

# Helping Children Learn<sup>®</sup>

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School



February 2020

The School District, City of Erie  
Federal Programs

## When your child is the teacher, learning comes naturally

Parents spend a lot of time teaching their children. But one of the most effective ways you can reinforce what your child is learning is to switch roles and ask her to teach you.

Trying to teach you what she is studying can help your child understand her assignments better. It can also make it clear what she doesn't yet know. And feeling capable and in control can motivate her to learn more.

Try these strategies with your child:

- **Show interest** in what she is learning in school. Ask her to show you an assignment, explain a concept or read a handout aloud to you.
- **Let her do the quizzing.** When she's studying for a test, she can see if you can define her vocabulary words or recall the math or science facts she needs to know.
- **Have her help you solve a problem** or create something. What does she think you should do first, second, next?
- **Ask her to teach you how to play** one of her favorite games.
- **Ask for her opinion** about something she knows—"Which team do you think has the strongest defense?"—and consider it before solidifying your own opinion.



## Reading historical fiction helps students connect with history

Learning about the past gives students a deeper understanding of the present and how it was shaped. But reading history in textbooks can often seem a bit dull or dry to them. That's where historical fiction can help.

The best historical fiction brings a past time to life. It shares the details about what people wore, what they ate and how they really lived. It adds a vivid human element to facts, dates and statistics.

To create a historical connection:

- **Ask teachers and librarians** to suggest titles that present facts accurately and avoid myths and stereotypes.

- **Choose books** with illustrations. They draw children in.
- **Read aloud**—especially if a book is too challenging for your child to read on his own.
- **Encourage your child** to read more than one book about a period. Talk about how people can view the same events differently.

Source: E.R. Codell, *How to Get Your Child to Love Reading*, Algonquin Books.

## Health is key to attendance

Illnesses like colds and flu are a leading cause of school absences. To help keep your child healthy and in school, teach her to:

- **Wash her hands** often. She should use soap and wash for 20 seconds. She can also use alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- **Avoid touching** her nose, mouth and eyes—or anyone else's.
- **Use a tissue** to cover coughs and sneezes, then throw it in the trash and wash her hands again.



Source: "Healthy Habits to Help Prevent Flu," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, [niswc.com/washhands](https://www.cdc.gov/niswc.com/washhands).

## Explore local geography

To boost your child's geography skills and help him relate to the world around him, have your child:

- **Draw a map** of the route from your home to school. Follow his map together.
- **Identify directions.** Stand outside your front door. Which way is *north*? In which direction is the school?
- **Look for street patterns.** Do streets run north/south, while avenues run east/west? Are street names alphabetical?



## Add to math vocabulary

Memorizing math terms makes solving math problems easier. Help your child:

- **Link symbols to words.** Have her create flash cards with a symbol (%) on one side and the word it represents on the other (percent).
- **Relate new terms** to concepts she knows. Is she learning about *centimeters*? Talk about how there are 100 *cents* in a dollar, 100 years in a *century*, and 100 *centimeters* in a meter.



## How can parents instill a desire to earn good grades?

**Q:** My third grader used to be a top student. We always celebrated his report card. This year, his grades are barely average. Whenever I ask him about it, he says, "Average is OK." His teacher says he can do the work. How can I motivate him to care about grades?

**A:** Your child probably does care about his grades. And that feeling may be behind his reluctance to strive for them.

Third grade is harder than second. Your son may be so afraid of trying his best and falling short that he's given up trying at all.

To rekindle his motivation:

- **Help your child see** that he *can* do third grade work. Express your faith in him. Then ask for the teacher's help. Could the teacher give your son some work that's just a little hard for him? Success will build your child's self-confidence, and then the teacher can increase the challenge.
- **Focus on learning** rather than grades. Even when his grades improve, talk more about your son's new skills and how much he is learning.
- **Look for other ways** to help your son figure out that he can handle challenges. Emphasize his strengths. Encourage him to participate in an activity where his skills will improve with practice, like chess or a sport.



## Are you encouraging civil behavior?

In school—as in the rest of life—respectful behavior makes cooperation and learning from others easier. Are you teaching your child how to show respect for others? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

1. **Do you talk** about the importance of treating others with kindness and honesty?
2. **Do you model** attentive listening when your child is speaking to you? Do you restate her points to confirm your understanding?
3. **Do you help** your child find healthy ways to vent anger—and avoid taking frustrations out on others?
4. **Do you discuss** the need for rules, and enforce consequences fairly and consistently?
5. **Do you teach** your child to admit mistakes and apologize?

### How well are you doing?

*More yes answers mean your child is learning about respect and civility first hand. For each no, try that idea.*

*"Every action done in Company, ought to be with Some Sign of Respect to those that are Present."*

*—16th-century French maxim as quoted by George Washington*

## Ask your child to retell stories after reading

Studies show that retelling stories helps children become more thoughtful readers—which improves their comprehension. Knowing that he'll be asked to retell a story he's read encourages your child to:

- **Pay attention** to words he doesn't know and figure out their meanings.
- **Focus on structure.** What happened in the beginning, middle and end of the tale?
- **Remember key details,** like the names of the characters.

Source: B. Taylor and J. Ysseldyke, *Effective Instruction for Struggling Readers: K-6*, Teachers College Press.

## Affirm your love often

There's no age limit for telling your child you love her—big kids need to hear it as much as babies. Every day, tell your child something you love about her. You may want to do it at bedtime. Or tuck a note in her lunch bag. Sometimes, a simple hug can say as much as a wordy compliment.



## Provide time for thinking

Your elementary schooler is learning more than facts and figures. He is learning how to think. To nurture his developing skills:

- **Give your child time** to figure out solutions for himself. If he's forgotten what he's supposed to do for homework, ask, "How could you find out?"
- **Discuss current events.** Give your child an article to read on an issue. Ask for his opinion, then ask why he thinks other people might disagree.
- **Encourage reflection.** When he has completed a project, ask him to consider how the process went. Did he allow enough time to finish? What did he learn?

### Helping Children Learn<sup>®</sup>

Published in English and Spanish, September through May.

Publisher: Doris McLaughlin.

Publisher Emeritus: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.

Editor: Alison McLean.

Staff Editors: Rebecca Miyares & Erika Beasley.

Production Manager: Sara Amon.

Translations Editor: Victoria Gaviola.

Copyright © 2020, The Parent Institute<sup>®</sup>, a division of PaperClip Media, Inc.

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

1-800-756-5525 • www.parent-institute.com • ISSN 1527-1013