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make the difference!
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Focus on kindness and respect to promote academic success

According to some researchers, kids whose parents value kindness over achievement tend to do better in school than kids from families where academic success matters above all else.

In fact, putting pressure on your child to score high marks can have the opposite effect. It can cause her grades and self-esteem to suffer, and lead to depression and anxiety. But when parents promote kindness and respect, students tend to perform better in school. This may be because they feel more secure and know their parents' approval doesn't hinge on good grades.

To show your child how much you value respect and kindness:

- **Demonstrate courtesy.** When talking to others—from neighbors to the mail carrier—let your child see you being polite. Say *please* and *thank you*. Be respectful. These may seem like small things, but they make a big impression.
- **Praise positive behavior.** When you notice your child doing something nice or loving, let her know. There's no need to go overboard—a simple pat on the back will remind her how much you value kindness.
- **Promote healthy relationships.** Encourage your child to connect with her teachers and classmates. The more support she gets from those around her, the less she'll depend on things like grades and awards to feel good about herself.

Source: L. Ciciolla and others, "When Mothers and Fathers Are Seen as Disproportionately Valuing Achievements," *Journal of Youth and Adolescence,* Springer US.

Get your family back in the school groove



The COVID-19 pandemic created significant challenges this past school year. Now it's a new school year, and time for a fresh start.

Here are practical ideas to help you and your family gear up for a productive year of learning:

- **Make** a weekly schedule. Include time for homework, play, activities and family.
- **Establish** a family reading time.
- **Keep** a family calendar. Mark each family member's activities in a different color.
- **Reestablish** bedtimes for school nights.
- **Scale back** screen time. Set a weekly limit for free time spent on digital devices.
- **Create** flexible learning spaces. Allow your child to work where he feels most comfortable—whether that's at the kitchen table or on the couch. Just make sure that the space has adequate lighting and is free from distractions.
- **Collect** important contact information for teachers. Update your work, medical and emergency contact numbers with the school.

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Reinforce learning by having your child teach you something



Students are more motivated to learn when they feel capable, connected and in control. Having your child teach you things nurtures these feelings.

When your child tries to teach you about what he is doing, it can help him understand assignments better. It also reinforces what he knows and reveals gaps in his comprehension.

Try these strategies:

- **Show an interest** in what your child is learning in school. Have him show you an assignment, explain a concept or read a chapter in his textbook aloud to you.
- **Ask your child to help you** solve a problem or create something. What does he think you should you do first, second, next?
- **Let your child quiz you.** See if you can you name the state capitals or the first five presidents. Try to define vocabulary words and recall math or science facts.
- **Ask your child to teach** you how to play one of his favorite games. Then play it together.
- **Ask for your child's opinion** about something and consider it before solidifying your own.

"When children and parents talk regularly about school, children perform better academically."

—National Education Association

Support your child's reading progress with seven strategies



You're proud of your child for learning to read. But remember that reading skills must be developed and maintained. The older your child gets, the more she'll depend on them for learning.

To support your child's education and foster her reading progress:

1. **Go beyond books.** Let her select reading materials she likes. She doesn't have to limit herself to books. Encourage her to read comics, children's magazines, age-appropriate news articles, game instructions and recipes.
2. **Make connections.** Have your child read about historical events that happened near your home. If she is passionate about something, find books related to the topic.
3. **Build excitement.** Make reading irresistible. Let your child stay up 15 minutes later to read in bed. Or, let her build a fort in her room and read by flashlight.
4. **Role-play.** Turn favorite books into family plays or movies. Add props and costumes.
5. **Suggest she join** (or start) a book club with friends. They can meet in person or online and have book-related discussions and activities.
6. **Set a timer.** If your child resists reading, a timer might help. Say, "Read to me for three minutes. When the timer beeps, you can stop." Add a minute every few days.
7. **Read aloud.** Try reading more advanced books. When parents read to them, kids enjoy more challenging words and stories.

Are you helping your child have healthy habits?



Healthy habits make it easier for children to concentrate and learn during the day. Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to see if you are promoting wellness for your child:

___**1. Do you enforce** a regular bedtime? Elementary school kids need at least nine hours of sleep each night to function at their best.

___**2. Do you make sure** your child eats breakfast every morning? Kids' brains need fuel to learn.

___**3. Do you encourage** your child to get moving every day? Studies show that exercise improves kids' memory and focus.

___**4. Do you remind** your child to wash his hands frequently? Hand washing kills germs and reduces illness.

___**5. Have you made sure** your child understands the rules about safely interacting with others?

How well are you doing?

More *yes* answers mean you are helping your child stay on track for health right through the school year. For *no* answers, try those ideas.

Elementary School Parents make the difference!

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Help your child bounce back and learn from mistakes



Mistakes are a part of life. It probably won't be long before your child makes one on a homework assignment or test—and that's OK.

What matters is how children and parents respond to those mistakes. Instead of glossing over your child's errors, help him learn from them. Research shows that when parents and teachers encourage students to learn from their errors, those children do better in school.

Fixing mistakes shows kids they can improve—that "smarts" aren't something they either have or they don't. Intelligence can be increased. And when students understand their errors and don't repeat them, they become more optimistic about their own brainpower.

When reviewing your child's work, first point out what he did well. Then, to help him learn from his mistakes:

- **Point them out.** Rather than saying, "Don't worry—you'll do better on the next math test," ask if he understands why his answers were wrong. If so, have him correct them. If he's not sure, offer suggestions or encourage him to ask his teacher for help.
- **Praise progress.** Did he miss only two problems on his latest math test? After reviewing his mistakes, remind him that he's improving. Talk about how paying attention to past mistakes—and correcting them—made a difference.

Source: H.S. Schroder and others, "Neural evidence for enhanced attention to mistakes among school-aged children with a growth mindset," *Developmental Cognitive Neuroscience*, Elsevier B.V.

'Quick writes' make writing fun for elementary schoolers



Writing can be hard work. But a *quick write* is a fun and easy way to encourage your child to get her ideas down on paper.

Quick writes are just what they sound like—writing that people do in short periods of time. Usually, a quick write is based on a question or an idea. You ask a challenging question and set the timer for five minutes. Then both you and your child write down everything you can before the timer beeps.

Once the quick write is finished, compare what each of you has written. The next time, let your child choose the quick-write topic.

Here are some quick-write ideas:

- **Would it be a good** or a bad idea if dogs could talk? Why?
- **The best birthday** I can imagine would be … .
- **It was a stormy day,** so I decided to … .
- **The most challenging part** of social distancing is … .
- **Ten years from now,** I will be … .
- **I invented** the most amazing machine. It can … .
- **When I woke up** this morning, I was a different person. I was … .

Even students who usually stare into space when it's time for a writing assignment may like a quick write. They are often surprised to discover just how much they know or have to say about a particular subject. Your child will gain confidence when she sees how much she can write in just a few minutes.

Q: My fifth grader has never been a bubbly child. But in the last year, she has become so negative. Nothing is ever right. She doesn't like school. She doesn't like her teacher. Last week, I asked her to plan something special for the two of us to do. Later, she said it was "All right, I guess." I'm losing patience. What can I do?

Questions & Answers

A: Remember that last school year was an unusually difficult year for most kids. And all of that stress and anxiety can breed negativity.

Here are some steps to take:

- **Listen to your daughter.** Ask her to tell you about things that get her down. If there is one issue that comes up over and over, you may have hit on the problem. Brainstorm ways she can address the situation.
- **Let her complain.** It's OK to let her complain once in a while. If she whines about homework, let her talk for a minute or two. Then redirect her by saying, "Well, you still need to finish it." Remind her that everyone has responsibilities—whether they like them or not.
- **Model the attitude** you'd like her to have. Try to be positive when you are faced with disappointments. Say things like, "I'm bummed I have to work on Saturday, but it will feel great to get this project finished!"
- **Realize you aren't responsible** for fixing everything in your child's life. Help her take responsibility where you can. It's a way of empowering her.
- **Make an appointment** with your child's doctor. If you think she may be anxious or depressed, it's important to take action now.

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It Matters: Discipline

Research reveals discipline that actually works



Think about how your parents raised you. What discipline methods did they use? Studies show that even when parents don't agree with how they were disciplined as children, many use the same approaches themselves.

For example, adults who were yelled at as kids were more likely to yell as parents—even if they thought yelling didn't work, according to one study.

In order to discipline effectively, consider what you believe *will* work. These methods tend to work best:

- **Plan ahead.** Talk with your child about discipline. Why is it helpful? How does it work? After considering her ideas, list basic rules and consequences. Then follow through with consistency, fairness and respect.
- **Acknowledge good behavior.** What are the most important behaviors for your child to learn? When you see them, take notice. Say, "It's nice that you lent a book to the new girl in your class. I bet that made her feel good."
- **Use consequences** that are natural or logical. When your child does something inappropriate, choose a natural or logical response, if possible. A natural consequence of forgetting to do homework is getting a zero. A logical consequence of losing an item is having to replace it.

Source: S. Barkin and others, "Determinants of Parental Discipline Practices: A National Sample From Primary Care Practices," *Clinical Pediatrics*, SAGE Publications.

Five simple ways to strengthen your child's listening skills

Teachers agree that the ability to listen is one of the most important skills children need in order to be successful in school.

Here are five ways to help your child sharpen his listening skills:

1. **Be a good model.** When your child is telling you something, stop what you're doing. Give him your full attention. Some parents find it easier to sit down so that their child's eyes are at their own eye level.
2. **Have family members** take turns telling about their day. Then have each person draw a name and repeat something that happened to the person whose name they drew.
3. **Play Simon Says.** This will teach your child to listen very carefully and to follow directions exactly.
4. **Practice reflective listening.** When you say something, ask your child to paraphrase what you said. When your child asks a question, repeat his question and then respond.
5. **Stop and ask questions** during story time. When you get to an exciting part, ask, "What do you think will happen next?"



Working well with others is a vital skill for school and life



There's a lot to be said for encouraging children to show leadership. But, let's face it—some kids are just plain bossy. They won't take turns. They won't share. They won't listen to what anyone says.

In school and life, your child will be expected to work with others. So, whether she has a group project in social studies or is on student council, she'll be more successful if she knows how to be a team player.

To help your child learn how to be a contributor:

- **Allow family members** to take turns making some decisions—from which movie to watch to what to have for dinner.
- **Establish basic house rules.** For example, if one child chooses the game, the other gets the first turn.
- **Teach fair ways** to make decisions. Have your children play "rock, paper, scissors" to see who gets on the computer first. Flip a coin to decide who takes the first bath.
- **Praise your child** when you see her being a team player. "That was nice of you to let your brother pick the cookie he wanted first."