

Helping Children Learn

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

February 2006

SOLVING SCHOOL PROBLEMS

React well to a poor report card

A disappointing report card at mid-year is worrisome. It means your child might not be learning necessary skills. If you believe she can do better, you must take action. Here's what experts suggest:

- **Pinpoint the problem.** Has your child been absent too much to learn? Does she turn in homework on time? Does she have attention or behavior problems?
- **Talk with your child.** What is causing her to struggle in school? What would help her? It's okay if she isn't sure.
- **Share your expectations.** Explain that you take low grades seriously. Your child doesn't have to get all A's. But she does need to try hard and ask for help when she doesn't understand something.
- **Contact the teacher.** How can you solve the problem together?
- **Plan for improvement.** Set a realistic goal in one or more areas (such as turning a C into a B- or doing homework at a regular time).
- **Praise your child's success.** Notice where she does well, including in extracurricular activities, and give frequent compliments.



Source: "How to Handle a Poor Report Card," Sylvan Learning Center, www.educate.com/about/pressroom/article_200210_us.cfm and "Poor Report Cards—What To Do," Huntington Learning Center, www.huntingtonlearning.com/p-report.php.

MOTIVATING YOUR CHILD

Make math fun, not intimidating

If your child views math as scary or boring, try these activities. They may change his perspective:

- **Puddle watch.** Use washable chalk to trace around a puddle after rain. Every hour, chart how much the puddle has changed, if any. See whether puddles in sun (versus shade) disappear more quickly.
- **Trace bodies.** Estimate how much yarn it will take to outline your bodies. Take turns lying down and tracing around your shape. Place the yarn around the trace lines and then measure it. Whose yarn is longest? By how much? How close were your estimates?
- **Mark shadows.** Stand in the sun. Trace your feet. Draw a line at the end of your shadow and write the time of day. Do this every half hour in the same spot. What changes occur? Why?

BUILDING CHARACTER

Create a reading record

Each time your child reads a book, suggest that he record it in a special journal. Have him note the title, authors, main characters and plot. Allow him to add drawings and any comments he'd like. Share with loved ones, such as grandparents, with pride!

Source: Dick Venezky, *Read*Write*Now! Play on Paper: A Funbook for Preparing to Read and Write* (U.S. Department of Education, 1-800-437-0833, www.ed.gov).

AFTER SCHOOL

Make caring a family activity

You want your child to care about others. One of the best ways to encourage this is through giving. This month, plan something you can do together. You might donate food to the homeless or bake cookies for a new neighbor. You'll build happy family memories while helping others.

BUILDING RESPONSIBILITY

Help your child become a 'gold-star' student

Your child does his homework. But he rushes through math, skims history and scrawls his book report. If this is an ongoing problem, a "gold-star" reward chart can help.

Start by talking about expectations. How could your child earn a gold star? For example, he might spend at least ten minutes on each homework subject. Write the tasks on a chart.

You can also give silver or bronze stars for partial work. Note how many stars it takes to win a reward. For example, five gold stars might earn a special outing with you. Over time, your child will learn what it takes to do his best.

Source: Virginia M. Shiller, *Rewards for Kids!*, ISBN: 1-591-47006-4 (American Psychological Association, 1-800-374-2721, www.apa.org).



QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

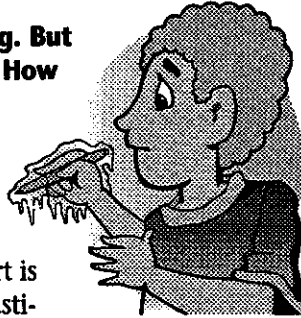
How can you help your child with writing?

Q: My fifth grader likes math and reading. But when it comes to writing, he freezes up. How can I help him relax?

A: Many students have trouble putting their thoughts on paper. But teachers recognize the importance of writing, so they emphasize it. Here are some ways to help:

- **Begin early.** Writing takes time. If a report is due next week, don't let your child procrastinate. Brainstorm about topics right away.
- **Jot down ideas.** Suggest that your child list everything he knows about the report subject. He may be surprised by how much information he has.
- **Have a conversation.** Ask your child what he'd like to say in his report. After he's said it aloud, writing the first draft may be easier.
- **Skip the introduction.** The first few sentences can be the hardest to write. It's fine if your child does them last.
- **Put the draft aside.** The next day, have your child read it. (Maybe he'll let you read it, too.) What works and what doesn't? Be as encouraging as possible.
- **Edit the project.** Your child should check spelling, grammar, organization and more. Compliment his work!

Source: Brains Are Not Enough: A Guide to Effective Study Skills, Harvard-Westlake School, www.harvardwestlake.com/students/studyskills/guide/.



PARENT QUIZ

Is your child an organized student?

Organization is a major step toward school success. Answer the following questions *yes* or *no* to see if you're promoting order.

- ___ 1. Does your child study in one place every day?
- ___ 2. Do you store library books in a specific spot?
- ___ 3. Does your child put finished homework in his book bag?
- ___ 4. Do you keep packed book bags by the front door?
- ___ 5. Does your family clean out book bags, desks and bedrooms weekly?

How did you do? Each *yes* answer means you're helping your child stay organized. For each *no* answer, consider using that idea from the quiz to change your answer to *yes*.

"Your children will become what you are, so be what you want them to be."

— David Bly

YOUR CHILD AND YOU

Make study time an every-day activity for your child

How often do you ask your child, "Do you have homework today?" If you establish a daily study time, this question isn't needed. Each day, your child can do assignments. If he doesn't have any, he should read or review. Instead of asking, "What homework do you have?" you can ask, "What will you be studying today?"

DISCIPLINE

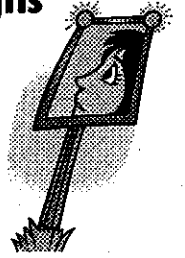
Impulsive behavior has some warning signs

Stopping impulsive behavior is tough. That's why it's smart to prevent it. Learn your child's signs of agitation. Does she get frustrated easily?

Wiggle in her seat? When you see them, take action.

For example, distract your child, do a soothing activity, or remind her of rewards.

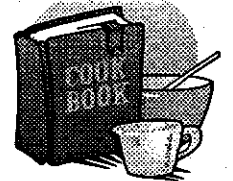
Source: Sandra F. Rief, "Dealing with Hyperactive/Impulsive Behavior," http://newsletters.fen.com/article/print/0,1303,23-24394,00.html?obj_gra.



WHEN YOU NEED HELP

Support your child through times of family stress

Stressful family events, such as a move or job loss, can affect children. It's important to give them stability and hope. Stick to familiar routines and involve your child in fun decisions. "What color do you want to paint your new room?" Or, "We're saving money. Instead of going out to eat, what could we cook that you love?" Help your child feel safe and optimistic.



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

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