Elementary School
Parents
make the difference!
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A reboot can help your child get back on the right track

When you run into a problem on your laptop or smartphone, do you ever power it off and restart it? Rebooting a device can help it correct processing issues and start over.

If your child's school year is not going as well as you'd hoped, it may be time to help him reboot, too! Here are a few ways to help your child get back on track:

- **Make change a family affair.** If you've decided that your child needs to spend more time doing schoolwork, make his study time quiet time for the whole family. You can work on paperwork or read while your child works.
- **Replace bad habits.** Breaking a habit is hard. It's much easier to put a different one in its place. If your child is in the habit of playing video games right after his classes end for the day, suggest that he read for 30 minutes instead. He'll still have a chance to relax—but he will also strengthen his reading skills.
- **Get organized.** You may still be able to find lots of great-looking calendars available on sale. Look for one your child will enjoy using. Then help him get into the habit of writing down his responsibilities for home and school. That can help avoid a last-minute panic.
- **Celebrate successes.** Help your child see the link between his new habits and his results. "You studied for that test and got nine out of 10 correct. That's great!"

Remember the three keys to discipline

Parents and teachers agree that discipline is important for learning. Discipline helps students accept responsibility and focus on the tasks at hand.

The goal is to help your child learn what she did wrong and how she can make a better choice in the future.

To keep your discipline positive and productive:

1. **Remain calm.** Giving in to an urge to yell at your child teaches her that it's OK to lose control when she's upset.
2. **Be consistent.** It doesn't take long for your child to learn whether you really intend to enforce rules. Give in just once to letting your child skip her chores and you'll have a battle every day. Don't set rules unless you plan to consistently enforce them.
3. **Focus on behavior.** Don't criticize. Instead, describe your child's behavior: "It was your sister's turn to use the computer and you wouldn't quit playing your game." Then, remind her of the rule and of the consequence.

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Paying your child for grades is not an effective motivator



There are just some things that money can't buy—including intelligence and academic success. Here's why using money as a reward for good grades my not be a good idea:

- **It places the emphasis** on the wrong thing. If you promise your child money for a good grade, he'll be working for the money rather than working to learn. He may find that he wants the money so badly that he's willing to cheat to get it.
- **It doesn't help** your child learn the satisfaction of doing a job well. He needs to learn the joy and pride that come just from doing something to the best of his ability. That is the reward your child ought to be striving for.
- **It focuses on the outcome** rather than the effort. Children need to learn the importance of trying their best and sticking with challenging subjects. Putting all his attention on a reward at the end of the process will make it harder for your child to learn that lesson.

So what should you do? Let your child know that school is important. Celebrate his successes, but keep your money in your pocket!

> **"The harder you work for something, the greater you'll feel when you achieve it."**
>
> *—Unknown*

Research disproves these five common myths about learning



Research shows that while people often believe they understand what "effective learning" looks like, they're frequently mistaken.

Here are five common myths about learning, along with the research-based facts:

- **Myth #1:** Everyone has a specific learning style. Fact: Kids learn in all kinds of ways. In one situation, they may do better *hearing* new material. But in another? *Seeing* examples could be key.
- **Myth #2**: You're either born smart or you're not. Fact: Intelligence and abilities can increase over time—especially when kids are given access to books and learning opportunities.
- **Myth #3:** Long study sessions are the best way to prepare for a quiz or test. Fact: Kids retain facts much better if they study it repeatedly over time. Studying a little each day is much more effective than trying to digest everything in one sitting.
- **Myth #4:** Reading material over and over is the best way to learn it. Fact: It's more effective for students to restate key ideas in their own words.
- **Myth #5:** Right-brained students learn differently than left-brained ones. Fact: There's no evidence that being left-brained (favoring logic and math) or right-brained (favoring art and emotions) has an impact on learning. Actually, there's no proof that one side of the brain even dominates at all.

Source: U. Boser, *Learn Better: Mastering the Skills for Success in Life, Business, and School, Or, How to Become an Expert in Just About Anything*, Rodale Books.

Are you helping your child take school seriously?



Attending every class improves your child's chances of academic success. Are you reinforcing the importance of attendance and encouraging your child to take school seriously? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

___**1. Have you told** your child that you expect her to attend every class, every day—whether it is in person or online? If you tell her it's important to you, it will become important to her.

___**2. Do you reinforce** healthy habits for sleep, nutrition and exercise that ensure your child is ready to learn?

___**3. Do you ignore** weak excuses? Not feeling like getting out of bed isn't an acceptable reason to miss a class.

___**4. Do you try** to make medical and dental appointments outside of school hours?

___**5. Do you help** your child set the alarm clock earlier if she has trouble getting up and ready for school on time?

How well are you doing?

Each *yes* means you are supporting your child's attendance. For each *no* answer, try that idea.

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Geography comes to life with fun and educational activities



Helping your child learn about geography can make it easier for her to relate to the world around her. Here are some educational and fun activities to boost interest in geography:

- **Have your child draw a map** of how to get from your home to school, the grocery store or a friend's home. Then follow the map.
- **Walk outside** and identify *north, south, east* and *west*, as well as *northeast, northwest, southeast* and *southwest.* Ask your child to use these words to describe where things in your town are located. "My school is *northeast* of my house."
- **Look for street patterns.** In some towns, streets run north and south, while avenues run east and west. Street names may be alphabetical: Adams St., Bay St., Club St., etc. Help your child recognize the patterns.
- **Encourage your child** to start a collection of objects from countries around the world. Stamps, post cards and coins are all easy items to collect and store.
- **Tell your child** where her ancestors came from. Find these places on a map. If possible, learn about the routes they traveled when they came to this country.
- **Go through your house** and talk about where things came from. Have your child read labels to see where items were made. 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.

Boost your child's skills and creativity this Valentine's Day



Valentine's Day offers a great opportunity for building school skills while spreading love. Here are some engaging activities to try with everyone in your family:

- **Write notes of kindness.** Have family members write individual notes to one another outlining all of the things they love about each person.
- **Make a heart collage.** Gather materials with different textures and cut out different sizes of hearts. Have family members glue them on paper to create beautiful pieces of art.
- **Discover the origin** of Valentine's Day. Challenge family members to collect interesting facts and share them during a family meal.
- **Read books together** about Valentine's Day and love. You can find some great titles at *niswc.com/elem_valentine*.
- **Play an estimation game.** Fill a jar with pieces of valentine candy or small heart-shaped items. Ask family members to guess the number of items in the jar. The winner gets to keep the contents.
- **Learn how to say "I love you"** in different languages. Have family members search online and write down translations in as many languages as they can find.
- **Bake some cookie valentines.** Heart-shaped cookies are fun to make and give! Let your child help with the measuring and baking. Then, together, decorate them any way you wish.

Q: My fifth grader is so hard on himself! He complains that he can't do anything right, which isn't true at all. How can I help him see that he's a smart, capable person?

Questions & Answers

A: As children get older and school becomes more challenging, self-doubt and insecurity can rear their ugly heads. Some kids feel immense pressure to measure up, and it can be scary when they feel like they're falling short.

Although you probably can't make your child's insecurity go away altogether, you can help him see just how smart and competent he is. Here's how:

- **Find the right outlets.** Let your child experience success by recommending activities where he's most likely to succeed. If sports are his thing, help him practice and perfect his skills. If he enjoys reading, encourage him to start a book club with friends.
- **Give him responsibilities.** He may gripe about having to take out the trash or empty the dishwasher, but make him do it anyway. Assigning chores is an effective way to make your child feel valued, because doing them helps the whole family. Completing chores can make him more responsible, too.
- **Acknowledge accomplishments.** Did your child just do something wonderful? Congratulate him! Show him that you noticed his achievement, whether it was earning a good grade on a quiz or setting a beautiful table for dinner.

With a little help from you, your elementary schooler will begin to see himself as the wonderful person he is!

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It Matters: Reading

Reading and writing at home boosts success



When children spend their time reading and writing, it benefits them academically. It may pay off later in life, too.

Studies show that children who sharpen their literacy skills at home—even with activities that are just for fun—are more successful in school than other kids. And they become adults with strong work ethics that serve them well in the workplace.

Luckily, it's easy to encourage your child to spend more time reading and writing. Here are three ideas to try:

1. **Make books a priority.** Don't save stories for bedtime—read them any time of day! Keep books out where your child can get to them. Check out new titles from the library. And set a good example: When you have some downtime, reach for a book instead of the remote. Your child will notice.
2. **Start a family journal.** Each weekend, have your child jot down something special about his week. It doesn't need to be long; a couple of sentences will do. After his entry, add your own. By the end of the school year, you'll have a written record of memories!
3. **Play word games.** Each round of Scrabble does more than entertain your child. It hones his reading and writing skills. Best of all, he won't suspect you're "teaching" him anything!

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.

Be a reading role model to build your child's interest in reading

Children who see their parents reading are more likely to grow up to be readers themselves. And since reading has such a profound effect on academic achievement, it's vital to show your child that you think it is important, too. Here's how:

- **Let your child see you reading** something every day. Share interesting facts and ideas from your reading.
- **Tell your child why** you're reading—for information, to check out something you think you know or just to relax.
- **Look up a word** in an online dictionary if you come across one you are unsure of. Ask your child if she knows the meaning of the word.
- **Read aloud** to your child. When you see an article you think she might find interesting, read a small part of it to her. She may be motivated to finish reading it herself.



- **Join your child.** When you see her reading, pick up something to read yourself. Bring a healthy snack to share.
- **Give books as gifts.** Show your child how much you value books by giving them as gifts. Encourage your child to give her friends books as gifts, too.

Motivate reluctant readers with appealing reading material



Some kids just don't like reading. One way to encourage your child to read is to help him find reading material related to things he is interested in.

If your child loves soccer, for example, help him find:

- **A book about the history** of the sport.
- **A how-to book** with tips on improving his game.
- **A biography** of one of his favorite players.
- **Kid-friendly websites** that contain sports-related articles.

If you aren't sure what your child likes, ask yourself:

- **What are three activities** he and his friends are involved in?
- **What are three adult activities** he might like to try some day?
- **What were the last three books** that he seemed to enjoy?