

# Helping Children Learn<sup>®</sup>

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School



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## Seven strategies help elementary schoolers expand reading skills

Is your child reading by herself? That's terrific. Keep in mind, however, that her reading skills must be strengthened and maintained. As she gets older, she will be expected to read more complex material. So how can you support her efforts and help keep her reading progress on track? Here are seven ways:

### 1. Let your child read what she likes.

She doesn't have to read only books. Graphic novels, magazines, advertisements and recipes are fine choices, too.

**2. Make connections.** Look for books about the places your child's ancestors came from. Or have her read about historic events that happened near home.

**3. Make reading irresistible.** Allow your child to stay up 15 minutes later to read in bed. Or let her build a fort and read inside by flashlight.

**4. Add some drama.** Turn favorite books into family plays. Encourage everyone to dress up and play a part.

**5. Start a book club.** Get your child's friends together for book-related discussions, activities and snacks.

**6. Set a timer.** If your child resists reading, say, "Read to me for three minutes. When the timer rings, you can stop." Add a minute every few days.

**7. Read aloud.** Select books that are a bit more advanced than your child can read herself. When parents read, kids enjoy more challenging stories.



## Exercise observation power

Scientists notice and remember details. Here's a memory game to play with your child to help build her observation skills.

When you're on a walk, ask your child questions like, "How many windows were on the front of the house we just passed?" or "What color was its front door?" See if she can remember without looking.

## Reset your child's habits for better results

If your child's school year is not going the way you'd hoped, push the reset button and give her a fresh start. To do it:

- **Involve the whole family.** If your child needs to spend more time studying, make it quiet time for everyone. Work or read while she studies.
- **Replace bad habits** with good ones. If she usually watches TV when she gets home, she can relax by reading for 30 minutes instead.
- **Praise successes.** Help her see the link between her new habits and her results.



Source: R. Fry, *Get Organized*, Career Press.



## Help your child get a feel for fractions

Many kids find fractions difficult. But they don't have to be! Help your child get comfortable with fractions by making a fraction kit. Here's how:

**1. Cut several long strips** of paper, each one a different color. They should all be the same length and about three inches wide.

**2. Let your child choose** one strip to represent one whole unit. He can label it  $\frac{1}{1}$ .

**3. Have your child fold** another strip in half end-to-end and cut on the fold. Label each piece  $\frac{1}{2}$ . Discuss how the two halves make one whole.

**4. Fold and cut** other strips into thirds, fourths, sixths and eighths. Label the pieces. Say what each fraction represents. "This is one piece of three, so we'll write  $\frac{1}{3}$ ."

**5. Let your child play** with the pieces. How many fourths add up to  $\frac{1}{2}$ ? Which is larger,  $\frac{1}{3}$  or  $\frac{1}{2}$ ?

**6. Save the kit** to help check work.

Source: D. Adams and M. Hamm, *Helping Students Who Struggle with Math and Science*, Rowman & Littlefield Education.

## Clean hands, healthy kids

One simple step can help your child stay healthy and avoid missing school. It's hand washing! Teach your child to:



- **Wash properly.** He should wet hands, lather with soap and wash fronts, backs, between fingers, etc. for 20 seconds.
- **Use a fresh paper towel** to turn off the faucet and open the bathroom door.
- **Wash hands often**, especially before eating and after using the bathroom.
- **Sneeze or cough into his elbow**, not his hand.

Source: C.H. Lau and others, "Hand hygiene instruction decreases illness-related absenteeism in elementary schools: a prospective cohort study," *BMC Pediatrics*, [nswc.com/lather](http://nswc.com/lather).



## How can I change my child's attitude toward school?

**Q:** My child has recently told me, more than once, that he hates school. I'm not sure how to respond—he has to go to school, after all. What can I do to improve the situation for him?

**A:** Not all children who say they hate school actually do. Sometimes, they're just looking for attention—or for a chance to put off homework.

Still, if your son has said this repeatedly, there's probably something going on. Here are some steps you can take:

- 1. Talk to your child.** Wait for a time when he's relatively calm and when you have plenty of time to talk. Then ask him what's going on. "You've said you hate school a couple times. What's making you feel this way?"
- 2. Identify the problem.** Listen closely to what your child says. Is he struggling in class? Are kids mean to him on the bus? Is he bored?
- 3. Help your child find solutions.** For example, if he is struggling in a subject, ask his teacher for advice. Does your child need to spend more time reviewing the subject? Is he turning in his homework? How can you help at home?
- 4. Be positive.** Help your child see that nearly every situation in life has positives and negatives. Then help him build on the positives and minimize the negatives.



## How do you handle issues at school?

If the teacher tells you that your child has a problem at school, your reaction can make the difference between finding a solution and creating a standoff. Are you addressing school issues constructively? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

- 1. Do you hear** the teacher out *before* you start explaining away your child's behavior?
- 2. Do you wait** to discuss the issue with your child until you can do so calmly?
- 3. Do you involve** your child in brainstorming possible solutions to the problem?
- 4. Do you let** the teacher know how you plan to handle the issue?
- 5. Do you stay** in touch with the school to confirm that your solution is working?

### How well are you doing?

*More yes answers mean you are working with the school and your child to solve problems in positive ways. For each no, try that idea.*

*"Teaching kids to count is fine, but teaching them what counts is best."*  
—Bob Talbert

## Share test-taking strategies

Your child has studied and knows the material. But does she know these strategies for test success? Encourage her to:

- **Ask questions.** If your child doesn't understand the directions or a question, she should ask the teacher to clarify.
- **Answer easy questions first.** If she gets stuck on a hard one, she should move on and return when she's finished the rest.
- **Use the process of elimination** on multiple-choice questions. She should cross off the answers that *can't* be right and decide between the ones that are left.
- **Use extra time** to review her answers and check for careless mistakes.

## Put spare time to good use

One valuable lesson you can teach your child is how to use small bits of time. If he has a few extra minutes before dinner, you might say, "Let's run through your spelling words." He'll learn that using spare moments frees up longer blocks of time for other things.



## Brush up on discipline basics

All children misbehave sometimes. Keep in mind that discipline is meant to teach desired behavior, not to punish. It helps to:

- **Be realistic** about your child's abilities. Match rules to her age and maturity level.
- **Mean what you say.** Make sure your rules and consequences are fair, then stick to them!
- **Acknowledge** your child's feelings. Say, "You are upset because you wanted that toy. But it's Jana's turn. You can have another turn when she's done."
- **Be forgiving.** Teach your child that everyone can learn from mistakes.

Source: "Disciplining Your Child," Healthy Children.org, American Academy of Pediatrics, [nswc.com/aap-discipline](http://nswc.com/aap-discipline).

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