Elementary School
Parents®
make the difference!
November 2020
Vol. 32, No. 3
Enterprise City Schools
Parent & Family Engagement



Avoid multitasking to boost concentration and learning

Look around your home during homework time. Is your child studying while singing to music? Are you answering her questions while checking your email?

Multitasking has become a way of life, but not necessarily a good one. In fact, while multitasking, the brain doesn't really concentrate on several tasks at once. Instead, it moves quickly from one thing to another—not giving anything its full attention.

To prevent multitasking mistakes:

- **Eliminate distractions.** Research shows that multitasking with technology (texting, listening to music, checking emails, etc.) negatively impacts studying, doing homework, learning and grades. Choose a quiet place for your child to study—free of TV, phones and loud music.
- **Help your elementary schooler** schedule challenging work that requires a lot of focus for the time of day when her attention and motivation are at their prime.
- **Set a good example.** If you give your child your undivided attention when she is talking or asking for help, you'll show her how to focus—and that what she is saying is important to you.
- **Limit multitasking** to activities that don't require much concentration. For example, your child can listen to music while cleaning her room.

Source: C. Kubu, Ph.D. and A. Machado, MD, "The Science Is Clear: Why Multitasking Doesn't Work," Cleveland Clinic, niswc.com/elem_multitask2.

Older kids can motivate your child to read



Lots of factors have an impact on your child's love of reading, but one of them may be closer to home than you realize. It's an older sibling! Studies show that children who see their older brother or sister reading for pleasure are more likely to seek out books themselves.

It's not just that book-loving older kids model good reading habits. They're also great resources when it comes to sharing books, suggesting new stories to explore and talking about literature.

To help your child reap the benefits of having an older sibling (or other older child) around:

- **Make reading a family affair.** Set aside some group reading time each week. Include older siblings or cousins.
- **Involve the babysitter.** The next time your teenage sitter comes over, ask him to bring along a favorite book. If your child notices how important reading is to him, he may become interested in it, too!

Source: M. Knoester and M. Plikuhn, "Influence of siblings on out-of-school reading practices," *Journal of Research in Reading*, John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

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Talk to your child about showing respect for teachers, classmates



Respectful behavior is vital for education. When students have respect for teachers and classmates, they help create the positive academic environment all children need to be successful.

Whether your child's classes are in person or online, encourage her to:

- **Address the teacher** by name. Simply saying "Good morning, Mrs. Jones" is an easy way to show respect.
- **Be courteous.** She should say *please* and *thank you* to her teacher and her classmates.
- **Raise her hand.** When she waits to be called on, she demonstrates self-control and respect for others.
- **Do what's expected.** Everyone in the class has a job to do. If the teacher doesn't plan any lessons, no one can learn anything. If students don't do their jobs—completing homework, listening to others—it makes it more difficult to learn.
- **Listen to the teacher's comments.** Teachers want students to learn and to succeed. That means they have to point out mistakes. Your child will do much better in school if she can recognize and accept constructive feedback.

"Respect for ourselves guides our morals; respect for others guides our manners."

—Laurence Sterne

Improve your child's recall by making facts meaningful



Repeating information over and over isn't the most effective way to help your child remember new facts. Instead, try connecting what he's studying to something meaningful.

Studies show that when new information is linked to something memorable, it's easier to retain. When your child is learning a new word, his brain can digest the information in two ways: by repeating the sound of the word, or by focusing on its meaning. Although both approaches may work, emphasizing meaning leads to better long-term recall.

To help your child absorb new facts:

- **Create a story.** He might struggle to remember the first three U.S. presidents, but what if you turned the information into a wild tale? "One day, George Washington went to the park. He met John Adams by the swings. And later, the two bumped into Thomas Jefferson going down the slide." Suddenly, the presidents are put in a context he'll understand—and their order is laid out for him.
- **Focus on the bigger picture.** Rather than having him simply repeat the fact that "Jupiter is the largest planet," help your child tie it to something broader. "Everything about our solar system's biggest planet is big. Jupiter's 'big red spot' is even bigger than Earth." Small facts stick better when they are illustrated in a wider way.

Source: J.A. Meltzer and others, "Electrophysiological signatures of phonological and semantic maintenance in sentence repetition," *NeuroImage*, Elsevier, niswc.com/elem_meaningful.

Are you teaching your child to make good choices?



Parents want children to make wise choices. When the time comes, you hope your child will say *no* to negative peer pressure and *yes* to positive things.

Are you doing all you can now to teach him to make these wise choices? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

___**1. Do you give your child** plenty of opportunities to make decisions—and expect him to live with the results of the choices he makes?

___**2. Do you discuss** family decisions together? Do you brainstorm and come up with the decisions together?

___**3. Do you sometimes think** out loud and talk through how you are making a choice?

___**4. Do you encourage your child** to ask questions before he makes a choice?

___**5. Do you teach your child** that every decision has consequences?

How well are you doing?

Each *yes* means you're helping your child make better choices today and in the future. For *no* answers, try those ideas in the quiz.

Elementary School Parents make the difference!

Practical Ideas for Parents to Help Their Children. ISSN: 1523-1275

For subscription information call or write: The Parent Institute, 1-800-756-5525, P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474. Fax: 1-800-216-3667. Or visit: www.parent-institute.com.

Published monthly September through May.
Copyright © 2020, The Parent Institute, a division of PaperClip Media, Inc., an independent, private agency. Equal opportunity employer.
Publisher: Doris McLaughlin.
Publisher Emeritus: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.
Editor: Rebecca Hasty Miyares.

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Communication is the key to a strong parent-teacher team



Research shows that parent engagement in education has a positive effect on students' academic success. When teachers and parents work together, the results can be powerful. To foster effective two-way communication:

- **Set the tone.** It's natural to have questions for your child's teachers. Ask questions respectfully. Show support for your child and the class, and encourage the teacher to keep you informed.
- **Be positive.** When you talk with the teacher, enjoy hearing about your child's strengths. But also prepare to hear about her weaknesses. Remember to remain calm. You and the teacher both want your child to do well. Addressing struggles is the only way to find solutions.
- **Role-play.** Some parents are nervous about talking with the teacher. If this describes you, consider practicing with a friend. If you aren't comfortable speaking English, have an interpreter join you. Still worried? Using email may put you at ease.
- **Choose words carefully.** It's more effective to make polite requests than demands. A helpful tip is to use the word *we* instead of *you*. ("How can we stay in touch to help Jordan?" is less aggressive than "You should tell me if Jordan is falling behind.") Remember: The teacher isn't your opponent; she's your teammate.

Habits at home can help your child thrive in school and life



Every family—and every child—is different, but there are ways all families can set their children up for success. Studies show that kids are more likely to achieve in elementary school and beyond when their parents give them the tools to succeed. To help your child:

- **Assign chores.** Kids who have responsibilities around the house learn how to be responsible. Give your child a list of weekly tasks to complete. He may grumble, but don't give in.
- **Teach social skills.** Your child's success in life hinges on more than grades; it centers on his ability to get along with others. Model good behavior—like cooperation and courtesy.
- **Set the bar high.** Expect your child to do well, and he'll rise to the occasion. Don't demand perfect grades, but do insist he work to the best of his ability. And praise him when he tries hard—even if he falls short. When you show him you believe in him, he'll believe in himself.
- **Nurture your relationship.** You are your child's parent, not his friend. But you're also his ally. So, make time to have fun together! Share a hobby. Play catch in the yard. Never let your child forget you love him and have his back.
- **Take care of yourself.** If you're always stressed, your child will be, too. Carve out time to relax, exercise, or curl up with a good book. A calm, peaceful home starts with you.

Source: R. Gillett and R. Premack, "Science says parents of successful kids have these 11 things in common," *Business Insider*, niswc.com/elem_habits2.

Q: My husband is deployed overseas. He won't be here for the holidays. The longer he has been gone, the harder it has been on my third grader. Now my daughter's grades are starting to suffer. What advice do you have to help me get through a difficult holiday season and also get my child back on track?

Questions & Answers

A: Being separated from a parent is always hard. Having that parent be away during the holiday season can be even harder. Here are some ways to help:

- **Let your child know** that it is OK to miss her father. Say something like, "We love Daddy very much. Of course we're going to miss him. Whenever you feel sad, you can talk with me."
- **Talk to her teacher.** Be sure her teacher understands what she's going through and how she's feeling. Sometimes, a child feels she has to be brave at home but will confide in a teacher. Ask the teacher how you can help support your child so she gets her grades back on track.
- **Talk with your child** about some fun holiday traditions you want to continue—baking, decorating or watching a favorite holiday movie. Even though the holidays won't be like every other year, they can still be a special time for you and your daughter.
- **Help your child stay in touch** with your husband as much as possible. Encourage him to call, send videos and email.
- **Look for ways** you and your daughter can help others. She may start to put her own problems in perspective when she sees that there are others who need help.

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It Matters: Building Character

Empathize with your child—up to a certain point



Is there such a thing as being too supportive when it comes to your child's negative emotions? Experts say *yes.*

Parents who are overly sympathetic about their children's troubled feelings think their kids are more socially well-adjusted than others. Those same kids' teachers, however, rate them as being less well-adjusted than their peers.

Why the disconnect? It could be that when parents indulge every bad mood their child has, the child never stops to consider that there may be little justification for that mood.

This doesn't mean you should ignore your child's feelings. But rather than rush to agree every time she feels she's been wronged:

- **Ask for details.** If your child says a friend was mean to her, find out more before jumping to her defense. Say, "Tell me what happened." This way, you're encouraging her to open up but not automatically agreeing that she's a victim.
- **Challenge her.** Your child may be upset that she performed poorly on a math quiz, but was that quiz really "unfair," as she claims? Press her a bit. "Why wasn't it fair?" If the real story is that she didn't study for it, then point that out. She wasn't mistreated; she was irresponsible. It's a hard—but vital—lesson to learn.

Source: V.L. Castro and others, "Changing tides: Mothers' supportive emotion socialization relates negatively to third-grade children's social adjustment in school," *Social Development,* John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Talk with your child about the importance of honesty

By the time children reach elementary school, most know the difference between being honest and lying. But that doesn't make telling the truth easy.

To encourage honesty:

- **Talk about it.** Ask your child if he believes that honesty is the best policy. Does he want others to tell him the truth? When, if ever, does he think it's OK to lie?
- **Discuss the consequences** of lying. Lying destroys trust. If your child makes a habit of lying to people, they won't believe what he says—even when he is telling the truth.
- **Be a role model.** Kids notice when parents tell the truth—and when they don't.
- **Create opportunities** for telling the truth. Say, "You ripped this book," instead of, "Did you do this?"
- **React calmly.** When your child lies. Express confidence that he will make better choices in the future.
- **Reward trustworthiness.** If your child is truthful in a difficult situation, compliment him.



Source: McGill University, "The truth about lying? Children's perceptions get more nuanced with age," ScienceDaily, niswc.com/elem_honesty.

Helping others promotes confidence and self-esteem



Children want to feel like they play an important role in their community. Volunteering can help your child build social skills and develop self-confidence—which will also benefit him in school.

Find a volunteer or community service activity you and your child can do together. Here are some ideas:

- **Take part in a clothing drive.** Collect coats, gloves and hats and donate them to local shelters.
- **Bake something** for a senior citizen or a parent of a new baby.
- **Make sandwiches** for people who are homeless.
- **Help take care of a pet.** If a neighbor is going away for a few days, you and your child could offer to feed and walk the dog.
- **Donate money he has earned.** It's nice when your child sees you give money to a charity. But he'll remember it longer if he gives away even a small sum of his own money to help others.