



Reinforce responsibility to boost academic success

Responsible students work hard, behave appropriately—and do better in school. And the lessons children learn about responsibility at home carry over to school.

To instill responsibility:

- **Trust your child** with meaningful tasks. School-age children are capable of picking up their rooms, packing lunches, taking out the recycling and putting clean laundry away.
- **Talk about financial responsibility.** Teach your child about budgeting, spending, saving and giving. Help your child practice with money from an allowance or gifts.
- **Find ways to help others.** Discuss what it means to be a responsible member of a community. Talk about different ways your family can contribute, such as by helping a neighbor or volunteering your time for an important cause.
- **Let your child make decisions,** such as which assignment to tackle first. Being responsible for making decisions builds confidence.
- **Enforce a few age-appropriate rules and consequences.** State them clearly so your child knows exactly what you expect—and what will happen if the rules are broken. (See next article for more tips on setting rules.)
- **Adjust responsibilities** as your child gets older. As children mature, their abilities will change. Perhaps your child can take on more grown-up chores or make new and exciting decisions. Talk to your elementary schooler about how great it feels to be responsible.

A set of house rules can make discipline easy



Children who are expected to follow rules at home are much more likely to follow rules at

school. And when students follow the rules, there is more time for learning.

To make rules memorable, create a short list of house rules. Focus on rules and consequences that govern the things that are your biggest concerns. In one family, it might be behavior toward siblings. In another, it might be helping out around the house.

Next, come up with a catchy phrase that sums up the rule and the consequence. For example:

- **If you hit, you sit.** Any physical action toward a sibling will result in a time out.
- **If you partake, you take part.** Every family member has responsibility for meal time—from setting the table to clearing the dishes.
- **Pick up or pay up.** If your child doesn't put belongings away, place them in a closet. Once a week, your child can earn them back by completing a small chore.

Tackle friend problems before they affect school performance



Learning how to deal with “friends” who turn out not to be friends is a tough lesson for kids.

And it’s one that can distract your elementary schooler from academic learning and affect performance in school.

Talk to your child about all of the qualities that make someone a true friend. Then, suggest your child be cautious with classmates who seem:

- **Selfish.** Does the person seem self-centered and manipulative? Are they using your child for personal gain?
- **Phony.** Does the person say one thing and then do another?
- **Dishonest.** Someone who wants to use a friend to cheat on a test is not really a friend at all.

- **Unreliable.** Did the person offer to walk home with your child after school, but then head off to someone else’s house instead? Explain that your child is worthy of *real* friends who are supportive. Friendship should be earned, so remind your child to be wary of people who have not earned it.

Source: R.M. Kidder, *Good Kids, Tough Choices: How Parents Can Help Their Children Do the Right Thing*, Jossey-Bass.

“Truly great friends are hard to find, difficult to leave, and impossible to forget.”

—G. Randolph

Keep your elementary schooler motivated with these strategies



You don’t just want your child to learn. You want your child to *want* to learn! Motivation drives students to put in effort, persevere and achieve goals.

To motivate your elementary schooler to put effort into learning:

- **Stay engaged.** When families are involved in education, kids do better in school. Talk about school, monitor schoolwork and communicate with the teacher regularly.
- **Have a positive outlook.** Say that you believe your child can succeed in school. And if your student struggles, work with the teacher to find solutions.
- **Promote independence.** Give your child age-appropriate freedoms—choosing between two places to read, or whether to do math before or after dinner, for example.
- **Correct mistakes** in positive ways. “You spelled everything right except these two words! I bet you can learn them with practice” is more motivating than “You seem to struggle with spelling.”
- **Give specific compliments.** It’s better to say, “Your report is written so neatly. I can tell that you really took your time” than “Nice handwriting.”
- **Add more to learning.** Let school lessons spark *your* imagination. Visit educational websites with your child. Take a trip to the state capital, plant a window garden or calculate distances between points on map together.

Are you helping your child build community spirit?



The same qualities that help people live peacefully together in families can help them live in their communities—and get

along with others in school. Are you encouraging civic responsibility? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

- ___ **1. Do you talk** with your child about school and family rules and why they’re necessary?
- ___ **2. Do you volunteer** your time as a family on a regular basis?
- ___ **3. Do you show** your child that it is important to honor commitments by keeping your promises?
- ___ **4. Do you model** sportsmanship when you are watching sporting events and playing games?
- ___ **5. Do you teach** your child to take responsibility for actions and be accountable for choices?

How well are you doing?

More *yes* answers mean you’re raising your elementary schooler to be a responsible community member. For *no* answers, try those ideas to promote cooperation with others.

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Help your elementary schooler succeed on standardized tests



Standardized tests have been used to measure student achievement and ability for many years. But it's important to remember that one test doesn't represent a child's total abilities. A student may get high grades on classwork, for example, but be too anxious on test day to think clearly.

To support your child's success on standardized tests:

- **Make schoolwork a priority.** Students who test well tend to be the ones who study and finish assignments on time. They also miss less school than other students.
- **Communicate with teachers.** In addition to finding out how your

child is doing throughout the year, ask about test details, such as, "Which skills do the tests measure?" "How can I help my child prepare?"

- **Develop healthy routines.** Your child needs adequate sleep and a nutritious breakfast every day before school—especially on the days leading up to a test.
- **Promote reading.** Most tests require reading, so make sure your child reads often. Reading skills get stronger with regular practice.
- **Reduce anxiety.** Help your child stay calm and positive. If nervous, your child can take deep breaths and say, "I can do this!" Remind your child that your love is not dependant on high test scores.

Celebrate Presidents Day with a variety of learning activities



February 17 is Presidents Day in the United States. Try these enjoyable learning activities to help your child discover more

about U.S. presidents:

- **Find a book** with pictures of U.S. presidents. Have your child match those pictures to the faces on coins (pennies, nickels, dimes and quarters) and bills (one-, five- and twenty-dollar bills).
- **Take a virtual tour** of George Washington's home. Visit <https://virtualtour.mountvernon.org>.
- **Learn how the office of president** was created by watching an animated TedED video at <https://ed.ted.com/lessons/inventing-the-american-presidency-kenneth-c-davis>.
- **Ask your child** to imagine being president for a day. Then, help

your elementary schooler write a short essay, answering questions such as: *What is my day like? What powers do I have? What laws do I want to create or change?*

- **Write a letter.** Does your child have something to say to the president? Encourage writing a letter. Help your child follow the guidelines at www.whitehouse.gov/get-involved/write-or-call.
- **Share the legend** of George Washington cutting down the cherry tree. Talk about how Lincoln was known as "Honest Abe." Discuss the value of honesty. Ask your child what other qualities a president needs.
- **Find crafts, coloring pages,** word searches and more fun activities to do with your child at www.dltk-kids.com/crafts/presidents.html.

Q: My oldest child is in middle school and excels in both academics and soccer. My youngest child, who is in third grade, struggles academically and athletically—and feels like a failure. How can I help my youngest overcome these feelings of inadequacy?

Questions & Answers

A: Younger siblings often feel like they're running to catch up. But with your love and support, your youngest child can find ways to grow into a more confident person—and improve grades at the same time!

Research consistently links a positive self-image—feeling capable of learning—to higher school achievement. And the best way to boost that feeling is to uncover areas where your child *can* be successful. Success in one area can inspire success in another.

What are your child's interests? If your oldest is an accomplished soccer player, suggest that your youngest try a different sport. Or, maybe your child would be happier playing an instrument or learning how to cook.

The key is to find activities that are different from those of your oldest and that will give your youngest an opportunity to shine.

Also point out things your youngest already does well. Whether it's a great sense of style or kindness to others, say that these are very important—and that they make you very proud. Avoid comparisons to your oldest child.

If the feelings of inadequacy continue or are affecting your child's overall well-being, consider consulting with a counselor or pediatrician.

It Matters: Reading Skills

Comprehension may improve with movement



Reading is often thought of as a calm and cozy activity. But research suggests that children can improve their comprehension and memory by moving around and acting out what they've read.

Acting out a phrase or a passage can help children make connections between the words on a page and real actions. Physically moving quickly and suddenly, for example, can help a young child understand the word *darting* better.

Here are some strategies for you and your child to try after reading a story together:

- **Play dress up.** Dress up as favorite characters. Use props from around the house and reenact exciting scenes. Use words from the story. "I'm climbing to the *peak* of the mountain! The very top!"
- **Put on a play.** Help your child write a short skit based on the story. Gather friends and family to participate or sit in the audience.
- **Do a dramatic reading.** Act out the story as you read it aloud. Take turns or let your child perform the whole thing. Use exaggerated actions and tones to bring the story to life.
- **Plan a puppet show** and act out a few scenes from the story with your child. If you don't have puppets, make some from old socks or small paper bags.

Source: M.P. Kaschak and others, "Enacted Reading Comprehension: Using Bodily Movement to Aid the Comprehension of Abstract Text Content," *PLOS ONE*, Public Library of Science.

A trip to the library can fuel your child's love of reading

Experts believe *all* children can enjoy reading. It's just a matter of finding the right materials. Before your next library visit, consider these six things:

1. **Company.** Kids who "don't like" to read often take pride in reading to others. Bring along a younger sibling, a grandparent or a favorite stuffed animal.
2. **Your child's hobbies.** Can you find an irresistible book about baseball, video games or crochet? Ask the librarian for suggestions.
3. **Different genres.** Perhaps your child would like to read a mystery, a how-to book or a biography. Consider everything.
4. **Alternatives to books.** Your child might prefer shorter materials, such as articles, comics or recipes. All of these count as reading.
5. **Other media.** Help your child find an audiobook to listen to while doing chores or riding in the car.
6. **Activities.** See if your local library hosts read-aloud times, or has reading-related activities and games for children on its website.



Turn your home into a haven for readers with these tips



One of the most effective ways to get elementary schoolers to read is to surround them with a wide variety of reading material. In addition to filling your home with books, magazines and newspapers:

- **Help your child own some books.** It's great to check out books from the library. But owning a few books can foster a sense of pride about reading in your child. You can find great deals on used books at library fundraisers, yard sales and thrift stores.
- **Organize reading materials** in containers, such as baskets, small boxes or magazine racks. These can fit in small spaces next to beds, couches and tables. They can even go in the car.
- **Create a special reading spot** in your child's bedroom. Provide adequate lighting. At bedtime, say something like, "You're old enough to stay up 15 minutes longer to read. Or, you can turn off the light at the same time as always. It's up to you." Your child will probably choose to stay up and read.