

# Helping Children Learn<sup>®</sup>

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

Valley Stream Christian Academy  
Leslie Fowley, Superintendent



February 2016

## Boost cooperation and improve behavior with teacher-proven tips

It isn't always easy to get children to behave, pay attention, get organized and respond to requests. But it's worth the effort. Students who learn to behave well and follow rules at home are more likely to do the same at school. Teachers face these challenges with 20 or more students each day. Here's what they suggest:

- **Teach your child what you want** him to do. Focus on the tasks that you want to be routine. For example, he can pack the backpack the night before and leave it by the door.
- **Post a schedule** of your child's regular daily activities. He will know what to do and when to do it. And he will feel more independent.
- **Avoid abrupt transitions.** Kids can get really absorbed in an activity. To help your child switch gears, give him a transition alert. Let him know how many minutes he has left before he needs to do something else.
- **Make ordinary tasks fun.** For example, challenge your child to put away his clean laundry in time with the beat of his favorite music.
- **Use silent signals.** Gently touch your child on the shoulder to get his attention. Flick the lights on and off to give a five-minute warning.
- **Provide meaningful things** for your child to do. He'll be less likely to misbehave if he's occupied. Keep books that interest him around the house. Keep craft supplies handy so he can use them at any time. In the grocery store, put your child in charge of coupons.

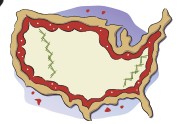


## Share a February who's who

In addition to George Washington and Abraham Lincoln, many other notable people were born in February. To celebrate some of them with your child, try these activities:

- **Feb. 4—Rosa Parks.** Listen to the civil rights activist recall the day she refused to give up her seat on the bus at: [www.achievement.org/autodoc/page/par0int-1](http://www.achievement.org/autodoc/page/par0int-1).
- **Feb. 8—Jules Verne.** Read one of his science fiction stories to your child.
- **Feb. 19—Nicolaus Copernicus.** Honor this early astronomer by taking a night walk and looking at the stars.
- **Feb. 25—Pierre-Auguste Renoir.** Look at his paintings in a book or online. Ask your child to paint one of her own.

## What's for dinner? Geography pizza



Here's a fun way to get your child excited about learning geography: Let him eat it. Help your child cut a pre-cooked pizza crust into the shape of a state or a country. Give him a variety of toppings to mark features such as cities or mountains. Then enjoy his efforts together!



## Offer opportunities to practice skills

Homework gives students a chance to practice the skills they are learning in school. But there are many additional ways that you can help your child get the practice that "makes perfect." Encourage your child to:

- **Write notes.** One fun way to provide writing practice is to have a "silent supper," where family members write notes to communicate. Just being unable to talk may make your child want to pick up a pen and express herself.
- **Tell you the key facts** she read in a chapter from a textbook. Be sure to ask her a few questions about what she tells you.
- **Share a fact with you.** Plan time for everyone to share one new thing they learned that day.
- **Play a matching game.** On a sheet of paper, write math problems (7 + 4) in one column. Write the answers (11) in a different order in another column. Have your child match them up.

Source: J.G. Thompson, *The First-Year Teacher's Survival Guide*, Jossey-Bass.

## Yes DEAR! Let's all read!

In some families, saying, "Oh DEAR!" doesn't mean something's wrong. DEAR stands for Drop Everything And Read. During this time, the TV goes off, phones go unanswered and all family members read. To start DEAR time with your dear ones:



- **Put DEAR on the family calendar** so everyone can plan to be home and have something to read.
- **Start with a half-hour session** once a week. As your family gets into the habit, you can increase DEAR time.

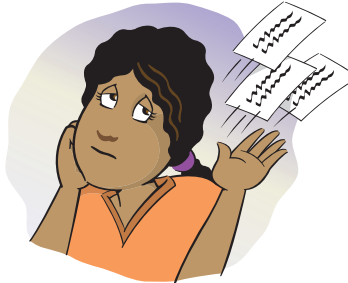


## How can I change my child's attitude about math?

**Q:** My fifth grader says she hates math. Her grades are still OK, but I see trouble ahead. She makes careless errors. When I suggest working with flash cards, she rolls her eyes and says she'll use a calculator. What can I do to help?

**A:** Fifth grade is a critical year. If your child doesn't master basic math skills now, she will fall more and more behind. Help her see that math is important and she *can* do it. Here are some strategies:

- **Eliminate negative expectations.** Research shows that when parents believe that boys are better at math than girls, it can negatively influence their daughters' attitudes about their ability. Assure your child that girls and boys can do math equally well.
- **Show your child** how people use math in daily life. Let her research something she wants the family to buy. What percentage of your monthly budget would it take? Remind her that even with a calculator, she will need to know the formulas to use.
- **Relate math to things** your child enjoys. Does she like music? Can she calculate the market share a new album earned its first week out?
- **Make studying math facts fun** with a deck of cards. Lay three or four cards on the table. Challenge your child to see who can add, subtract, multiply and divide them to come up with the greatest number of different answers in five minutes.



## How do you handle report card time?

A report card, whether it's great or disappointing, offers a perfect opportunity to talk with your child about school and study habits. Are you making the most of your report card talks with your child? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you take** each report card seriously and set aside time to talk about it?
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you ask** your child if he agrees with the grades, and why or why not?
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you praise** your child for his positive efforts and try not to make him feel worse if he's disappointed?
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you help** your child figure out a plan to improve his grades for the next term, or encourage him to keep up the good work?

- \_\_\_ **5. Do you contact** the teacher if you have concerns about your child's grades?

### How well are you doing?

*More yes answers mean you're helping your child learn from his report card. For each no, try that idea.*

*"The time is always right to do right."  
—Martin Luther King, Jr.*

## Support your young writer

Writing involves many skills: understanding a subject, knowing how to organize ideas, and using correct spelling and grammar. It can be a challenge for an elementary student. Here are some ways you can help:

- 1. Have your child** talk through her ideas with you before she begins to write.
- 2. Encourage her** to organize her thoughts by making an outline.
- 3. Offer detailed praise.** "I really like the clear way you've described what led up to this event."
- 4. Focus on** what your child is trying to say. Later, you can suggest that she edit and proofread her draft.

## Be specific about respect

One effective way to teach your child to be respectful of others at home and at school is to talk about specific actions he can take in particular situations.

For example, if he interrupts you, you might say, "When someone else is talking, it's respectful to listen until the person is finished. Then you can have your turn."

Source: P. Denton, *The Power of Our Words: Teacher Language that Helps Children Learn*, Center for Responsive Schools, Inc.

## Show you value education

When you make it clear to your child that education matters to you, it will become important to her, too. To show your child that school should be her top priority:



- **Talk about school** every day. Ask your child questions about what she is learning. Tell her why you value education and why she should, too.
- **Review homework** every day.
- **Stay in contact** with her teacher. Kids learn best when they feel that adults at home and school are on the same team.

### Helping Children Learn®

Published in English and Spanish, September through May.

Publisher: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.

Editor: Alison McLean.

Staff Editors: Rebecca Miyares & Erika Beasley.

Production Manager: Pat Carter.

Translations Editor: Victoria Gaviola.

Layout & Illustrations: Maher & Mignella, Cherry Hill, NJ.

Copyright © 2016, The Parent Institute®, a division of NIS, Inc.

P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474

1-800-756-5525 • www.parent-institute.com • ISSN 1527-1013