

Helping Children Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

Family and School Partnerships

Fairfax County Public Schools



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Build your child's literacy skills in a variety of fun ways at home

Literacy involves both reading and writing, so it's vital that children strengthen both these skills with plenty of practice. And studies show that students who sharpen their literacy skills at home—even with activities that are just for fun—do better in school than kids who don't.



To encourage reading and writing:

- **Make them "anytime"** activities. Don't save reading stories for bedtime or writing for study time. Provide opportunities to do both throughout the day. Keep books out where your child can pick them up. Have your child help you write a shopping list.
- **Start a family journal.** Each weekend, have your child jot down a few sentences about the week. Then add your own thoughts. By the end of the school year, you'll have a written record of family memories!
- **Play word games.** Each round of Scrabble or Bananagrams does more than entertain your child. It hones reading and writing skills.
- **Set an example.** When you have some downtime, reach for a book or magazine. Try writing a poem about a snowy day. Let your child see you writing letters to friends, and enjoying reading the responses.

Source: N.L. Alston-Abel and V.W. Berninger, "Relationships Between Home Literacy Practices and School Achievement: Implications for Consultation and Home-School Collaboration," *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation*, Taylor and Francis.



Promote kindness this Valentine's Day

Did you know that kindness is a school success skill? In studies, children who are kind to others tend to score higher on tests and make more progress toward learning goals. Discuss the importance of being kind to others as you and your child enjoy Valentine activities together. Here are some that foster a variety of school skills:

- **Discover the origins** of Valentine's Day. Help your child collect interesting facts to share with family over a meal.
- **Play an estimation game.** Fill a jar with pieces of heart-shaped candy or small items. Ask family members to guess the number of

items in the jar. The winner gets to pass out the contents.

- **Learn how to say "I love you"** in different languages.
- **Make a heart collage.** Gather materials with different textures. Cut out hearts and have your child glue them on paper to create art full of love to give to a friend.

Source: N. Morrison, "If You Teach Children To Be Kind You Get Better Results In Class," *Forbes*.

Go on a geography hunt around your house

Help your child make a real-world connection to faraway places without leaving home. Go through your house and talk about where things came from. A calculator may have come from Taiwan. A box of cereal may have a Michigan or Illinois address. Together, locate these places on a map.



Get the learning facts

Studies show that some commonly held beliefs about learning strategies aren't valid. Here are three facts to know:

1. **Students remember more** when they restate the information they are studying in their own words than when they reread it.
2. **Studying material** for a short time each day for several days works better than trying to learn and understand everything in one long study session.
3. **Kids learn in all kinds of ways**, depending on the situation. No one learning style is always best for a student.

Source: U. Boser, "What Do People Know About Excellent Teaching and Learning?" Center for American Progress.

Strengthen self-control

You want your child to thrive in school, both academically and socially. One way to help is to encourage accountability. Teach your child that we are all accountable for what we do.



You might suggest that your child repeat aloud each day: "I can't control others. But I can control my choices and my actions."



My child is too self-critical. How can I help?

Q: My fourth-grader complains about not being able to do anything right, which isn't true at all. My child is smart and capable. How can parents help children stop running themselves down?



A: In the upper elementary school grades, challenging schoolwork can bring on students' self-doubt and insecurity. Some kids feel pressure to measure up, and it can be scary when they feel they are falling short.

To polish your child's self-image:

- **Find outlets for success.** Recommend activities where your child is most likely to succeed. If sports are a strength, help your child practice and perfect skills. If your student enjoys reading, suggest starting a book club with friends.
- **Assign responsibilities.** You may hear complaints about having to sort the recycling or put away clean laundry, but have your child do it anyway. Explain that doing chores helps the whole family, and thank your child for making a valuable contribution. Offer praise for completing chores without reminders: "You're so responsible!"
- **Recognize accomplishments.** Did your child just do something wonderful? Show that you noticed the achievement, whether it was earning a good grade on a quiz or figuring out how to format a document on the computer.



Do you make it clear that school matters?

Daily attendance and effort in class are the foundation for academic success. Are you emphasizing these essentials and encouraging your child to take school seriously? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

- ___ **1. Do you tell** your child that education is important and school is not to be missed?
- ___ **2. Do you have** your child set the alarm clock earlier if getting ready on time is a problem?
- ___ **3. Do you help** your child establish healthy sleep, exercise and eating habits that support performance in school?
- ___ **4. Do you reject** weak excuses from your child? Not wanting to get out of bed isn't a valid reason to be late for school.
- ___ **5. Do you show** interest in what your child is learning and help find ways to apply it?

How well are you doing?

More *yes* answers mean you are reinforcing expectations for attendance and effort. For each *no*, try that idea.

"The object of education is to prepare the young to educate themselves throughout their lives."

—Robert M. Hutchins

Point out reasons to read

Showing your child that *you* think reading is important is an effective way to motivate *your* child to read more. Here are some ways:

- **Share interesting facts** and ideas with your child that you come across while reading.
- **Talk about why** you are reading—for information, to verify things you think you know, to relax, etc.
- **Look up new words** you read in the dictionary. Ask if your child knows the meaning. Use the words in conversation.

Try a school year reboot

Restarting a computer can help it correct performance issues. If your child's school year is not going as well as you'd hoped, a reset may also be the answer. To set off in a better direction:



- **Make school a family priority.** If your child needs to focus more on studying, for example, make study time a quiet time for the whole family.
- **Upgrade habits.** If your child plays video games to relax, suggest pleasure reading for 20 minutes instead.
- **Promote organization.** Have your child write down responsibilities for home and school on a calendar, and review them each day. This helps avoid last minute panic.

Uphold limits consistently

It doesn't take long for your child to learn whether you really intend to enforce rules. If you let your child skip a responsibility or ignore a boundary, you're likely to have a battle every day.

Instead, make it clear what your child did wrong by describing the behavior. Remind your child of the consequence, and discuss how to make a better choice in the future.

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