

Helping Children Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School



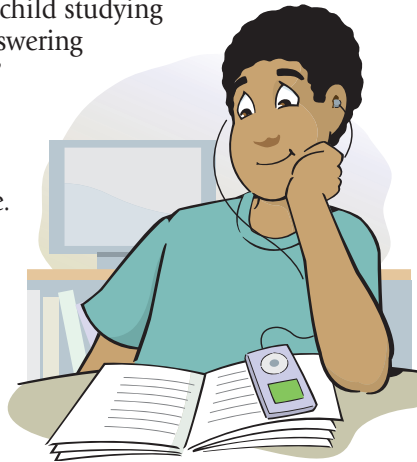
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PS 101 School in the Gardens

Randy St. Germain/Parent Coordinator

Can multitasking be effective?

Look around at homework time. Is your child studying while singing along to music? Are you answering his questions while checking your email? "Multitasking" has become a way of life, but that isn't necessarily good. In fact, while multitasking, the brain doesn't *really* concentrate on several tasks at once. It moves quickly from one to another, not giving *anything* its full attention. To avoid multitasking mistakes:



- **Prevent distractions.** Choose a calm place for your child to study—free of TV, ringing phones and loud music. Ask family members to keep quiet during study time.
- **Take breaks.** Instead of doing several things at once, schedule tasks consecutively. "From 4 to 4:30 I'll help James with homework. At 4:30, he can get a snack, and I'll make some calls."
- **Do an experiment.** If you and your child doubt that multitasking makes you less effective, test it out. Choose a task that requires some concentration. Then do it with and without distractions.
- **Find solutions.** Your child wants to watch TV, but he has math problems to do. Record the show so he can concentrate on his assignment.
- **Set a good example.** It's natural to want to accomplish as much as possible, as quickly as possible. But do what really works. When you give your child undivided attention, you show him how to focus—and how important he is to you.

Prepare for conferences

Parent-teacher conferences can help you, your child's teacher and your child prepare for the rest of the school year. As you get ready for your conference, here are four questions to ask your child's teacher:

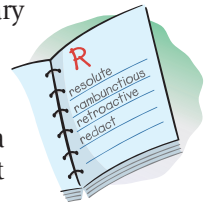
1. **What skills** will my child be expected to master this year?
2. **How will you evaluate** my child's progress?
3. **What can I do** at home to help?
4. **What is the best way** for us to communicate with each other?

A homemade ABC book can build vocabulary skills

Build your child's vocabulary with an ABC notebook.

Have your child create a page for every letter of the alphabet. When she reads a new word, have her write it on the corresponding page.

Review the book together often, and encourage your child to use these words when she is speaking or writing.



Source: J. Harmon and others, *Instructional Strategies for Teaching Content Vocabulary*, International Reading Association.



Schedule time for your child to play!

The American Academy of Pediatrics says that play should remain a central part of childhood. Of course, homework and organized activities still can have a place in your child's life. But it's just as important for them to have time for themselves.

Let your child have unstructured time to hang out with her friends, develop hobbies, read or just daydream. Encourage her to play pretend—turn the couch into a pirate ship or the dining room table into a fort. Head outside for Simon Says or digging in a sandbox.

Psychologists say that many skills children need for success in school are developed through childhood play, including:

- **Problem-solving.**
- **Teamwork.**
- **Impulse control.**
- **Creative thinking.**

So when you're writing out the week's schedule, be sure to include time to play every day.

Source: H. Stout, "Effort to Restore Children's Play Gains Momentum," *New York Times*, www.nytimes.com/2011/01/06/garden/06play.html.

Strengthen observation skills with pumpkins

October is the pumpkin's big month. But some jack-o'-lanterns aren't made from pumpkins. They're made from squash.

How can you tell the difference? A pumpkin has a five-sided stem. A squash does not. On your next trip to the grocery store or a farm, look at the pumpkins. How many are really pumpkins? What else can your child see that's different about the two? Encourage him to use his observation skills!





How can parents help kids study for spelling tests?

Q: My daughter doesn't do well on her weekly spelling tests. How can I help her prepare?

A: Spelling is an important part of reading and writing success, so it's great that you want to help your daughter become a better speller. To turn spelling review from challenging to fun, have her:

- **Write a story** using all the week's words.
- **Eat her words.** Serve alphabet cereal for breakfast or alphabet soup for a light dinner. Allow your child to use her meal to spell as many of her spelling words as she can.
- **Get moving.** Write the words in the air, on a chalkboard or in sand. Use refrigerator alphabet magnets to spell out words. She can even write words on the bathtub wall with shaving cream!
- **Make a spelling place mat.** Help your daughter use a marker to write her spelling words on a large piece of construction paper. Then cover the paper with clear contact paper to create a place mat for your child to look at while she eats, all week long.
- **Sing and spell.** Remember the song, "Bingo"? Try putting a five-letter word to that melody. Sing it together while you're riding in the car!



When spelling is fun, your daughter may be more motivated to review with you. If she continues to have trouble, talk with her teacher. Ask how you can help your daughter at home.



Does your child follow directions?

Classrooms—and families—function better when children know how to follow directions. Answer the following questions *yes* or *no* to see if you are teaching your child this vital skill:

- ___ **1. Do you avoid** giving directions until you have your child's undivided attention? Do you try to look him in the eye and call him by name?
- ___ **2. Do you name** the steps of a task if it involves several? "First, pick up your clothes. Then put your books away."
- ___ **3. Do you ask** your child to repeat what you said if you're not sure he is paying attention?
- ___ **4. Do you write** out directions on a checklist or a poster for things you do every day (getting ready for school)?

- ___ **5. Do you praise** your child when he has followed directions correctly?

How did you do? Each *yes* answer means you are teaching your child the skill of following directions. For each *no* answer, try that idea from the quiz.

"If passion drives you, let reason hold the reins."

—Benjamin Franklin

Know when to give praise

Self-esteem helps kids grow into healthy adults. Kids who think poorly of themselves are likely to get into trouble, whether it's using drugs or failing their classes.

But save praise for times when your child does something really special. Be specific about what he did well. Comment on how hard he worked and what he learned, not just high grades.

Get involved this year!

What does "being involved" with your child's education really mean? It means you should try to:

- **Always be aware.** If you notice your child is struggling with schoolwork, or if she's bothered by other students, contact the teacher right away.
- **Attend school events.** Children appreciate having their families participate in school activities.
- **Keep up with class activities.** Read everything the teacher sends home. Also ask your child, "What are you working on now?" Look at your child's books, and see what topics the class is covering.



Discuss children's bad days

When your child's upset, it helps to talk about what happened. You can:

- **Help** label your child's feelings. "That must have made you pretty angry."
- **Say** you understand. "I can imagine how you felt when Madison said that."
- **Share** an experience of your own.

Source: D. Stipek and K. Seal, *Motivated Minds: Raising Children to Love Learning*, Owl Books, a division of Henry Holt and Company.

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