

Elementary School Parents[®]

Gatesville Elementary School

make the difference!

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Share the wonders of science with your elementary schooler

You don't have to be a rocket scientist to teach your child about science. Just try some simple activities like these:

- **Encourage your child** to collect and organize objects, such as leaves, rocks, shells or bottle caps.
- **Encourage investigation.** Give your child a magnifying glass. Ask, "What things do you see?" "What's similar and what's different with and without the glass?"
- **Talk about the science** that happens at home. Which cereals get soggy in milk? Why do foods in the refrigerator get moldy? Why do some plants need more water than others?
- **Show an interest** in science. Look at the night sky with your child. Mix paint colors.
- **Include your child**—as an observer or, better yet, a helper—when you make household repairs or work on the family car.
- **Nurture curiosity.** Ask your child questions. "Why do you think ...?" "What might happen if ...?" and "How can we find out ...?"
- **Go to the library.** Check out books on different scientific topics.
- **Give your child something** to take apart—a ball point pen, a candle, an old toy. Encourage your child to figure out how it works.
- **Talk about the weather.** Have your child record the temperature each day for a month. Note whether the day was sunny, cloudy, rainy or snowy. Which was the coldest day? How many snowy days were there?

Strengthen your child's online research skills



Help your child develop important research skills by demonstrating how to find interesting

information online. Here are two games the whole family can play:

- **Scavenger hunt.** Make a list of 10 questions for which there is only one correct answer. For example: *What country won the latest FIFA Men's World Cup? Which city has more people: Tokyo or New Delhi?*

Then, start a timer and see how quickly your child can find the answers (without asking Siri). Encourage the use of a variety of search terms to make the search more effective. Give the same list of questions to another family member and see who gets the best time!

- **Panning for gold.** Choose a famous person or event from history. Give everyone in the family 15 minutes to search online for interesting facts about that person or event. Share what each of you has learned. Vote for whose "nugget" of information turned out to be gold.

Positive learning environments begin with respectful behavior



Each student plays a part in creating a classroom where everyone feels safe and ready to learn.

Respectful behavior helps make school a place where all students can succeed. Encourage your child to:

- **Address the teacher** by name. Encourage your child to smile, look the teacher in the eye and say, “Good morning, Mrs. Jones.”
- **Be courteous.** Your child should say *please*, *thank you* and *excuse me* to teachers and classmates.
- **Do what’s expected.** When teachers plan lessons, students can learn and grow. And when students do their part—like completing assignments and listening carefully—they help create a classroom where everyone can learn together.

- **Wait to be called on.** When students raise their hands, they demonstrate self-control and respect for others.
- **Participate** in class discussions on a regular basis.
- **Accept feedback** from the teacher. Teachers sometimes point out mistakes and areas where students can improve. Your child will be more successful in school by learning to accept constructive feedback in a positive way.

“Respect is one of the most important things you can teach a child.”

—Catherine Pulsifer

Discover the hidden lessons in different types of schoolwork



While doing a math worksheet, your child says, “Why do I have to do the same kinds of problems over and over? I’m so tired of them!”

It’s true that teachers sometimes assign repetitive work, and it’s helpful for students and families to understand why.

Here are four kinds of schoolwork—and the reasons teachers use them:

1. **Practice assignments.** Doing the same kind of work repeatedly helps students remember a skill. This is especially true when it comes to learning math, word definitions and spelling.
2. **Preparation assignments.** This is a way to introduce students to new topics. For instance,

students might read a book about animals before studying animal families.

3. **Extension assignments.** Students need to be able to connect separate topics. For example, they might be asked to compare and contrast two historic events.
4. **Creative assignments.** These assignments challenge students to use different skills to show what they have learned. For instance, your child might be asked to build a model for science class.

Of course, all schoolwork builds self-discipline. So remember, even if your child doesn’t see a reason for an assignment, completing it will still teach valuable lessons.

Source: M. Martin and C. Waltman-Greenwood, *Solve Your Child’s School-Related Problems*, HarperCollins.

Do you encourage your child to work independently?



“Mom, I can’t do it. I need help!” Every child makes that plea once in a while. But if you hear it every day, you may

need to help your child become more independent.

Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out if you are fostering self-reliance:

___ 1. **Do you tell** your child, “I believe in you and know you can do it.”

___ 2. **Do you help** your child break big projects down into smaller pieces that are easier to finish?

___ 3. **Do you remind** your child of the importance of persistence? “You couldn’t ride a bike the first time you tried. But you kept at it. Is there another strategy you could try?”

___ 4. **Do you ask questions** when your child gets stuck? “What did you learn when you read the chapter?”

___ 5. **Do you offer praise** when your child finishes work without assistance?

How well are you doing?

If most of your answers are *yes*, you are helping your child learn how to work independently. For *no* answers, try those ideas.

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Practical Ideas for Parents
to Help Their Children.

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Here's how to make the most of your parent-teacher conference



Preparation is the key to a successful parent-teacher conference. Here's how to get the most benefit from your meeting:

Before the conference:

- **Make a list** of things you'd like to tell the teacher, such as your child's favorite subjects and activities, difficulties in school, medical needs and any sensitive issues.
- **Make a list** of things to ask the teacher about, such as your child's work habits, attitude, behavior, strengths and weaknesses.
- **Let your child know** you are having a conference. Ask if there's anything you and the teacher should discuss.

During the conference:

- **Be on time.** Teachers have many conferences, and being late will reduce the time you have together.
- **Listen carefully** and take notes about your child's progress.
- **Be positive.** Remember: You and your child's teacher both want what's best for your child.
- **Make a plan** with the teacher to address any concerns and schedule a time to follow up.

After the conference:

- **Let your child know** how the conference went.
- **Start with positive comments.** Then, talk about any suggestions the teacher made—and how you plan to help your child carry these out.

Reading comprehension is crucial for academic success



Have you ever read a page in a book and realized you didn't remember a thing? If so, you know why reading

comprehension is so important!

Much of children's success in school depends on being able to remember and understand what they read. Reading comprehension is more than being able to read the words on the page. It also means understanding the meaning, context and details of the text.

Here are four ways to boost your child's reading comprehension:

1. **Summarize.** Talk about the material together. Ask your child to recall facts (such as characters, setting and plot), but also ask questions that require deeper thinking: *What problems did the characters face? How does the story progress from beginning to end?*

2. **Make connections.** Ask what your child has already learned or experienced that relates to the story. Is the story like or unlike others your child has read?
3. **Solve problems.** Ask how the characters were affected by one another's actions. Suggest your child imagine taking a character's place. Would your child make the same decision the character made? How might different choices have changed the story?
4. **Apply knowledge.** Ask your child to explain the message or moral of the story. Did the author have a clear opinion? If so, what was it? Does your child agree? How can your child apply information in the reading to everyday life?

Source: "Reading Comprehension and Higher Order Thinking Skills," K12 Reader.

Q: My elementary schooler struggled with math last year and now doesn't like it. I understand because I'm not good at math either. How can I help my child succeed with math?

Questions & Answers

A: Parents' attitudes about math have a lot to do with how well their children do in math. Kids whose parents tell them they didn't like math when they were in school often struggle with math as well. Likewise, children whose families instill a sense of enjoyment of math tend to perform better.

To help your child develop a positive attitude about math:

- **Set the tone.** Let your child know you believe *everyone* can be successful in math. If you say this often enough, your child will start to believe it!
- **Avoid stereotypes.** Men and women can be engineers. Children from all backgrounds can be successful in school. In fact, students who are successful in math can go a long way toward breaking the stereotypes that others may hold.
- **Talk about careers.** Young children may decide that being a Ninja Turtle or an Avenger is a great career choice. Expand the options. Talk about people who use math in their jobs—an airline pilot, a weather forecaster, an architect, an astronaut, a researcher, an engineer, etc.
- **Connect math** to the real world. When you and your child go to the store, bank, restaurant, etc., point out all of the ways people use math. At dinner, challenge family members to tell one way they used math that day.

It Matters: Responsibility

Clear guidelines reinforce lessons in responsibility



Young children are still learning how to be responsible students. So they sometimes forget their books, their schoolwork and even their lunches.

It's tempting to keep track of these things for your child. But this won't help in the long run. Success in school depends on your child's ability to be responsible.

To reinforce this trait:

- **Write down what you expect** your child to do. Post lists of responsibilities, weekly chores, and items needed for school.
- **Show your child how** to keep track of activities and assignments on a weekly calendar.
- **Ask your child to check off** tasks once they are completed.
- **Help your child figure out** where to store things when they are not in use.
- **Encourage self-sufficiency.** Put your child in charge of making lunch, picking out outfits and organizing school supplies.
- **Let your child experience** the consequences of forgetting or losing an item. For example, don't rush an instrument to school if it is left at home. If a library book is lost, expect your child to do extra chores to earn the money to replace it.
- **Set an example.** Have a designated spot for your keys and wallet. Check your calendar to prepare for the next day.
- **Offer specific praise** when you see your child demonstrating responsibility.

Help your child set goals and take responsibility for learning

Setting weekly goals helps students take control of their learning and establish a clear pathway to success. To help your elementary schooler set goals and achieve them:

1. **Ask your child to identify** one goal at the beginning of the week, such as learning the new vocabulary words assigned in science class.
2. **Have your child write** the goal on a piece of paper and post it on the refrigerator or bulletin board.
3. **Talk about how to accomplish** the goal. Help your child break the goal down into smaller steps. For example, "You could study and learn three vocabulary words each day."
4. **Check your child's progress** in a few days. If problems arise, talk about possible solutions. If your child falls behind, brainstorm together about ways to catch up.



5. **Help your child evaluate** results at the end of the week. Did your student achieve the goal? Why or why not? Regardless of the outcome, praise your child for trying. Then, set a new goal for next week.

Teach your child the difference between a mistake and neglect



Learning responsibility takes time. So don't expect your elementary schooler to master it overnight. But do expect your child to take school responsibilities seriously. Make sure your child understands the difference between an honest mistake and neglect:

- **An honest mistake** would be accidentally doing the even-numbered problems instead of the odd-numbered ones.
- **Neglect** would be failing to do the assignment at all.

Don't punish honest mistakes; everyone makes them. But if your child neglects a responsibility, like schoolwork, don't ignore it. Instead:

- **Talk to your child** about what happened and why.
- **Make it clear** that school is your child's top responsibility.
- **Enforce a consequence.** It's best to agree on the consequence ahead of time and to make sure it is directly related to the responsibility that was neglected.

Source: K. Thomsen, M.S., *Parenting Preteens with a Purpose: Navigating the Middle Years*, Search Institute Press.