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make the difference!
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Set high expectations for your child that are realistic

Expectations can be tricky. Research shows that students generally live up to parent and teacher expectations, whether those expectations are high or low. So, you want to set the bar high for your child.

It's also important to be realistic. Most students are not going to excel at everything. If only near-perfection satisfies you, your child may say to herself, "What's the point?" and stop trying altogether.

To make sure your expectations are realistic and effective:

- **Encourage your child** to do her best in all her pursuits.
- **Have unique expectations** for each of your children. Do not compare your child with her siblings, friends or classmates.
- **Let your child know** you are proud of her effort and hard work. Remind her to be proud of herself.
- **Remember that** your expectations are for your child, not for you. She is entitled to her own dreams. It is not fair to her if you simply want her to do what you wish you had done.
- **Learn about your child's interests.** Feeling that you value her passions can spur her to try to do better in all her pursuits.
- **Be a good role model.** Let your child see you give your best effort. Set expectations for yourself and talk to your child about how you plan to meet them.

Source: J.A. Fredricks and others, *Handbook of Student Engagement Interventions: Working with Disengaged Students*, Academic Press.

Boost your child's test performance



Regardless of how well your child knows the material before a test, he will benefit from knowing some basic test-taking strategies. Encourage your elementary schooler to:

- **Read carefully.** This applies to directions, questions and answers.
- **Ask questions.** If your child doesn't understand the directions or a question, he should ask the teacher for clarification before he starts.
- **Manage his time.** Tell him to look over the questions and answer the easy ones first. If he gets stuck on an especially hard question, he should move on and come back to that question when he's finished everything else.
- **Use the process** of elimination when answering multiple choice questions. He should eliminate answers he knows can't be right. Then he can focus on choosing among the answers that are left.
- **Use any extra time** to review all of his answers and check for careless mistakes.

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Show your elementary schooler how to see beauty in diversity



Your child knows that no two people—or families—are exactly alike. But does he accept and appreciate this? Respecting people's differences is the first step in becoming a responsible citizen.

You can nurture your child's respect for diversity if you:

- **Are a positive role model.** Kids are naturally open-minded. When parents show respect for others—through actions and words—children imitate them. Let your child know that while people can be different from one another, they also have a lot in common.
- **Learn about other people** by leaving your "comfort zone." Visit a new place. Try a new food. Read books about other ways of life. Watch an age-appropriate movie that gives your child a peek at another culture.
- **Speak openly about diversity** issues. It's normal for your child to notice differences. They're fascinating and amazing! Correct any stereotyping with kid-friendly explanations.

"It is time for parents to teach young people early on that in diversity there is beauty and there is strength."

—Maya Angelou

Retelling can improve your child's reading comprehension



You've just finished reading a story with your child. One of the best ways to check and clarify her understanding of the story is to ask her to retell it.

Retelling a story requires your child to think about the details and decide what's really important.

Give your child these three rules for retelling a story:

1. **Tell what's important.**
2. **Tell it in a way that makes sense.**
3. **Don't tell too much.**

Your child should be able to tell you what happens at the beginning, the middle and the end of the story. She should also be able to name the main characters.

You can prompt your child by asking open-ended questions, such as, "What happened next?" It's OK if she doesn't remember all the details. That gives you a chance to say, "Let's go back and look at that part of the story again." Revisiting parts of the story will show your child that she sometimes has to read things more than once to gain a thorough understanding.

Studies show that this simple activity will help your child become a more thoughtful reader. She will start to pay attention to words whose meanings she doesn't know. She will focus on the story structure and pay more attention to important details. All of these things will improve your child's reading comprehension and make her a stronger reader—and a more successful student!

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

Have you built a team with your child's teachers?



When parents and teachers form a strong team, students are the real winners. They learn more and do better academically and socially.

Have you been doing everything you can to build a successful school-home team? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

___**1. Have you met** your child's classroom teacher in person or online?

___**2. Do you talk** with your child about school each day and review information the school sends home?

___**3. Do you monitor** your child's schoolwork? If he struggles with an assignment, do you ask the teacher how you can help?

___**4. Do you make sure** your child attends his classes each day and has everything he needs for assignments?

___**5. Have you reviewed** the school handbook and told your child that you expect him to follow all school rules?

How well are you doing?

Each *yes* answer means you are helping build a strong home-school team. For each *no* answer, try that idea from the quiz.

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Make science come alive with simple and fun experiments



Keep your budding scientist experimenting with these clever activities. They're kid-friendly, safe, affordable and really, really cool!

Together, try these experiments:

- **Vinegar volcano.** Grab a cup or bowl, a box of baking soda, and some plain vinegar. (Conduct this experiment outside or in the kitchen sink.) Add a little bit of the baking soda to the cup, pour in some vinegar, and voilà! Chemistry in action! The fizzy rush happens because the baking soda—a base—reacts with the vinegar—an acid.
- **Raw or cooked?** Take two eggs—one raw and the other hardboiled—and try to figure out which is which. (Nope, you can't crack them.) How to do it? Put each egg on its side on a flat surface, and then spin it. The raw egg will wobble, while the hardboiled egg will spin smoothly. Why? The yolk and white in the raw egg are liquid, so they shift when moved. This affects the egg's center of gravity and makes it wobbly.
- **The sinking/floating orange.** Fill a sink with water and drop in a whole orange. It floats, doesn't it? Now peel the orange and drop it in again. It sinks, right? That's because the peel is full of tiny air pockets that make the fruit less dense (and able to float). Strip away those air pockets, and suddenly the orange is much denser. Hence, its trip to the bottom of the sink!

Encourage responsibility by involving your child in chores



How do you get your elementary schooler to do chores willingly? Most children love to make a plan and then carry it out. So first, involve your child in brainstorming what needs to be done around the house and when. Then:

- **Give your child a choice.** Together, make a list of age-appropriate chores, such as taking out the trash, sweeping, folding laundry, feeding a pet and helping with yard work. Let your child choose which ones he'd like to do.
- **Schedule a family work time** when everyone has a chore to do.
- **Be a good model.** Dive into chores yourself. Avoid complaining. Instead, talk about how good it feels when you finish a chore.
- **Be encouraging.** Say, "Here's the broom so you can help! Let's do this together."
- **Make a game of it.** Set a timer and see if your child can beat the clock. Turn on some music and work to the rhythm of the beat.
- **Rotate chores** each week, so no one feels stuck doing a chore he doesn't like. Put chores on slips of paper and let family members draw from a bowl.
- **Use a chore chart.** Let your child place a star next to chores when he completes them.
- **Curb criticism.** Don't immediately say what your child did wrong. Gently show him what he could do to improve, but don't redo his work.
- **Follow chores with fun.** Have a basket of index cards listing fun stuff to do after finishing chores.

Q: I used to think that *fun* and *games* went together—boy was I wrong! What's fun about my daughter running out of the room in tears when she loses, or my other daughter cheating when my back is turned? Is there some way to teach sportsmanship?

Questions & Answers

A: Elementary schoolers can be competitive. However, it is possible to have fun playing games with kids. Try these simple guidelines:

- **Talk to your kids** about the importance of being a good sport. Let them know that you expect them to be humble when they win and gracious when they lose.
- **Establish quitting time** in advance. Set an alarm before you start. When the bell rings, the game is over.
- **Minimize mistakes.** Be gentle when you correct your kids for a wrong move or a mistake.
- **Be prepared for cheating.** Start each game by reviewing the rules. The first time a child tries to cheat, simply repeat the rules. Say nothing more.

  The second time calmly say, "When you don't play by the rules, I get upset and don't enjoy playing. If it happens again, the game is over." If it does happen again, say nothing. Simply put the game away.
- **Beat the bickering.** Call fouls during home play just as the ref does in basketball. Every jibe, poke, put-down or unkind comment results in a foul for that player. Five fouls and the player's out.

Sportsmanship can help your children be more successful in school, too. But remember, it takes patience, firm guidelines and time to develop.

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It Matters: Schoolwork

Help your child make schoolwork time effective



Don't let your child's schoolwork cause headaches. Instead, set your child up for success. Try these ideas:

- **Make school the top priority.** If your child can't finish all of her work because of other activities, there is a problem—and it isn't the schoolwork. Adjust her schedule so that school comes first.
- **Don't do your child's work.** Not only is it wrong to do her assignments for her, it may make her feel dumb. "Dad doesn't think I can handle this math assignment. I must not be very good at math."
- **Remember what it's all about.** Schoolwork helps your child practice what she's learning. Her assignments and projects don't need to be perfect.
- **Expect some frustration.** Your child shouldn't melt down over every assignment, but a little complaining is normal. Take it in stride. Even cries of "I hate school!" will pass.
- **Show interest.** Don't hover while your child works, but let her know you care about what she's doing. If she's writing a history report, for example, show some enthusiasm. "You sure know a lot about Ancient Greece. Tell me something else!"
- **Expect your child to help herself.** Encourage her to contact a classmate if she has a question about an assignment. This shifts the responsibility away from you and onto her—where it belongs.

Understand the four reasons teachers give assignments

Understanding the goal behind an assignment can make it more rewarding—for students and parents. Teachers usually assign work for one of four reasons:



1. **Preparation.** Some assignments get your child ready for upcoming topics. If the teacher plans a lesson about the Civil War for instance, your child may be asked to read a chapter in his social studies textbook beforehand. Preparation assignments typically require reading or research.
2. **Practice.** Doing the same kind of work repeatedly—writing spelling words or solving similar math problems—reinforces your child's skills. This may sometimes seem tedious, but it works.
3. **Demonstration.** It's challenging for kids to use different skills to show what they've learned. Projects such as preparing an oral report, writing a paper or putting on a play encourage creativity and let students demonstrate their understanding of concepts.
4. **Extension.** This type of work involves applying knowledge to a new situation. Your child might be asked to compare and contrast two historic events, do a science experiment or solve a real-life problem.

Teach your child to pay close attention to graphics



Many students pay little or no attention to the images in their textbooks. However, photos, maps, graphs and illustrations can give students a clearer idea of what a chapter is about.

Before your child reads anything for school, have her look at the visuals and answer the following questions:

- **What does the graphic show?** She should explain in her own words.
- **What details do you see?**
- **What do you think** this chapter is about based on these graphics?
- **Why do you think** the authors included this graphic?

Once your child has studied the images, have her read the chapter. She is likely to understand more and remember more of what she reads.