



## Physical activity is linked to better classroom performance

It's no secret that exercise benefits children. It can reduce their risk for obesity, diabetes and even some types of cancer. But did you know that maintaining physical fitness can also help your child in school?

Studies show that, compared with their inactive peers, children who get regular exercise:

- Have better hand-eye coordination.
- Are better listeners.
- Are less fidgety during class.
- Have better handwriting.

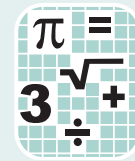
To make physical activity a daily part of your child's life:

- **Go on regular walks.** Pick a time, such as before or after dinner, to take a short walk around your neighborhood together and have a conversation. Make this a habit.

- **Take the long way.** When you are out running errands with your child, skip the elevators and escalators and take the stairs. Choose parking spots that will allow you to walk a bit farther.
- **Play active games.** From shooting hoops to tag, there's no end to the fun your family can have.
- **Have contests.** When you watch TV together, challenge your child to a competition. During commercial breaks, see who can do the most jumping jacks or pushups.
- **Put your child in charge.** Ask your child to come up with some creative ways to keep your family moving.

Source: "Physically active children have improved learning and well-being, DMU researchers find," De Montfort University.

## Help your child have some fun with fractions



Understanding fractions can be a challenge for some children. To help your child learn

to use fractions in fun, everyday ways, try these activities:

- **Take a fraction walk.** Have your child count how many cars you pass. Then, figure how many (what fraction) of them are a certain color. Take turns choosing a color and seeing who has the largest fraction.
- **Measure up.** Give your child measuring cups and two identical glasses. Have your child pour one cup of water into one glass. Can your child guess how many half cups it will take to fill the other glass? How many quarter cups or third cups?
- **Change that recipe.** Ask your child to rewrite the amount of each ingredient to double a recipe or cut it in half.
- **Eat your fractions.** Give your child 24 pieces of cereal. Ask your child to divide them into halves, fourths, etc. Or, share a pizza and ask some questions: "If the pizza is cut into 12 slices, how many slices equal one-half or one-third of the pizza?"

## Elementary school is the perfect time to talk about peer pressure



Most students face peer pressure when they get to middle or high school. But even in elementary school, children can feel pressure to fit in and to do what “everyone else” is doing.

Sometimes, that means going along with teasing others on the playground. Other times, it means watching a movie at a friend’s house that your child knows would never be allowed at home.

Now is the time to teach your elementary schooler how to resist negative peer pressure—and how to say *no* to things that don’t fit with your family’s rules or values. Encourage your child to say and remember these statements:

- I can say *no* to things that would put me in danger.
- I can make positive choices for myself.
- I can say, “You’re my friend, but I don’t choose to do that.”
- It’s OK if I make choices that are not the same as the choices my friends make.

Source: D. Bloch, *The Power of Positive Talk: Words to Help Every Child Succeed*, FreeSpirit Publishers.

**“To be yourself in a world that is constantly trying to make you something else is the greatest accomplishment.”**

—Anonymous

## Take advantage of opportunities to strengthen thinking skills



Students boost their thinking skills when they learn how to apply concepts they’ve learned to various situations.

A child who has learned to count, for example, can get out the correct number of plates when setting the dinner table.

Here are ways to help your child strengthen thinking skills in common elementary school subjects, such as:

- **Language arts.** Before, during and after reading, encourage your child to ask and answer questions that start with *What*, *Why* and *What if*. “What do you think the character will do?” “Why is the character doing that?” “What if the character had made a different decision?”
- **Math.** Challenge your child to catch mistakes. For example, you might count by twos and say, “2, 4, 6, 7.” Can your child figure out what’s wrong? Do activities together that involve building and sorting. “Let’s build a tiny model of our car.” “Can you help me reorganize this shelf of canned food?”
- **Science.** Watch nature programs and read books about nature together. Then, ask your child questions: “That tree has needles instead of flat leaves. What’s that type of tree called?” “The flowers we planted last year grew back. Are they *annuals* or *perennials*?” “Look at that fly. Do flies have four wings or two?”

## Are you spending meaningful time with your family?



Frequent, meaningful, undivided attention from family helps children reach their full potential in school and life. But finding

that time can often be difficult.

Are you finding ways to spend meaningful family time together?

Answer *yes* or *no* to each of the questions below to find out:

- \_\_\_ 1. Do you **strive** to eat meals as a family regularly and include your child in mealtime conversations?
- \_\_\_ 2. Do you **balance** your child’s structured activities with plenty of time for reading, relaxing and hanging out with family?
- \_\_\_ 3. Do you **have** a bedtime routine that includes spending at least five minutes talking with your child?
- \_\_\_ 4. Do you **schedule** one-on-one time with your child each week?
- \_\_\_ 5. Have you **designated** screen-free times at home? Digital devices can cause separation even when family members are together.

### How well are you doing?

More *yes* answers mean you’re finding ways to make family time a priority.

For *no* answers, try those ideas.

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# Set the stage for a successful transition to middle school



Will your child be heading to middle school next year? If so, the time to start preparing for that exciting transition is now.

At school, teachers are helping students get ready. At home, you can do the same thing. To support your child's progress and independence:

- **Learn about the middle school.** Read its website regularly with your child. Follow its social media pages. Visit the school. Ask for a tour. The more familiar you and your child are with the school, the easier it will be to adjust.
- **Build school spirit.** Learn about the school's clubs, teams, classes, colors and mascot. Talk about your child's interests and the exciting opportunities for middle school students. Attend a student performance or game together.
- **Encourage important habits.** Your child should stick to a daily study routine and practice staying organized. These skills will be crucial in middle school and beyond.
- **Find out about** summer activities for rising middle schoolers, such as library reading programs. Ask the school for suggestions.
- **Attend events** for new students and families. Join the parent-teacher organization and ask about the volunteer opportunities. Introduce yourself to staff and other parents.
- **Find a mentor.** Do any of your neighbors or friends have children currently attending the middle school? Perhaps one could talk to your child about what it's like.
- **Keep communicating.** Discuss any concerns or questions your child may have.

# Reduce passive screen time by tracking it and setting limits



Researchers have looked at the difference in children's brain activity when reading a book versus consuming

screen-based media. The researchers found that brain activity increased while children were reading and decreased while they were viewing screen-based media. Their findings highlight the importance of limiting passive recreational screen time for healthy brain development.

The first step in managing digital media is to become aware of how much time your child is actually spending staring at a screen for entertainment.

Have your child track time spent on passive online activities, such as

streaming TV shows, watching videos and browsing social media. Kids are often surprised at how quickly those minutes add up.

Next, challenge your child to limit passive screen time and replace it with more beneficial activities. Your child could play a game with friends, read a good book, write in a journal, work on a craft or listen to music, for example.

Studies show that when families discuss and set *any* media limits, children's screen time drops by an average of more than three hours a day.

**Source:** T. Horowitz-Kraus and J.S. Hutton, "Brain connectivity in children is increased by the time they spend reading books and decreased by the length of exposure to screen-based media," *Acta Paediatrica*.

**Q:** When my eight-year-old gets angry or frustrated, it often results in a tantrum. This is happening at home and at school—and the teacher is asking for my help. How do I teach my child self-control?

## Questions & Answers

**A:** Elementary-age children have more stress in their lives than most families realize. When they don't have the skills to cope with stress, they may resort to toddler-style outbursts and crying fits.

However, success in school and in relationships depends on your child's ability to maintain self-control.

To minimize temper tantrums, first try to figure out what triggers them. Keep a record of your child's behavior for one week. What happens just before a tantrum begins? Do you notice patterns? Then, help your child avoid some of the situations that lead to stress.

Next, share tools that can help your child manage behavior. When you sense a meltdown, show your child how to:

- **Take a time out.** Have your child walk away from the situation for a five-minute breather. Tell your child, "You may return once you are able to talk calmly."
- **Use calming techniques,** such as breathing deeply, while slowly counting to 10. Encourage your child to say, "I can work through this."
- **Throw it out.** Have your child write or draw the angry feelings on paper and then wad the paper up and toss it away.
- **Talk it out.** Help your child become more self-aware. When things aren't going well, assist your child in recognizing and naming feelings.

# It Matters: Study Skills

## Preparation is key to your child's test success



Your child's teacher announces there will be a test next week and tells students to start preparing now. What

steps should your child follow?

Encourage your child to:

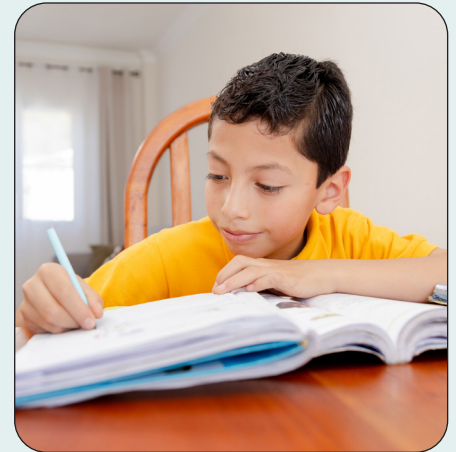
- **Clarify what will be tested.** Have your child check with the teacher to find out what the test will cover. Also suggest asking what kind of test it will be (fill in the blanks, multiple choice, etc.).
- **Make a plan.** Studying works best when it's done repeatedly over time—not at the last minute. Help your child schedule several study sessions and write them on the calendar.
- **Think of ways** to reinforce the material. Your child could make flash cards or take a practice test. You could quiz each other on the material.
- **Focus on school success habits.** In addition to studying, your child needs rest and good nutrition to succeed in school. A regular bedtime and healthy meals go a long way!
- **Make attendance a priority.** It's hard for students to keep up when they miss school or arrive late. Reduce stress on test day by making sure your child begins class on time.
- **Ease anxiety.** Make plenty of positive comments. "You are prepared for this test. You're going to do great on it!" There's no need to pressure your child. Support and preparation are all your child needs!

## Help your child review graded tests and make adjustments

Your child is used to learning material before a test. But what about after the test? Unless your student gets a perfect score on every test, every time, there is still learning to do!

After a test, your child should:

- **Review the graded test** and make notes about which answers were correct and which were incorrect.
- **Identify the types of errors** most commonly made. Mistakes generally come in two forms: Carelessness—your child may have rushed through the question. Lack of preparation—your child didn't study enough, or is still confused about a topic and needs to ask the teacher for help.
- **Make adjustments.** Brainstorm together about how to reduce careless errors. For example, your child could read questions twice



and check work before turning it in.

For mistakes based on lack of preparation, the solution is more studying. Your child should start to review several days before the test. The last day should be spent going over everything a final time, not learning new material.

## Reduce your child's test anxiety with four proven strategies



It's normal to get a little nervous before a big test, but many students suffer from excessive test anxiety. They worry so much about taking the test that their performance suffers.

To help your child relieve those pre-test jitters:

1. **Focus on preparation.** Encourage your child to spread studying out over time. True learning requires time to review and think about the content. And knowing the material is the best way to reduce anxiety and stress.
2. **Discourage cramming,** which can increase anxiety and interfere with clear thinking. The most important things your child can do the day before a test are to review and then get a good night's sleep.
3. **Encourage a positive outlook.** Build confidence by reminding your child of strengths. Have your child imagine what it will feel like to do well on the test.
4. **Maintain perspective.** Remind your child that test scores aren't everything. Make sure your child knows that your support and love are unconditional.