Stay positive.** If your child has problems in school, talk about how to solve them. Meet with the teacher and discuss ways you can work together to help your child succeed.
- **Show faith** in your child's ability to learn. Offer praise when your child shows effort.