

# Helping Children Learn<sup>®</sup>

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School  
Family and School Partnerships



September 2022

## Put simple ideas to work now to support learning all year long

Schools and families share a common goal: helping students learn, grow and thrive. And it takes both schools and families to achieve it.

At school, the start of a new year is a time to establish routines and priorities. To do the same at home and set your child up for a productive year of learning:

- **Create a study space** that is comfortable for your student. It can be at a bedroom desk, at the kitchen table or on the couch. It just needs to have plenty of light and few distractions when your child is working.
- **Make a weekly schedule.** Plan time for schoolwork, play, activities and relaxing. Be sure to include a family reading time. Reading together regularly shows your child that reading is important.
- **Keep a family calendar.** You can use a different color for each family member's activities.
- **Set up a folder** for school notices so they won't get misplaced.
- **Cut back on recreational screen time.** Set a weekly limit on time spent passively watching screen media.
- **Update contact information.** Provide your work and emergency numbers to the school. Collect teacher and attendance office contacts.



## Establish a key partnership

You and the teacher are at the center of your child's daily life. Teamwork between you benefits your student. To foster it:

- **Participate** in Back-to-School Night to find out about teacher expectations.
- **Update the teacher** about changes and challenges your child is facing.
- **Show your child** you respect the teacher.

## Encourage cooperation

Leadership is a positive quality in a student. But *bossiness*—being demanding, not listening, not cooperating—just makes working with classmates and teachers harder. To help your child learn to contribute in a group:

- **Have family members take turns** making some decisions for everyone, such as what vegetable to eat for dinner.
- **Set house rules.** If one person divides the cookie, the other person gets to choose which piece they want.
- **Teach fair ways** to make decisions, like flipping a coin to see who goes first.



## Have your student teach

One of the most effective ways to reinforce learning is to ask your child to teach the material to you. Try these three strategies with your "student teacher":

1. **Show interest** in what your child is learning in school. Ask your student to explain concepts and read texts aloud.
2. **Take a quiz.** Let your child ask you questions about the material.
3. **Ask for help.** How does your child think you should solve a problem? What should you do first?



## Make reading an activity your child will enjoy doing every day

Even after elementary schoolers learn to read, they must practice regularly to develop their skills. Strong reading skills will make learning every subject easier for your child. To encourage frequent reading:

- **Give your child choices.** Offer a wide variety of reading material—books, age-appropriate news articles, graphic novels etc. Let your child choose what to bring home from the library.
- **Connect reading to life.** Read together about historical events that happened near your home. Look for books related to things your child likes to do.
- **Set a timer.** If your child resists reading, say "Read to me for three minutes." Add another minute every few days.
- **Act out stories.** Help your child stage a family play or make a video of a current favorite book.
- **Read aloud.** When children listen to books, they can enjoy more challenging words and stories.





## How can I help my child make up for lost learning?

**Q:** My third grader lost ground academically during the pandemic and struggled with grade level work last spring. How can I help my child get back on track this year?

**A:** Your student is not alone! Studies show widespread drops in math and reading test scores since 2019. But there's also good news: There are many ways you can work with the school and your child to help recover that lost ground. Here are some ways to get started:



- **Meet with your child's teacher** as early as possible this fall. Talk about subject areas that give your student trouble. Ask what you can do at home and about school resources that can help. Many schools and districts are using relief funds to implement tutoring programs, for example.
- **Prioritize school attendance.** Don't let your child miss out on class instruction, discussions and demonstrations.
- **Help your child set learning goals** and plan steps to meet them. Every time your student completes a step, recognize the effort.
- **Plan for out-of-school learning.** Visit a historic site together. Get a book on minerals from the library and spend an afternoon rock-hunting. Building your child's base of knowledge helps with learning in school.



## Are you establishing healthy habits?

Families play a vital role in helping students do their best in school. One key way to do this is by ensuring that your child gets needed rest, nutrition and exercise. Are you promoting healthy choices? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you maintain** a regular bedtime for your child? Elementary schoolers need at least nine hours of sleep daily.
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you feed** your child breakfast each day? Food fuels kids' brains for learning.
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you find** fun ways for your child to get moving? Daily exercise improves memory and focus.
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you review** the rules often about safely interacting with others, and make sure your child understands them?

- \_\_\_ **5. Do you teach** your child to wash or sanitize hands frequently throughout the day?

### How well are you doing?

*More yes answers mean you are helping your child establish habits that support learning. For each no, try that idea.*

*"The habits we form from childhood make no small difference, but rather they make all the difference." —Aristotle*

## Mistakes are good teachers

The way your child responds after making a mistake in schoolwork makes the difference between learning and being stuck. When you see that your student has made an error:

- 1. Ask,** "Do you understand why this is wrong?" If the answer is *yes*, have your child correct the mistake. If the answer is *no*, offer guidance or suggest asking the teacher for help.
- 2. Explain** that fixing mistakes helps kids understand them, so they can avoid making them again.
- 3. Recognize** progress and remind your child that people get smarter when they learn from mistakes.

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.

## Concentrate on listening

Listening and learning go hand in hand. To build your child's listening skills, be a good role model. When your elementary schooler is telling you



something, stop what you are doing. Offer your full attention. If your child asks a question, repeat the question and then respond.

## Enjoy the fun of writing

To encourage your child's interest in writing, have some fun doing it together. Set a timer for five minutes then spend the time writing about one of these ideas:

- **The best birthday** I can imagine.
- **Something I'd like to try** and why.
- **The most exciting thing** I've ever done and how I did it.

Afterward, share what you each wrote.

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Published in English and Spanish, September through May.

Publisher: Doris McLaughlin.

Publisher Emeritus: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.

Editor: Alison McLean.

Translations Editor: Victoria Gaviola.

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