

# Helping Children Learn<sup>®</sup>

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School



November 2011

PS 101 School in the Gardens

Randy St. Germain/Parent Coordinator

## Encourage regular writing at home

Children need to be taught how to express themselves in writing. It takes practice to know which word to choose to describe your thoughts. If you help your child become familiar with this process at home, she's more likely to be comfortable writing at school, too—and you'll see that comfort reflected in her grades.



Here's how to encourage your child's writing at home:

- **Make it easy.** Have pens, pencils, paper and notebooks around the house. Send your child email or text messages. Or have a "silent hour" where all communication happens by writing!
- **Play games.** Do crossword or word-find puzzles with your child. Play Scrabble or Boggle. You might even invent a new board game together. Have your child design the board and write the rules.
- **Suggest that your child keep a journal.** If she's not sure what to write about, ask her "What if?" questions to spark her creative imagination. What if oranges were purple? What if dogs could talk?
- **Look for real-life reasons for your child to write.** You can encourage your child to write notes to friends, to-do lists or shopping lists. Or have her write a formal menu for family dinner!
- **Be a role model.** Talk about what you're writing—"I'm writing a letter to your Aunt Mary." "I'm typing up a report for work." Use a dictionary or thesaurus when you read and write and encourage your child to use those references, too.



## Choose the best ways to discipline

Research shows that children react best to discipline that isn't too strict or too permissive. It's most effective to strike a balance. Remember to:

- **Be positive.** Motivate your child with love, not fear. Avoid punishments and put the focus on what your child does right.
- **Set limits.** Choose rules carefully. Ask yourself, "Is this rule necessary?"
- **Use consequences.** Connect the consequence to the behavior. For example, "You didn't finish your homework, so you can't watch your TV show."
- **Give choices.** Over time, you want your child to develop self-discipline. Allowing him to make age-appropriate choices builds confidence and responsibility.
- **Manage your emotions.** It's natural for parents to feel angry and frustrated sometimes. Wait until you're calm to discipline.

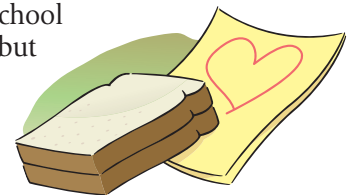
Source: L. Markham, "Positive Discipline," Aha! Parenting, <http://yourparentingsolutions.com/parenting-tools/positive-discipline/timeouts>.

## Respect promotes learning

Basic manners help classrooms run smoothly. So encourage respectful habits at home—like saying *please* and *thank you* and taking turns. The most important thing you can do is to set a good example. When your family demonstrates good manners at home, your child is more likely to act properly at school, too.

## Send some lunchtime love

You can't go to school with your child, but you can let her know you're thinking of her. Tuck something special into her lunch. Surprise your child with a note of encouragement on her napkin, a comic cut from the newspaper or a family photo.



## Try these five steps to solving word problems

Sometimes, the reason kids can't find the *answer* to a math word problem is that they can't figure out what *question* they're supposed to be answering. To help your child solve word problems, have him:

1. **Read** the problem aloud.
2. **Identify** the question the problem asks: "How many marbles will John have?"
3. **Find** key facts—John has 9 marbles and Sam has 11. Sam gives John 3 marbles.
4. **Write** a math problem:  $9 \text{ marbles} + 3 \text{ marbles} = \text{how many marbles?}$
5. **Solve** the problem. "John has 12 marbles."





## How can parents help their child focus on homework?

**Q:** I'd like my son to get his homework finished before dinner so we could have family time in the evening. But he dawdles, and homework seems to take him forever. He is constantly getting up and moving around—and I have to keep reminding him to finish his assignments. How can I keep him focused on his homework?

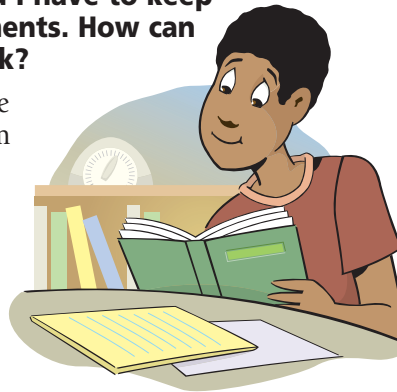
**A:** Your son may need some time off before settling down to do his homework. Ask him how he feels when he gets home from school. Is he tired? Does he just want to relax? Does he want to play outside?

Based on what he tells you, come up with a schedule that works for both of you. Tell him that the first 45 minutes or one hour are his to schedule. He can relax. He can play outside.

Give him a five-minute warning when the free time is nearly up. Then use a kitchen timer to signal that it's time to do his homework.

You can also use the timer to keep him on task. Have him estimate the time he'll need to complete an assignment. Set the timer. Expect him to keep working until he finishes the work or the timer goes off.

The good news is that he may spend less time dawdling and more time working. So you'll still have time for family!



## Is your child learning to be thankful?

Kids who learn to be grateful are less likely to whine when they don't get what they want. So they get along better with friends and adults at school and in life. Answer the following questions *yes* or *no* to see if you are helping your child learn to be thankful:

1. **Do you ask** everyone in your family to identify one thing for which they are grateful each day?
2. **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, like a beautiful cloud you spot on your walk to the bus?
4. **Do you encourage** your family to focus on things you can do together instead of things you can't afford?

5. **Do you and your child talk** about the things you have to be grateful for each night before bed?

**How did you do?** Each yes answer means you are helping your child become more grateful. For each no answer, try that idea from the quiz.

*"Who does not thank for little will not thank for much."*  
—Estonian Proverb

## Make attendance a priority

During the busy holiday season, it is sometimes hard to get kids to school on time. But building a habit of regular attendance is important for your child today—and in the future. You build responsibility as you stress the need to get to school on time. Make every effort not to let holiday travel or activities keep your child from attending school.

## Turn off TV & open a book

Research links higher levels of television viewing to lower academic performance—especially reading scores. Why? Watching TV is time not spent reading. Limit your child to one hour of TV a day. Then cuddle up and read with your child.

Source: "Children, Adolescents, and Television" American Academy of Pediatrics [http://aapolicy.aapublications.org/cgi/content/full/pediatrics;107/2/423?fulltext=Children+%2C+Adolescents+%2c+Television&searchid=QID\\_NOT\\_SET](http://aapolicy.aapublications.org/cgi/content/full/pediatrics;107/2/423?fulltext=Children+%2C+Adolescents+%2c+Television&searchid=QID_NOT_SET).

## Encourage positive thinking

Coaches encourage athletes to picture themselves scoring a goal. To use this same strategy to promote academic achievement:

- **Help** your child create a mental picture of success. "I want you to see yourself getting an A on your spelling test."
- **Stress** the importance of effort. Say, "You worked hard to master adding and subtracting. I know if you put forth the same effort, you can master the multiplication tables, too."
- **Name** the positive behavior. "Your organization and planning really paid off on that project!"



Source: J.R. Ban, *Parents Assuring Student Success: Achievement Made Easy by Learning Together*, National Educational Service.

### Helping Children Learn®

Published in English and Spanish, September through May.

Publisher: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.

Editor: Jennifer McGovern.

Staff Editors: Rebecca Miyares & Erika Beasley.

Writer: Pat Hodgdon. Production Manager: Pat Carter.

Translations Editor: Victoria Gaviola.

Layout & Illustrations: Maher & Mignella, Cherry Hill, NJ.

Copyright © 2011, The Parent Institute®, a division of NIS, Inc.

P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474

1-800-756-5525 • [www.parent-institute.com](http://www.parent-institute.com) • ISSN 1527-1013