

Helping Children Learn

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

January 2006

DEVELOPING THINKING SKILLS

Build skills that solve problems

"It's not that I'm so smart," said the great scientist Albert Einstein. "It's just that I stay with problems longer." This takes perseverance and thinking skills. Here are some ways to build these traits in your child:

- **Sort.** Encourage your child to help you separate things into categories, such as laundry and toys. Think of new ways to organize clothes—by color, use (tops and bottoms) or wearer. Put favorite toys on shelves, for example, and others in a closet.
- **List.** Challenge your child to think about events and experiences. What were the two best days of winter vacation? Which three books has he enjoyed most? What are his top five goals for the future?
- **Brainstorm.** If your child needs to decide something, think of all the possible choices—even silly ones. Then narrow down the options. Note the pros and cons of each one. Help him make a sensible decision.
- **Observe.** Sometimes play "What's Wrong Here?" You might set the table, but remove the fork from one place. Or you could put vegetables on every plate except yours. Can your child tell what's wrong? Have fun while noticing patterns.



Source: Kathryn Stout, "Simple Techniques To Encourage Thinking Skills in the Young," Design-A-Study, www.designastudy.com/teaching/tips-0198.html.

BUILDING RESPONSIBILITY

Help your child keep track of things

Elementary schoolers are still developing their ability to store information. So they forget a lot. Instead of taking over their duties (which only leads to more problems), try these ideas:

- **Write down tasks.** List and post your child's responsibilities, chores and school assignments.
- **Set an example.** Use to-do lists. Follow through on commitments.
- **Notice success.** Tell your child that you admire her efforts!
- **Establish routines.** This will help your child remember what to do and when to do it.
- **Avoid saving the day.** If forgetting is unpleasant, it may happen less often.
- **Organize belongings.** Have your child put key items in the same place every day.
- **Show confidence.** Send the message, "I know you can do this. I believe in you."

Source: Mimi Greenwood Knight, "Oops, I forgot," *Parents*, September 2002 (Gruner + Jahr Publishing, 1-800-727-3682, www.parents.com).

WHEN YOU NEED HELP

Learn the signs of ADHD

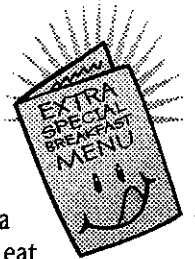
If your child misbehaves at school, you may worry that he has ADHD. Here's a question to consider. Is he disruptive at home too? Among other things, kids with ADHD have significant trouble in at least two settings. But no matter what the cause, contact the school for help.

Source: "Profiles of Behavioral and Emotional Disorders," Center for the Advancement of Children's Mental Health at Columbia University, www.kidsmentalhealth.org/Attention-Deficit-HyperactivityDisorder.html.

PARENT TO PARENT

Use an 'Extra-Special Menu' to recognize achievement

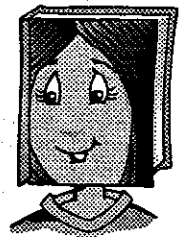
Looking for a new reward for your child? Here's an idea from teacher and mom **Heather Stevenson of Rochester, New York**. She made an "Extra-Special Breakfast Menu." It includes her kids' favorite foods. She offers it when a child does a great job. Even better, they eat the meal together!



MAKING TIME COUNT

Make story-telling a fun game for the whole family

When kids tell stories, they get creative. They experiment with words and organize thoughts. Here's a way to keep everyone interested. Let each member of the family pick a character. Then take turns telling the story. Each character must be included. This is a great way to pass time in the car.



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QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

How important are manners at your child's elementary school?

Q: My daughter's teacher called me for a conference. He says she has good grades, but poor manners. With all the skills children have to master, are manners really a "school subject"? How can I help my daughter with this?

A: Imagine a world where everyone talked whenever they wanted to. Imagine a world where no one waited to take a turn.

That's a fairly accurate picture of how some children act in school. The sad truth is that until kids display basic manners—taking turns, listening quietly, respecting others—learning in a group is difficult.

You can help your child, her teacher and the class by focusing on manners at home. Start small. Ask the teacher which skills need the most work. Choose two or three to improve. Once your daughter makes progress, provide new challenges.

Be positive. If your child waits patiently while you're on the phone, for example, compliment her. When she sees that good behavior makes you proud, she's likely to keep it up. When she makes mistakes (and she will), don't make a big fuss.

The most important thing you can do is set a good example. If you are consistently polite, your child probably will be, too.



PARENT QUIZ

Are you using positive discipline?

The best kind of discipline supports good behavior. Answer the following questions *yes* or *no* to see if you're taking a positive approach.

- ___ 1. Do you talk about rules before problems arise?
- ___ 2. Do you offer alternatives instead of just saying no?
- ___ 3. Do you teach your child appropriate ways to express feelings?
- ___ 4. Do you compliment your child when he behaves well?
- ___ 5. Do you stay calm when your child misbehaves?

How did you do? Each yes answer means you're taking a positive approach to discipline. For each no answer, consider using that idea from the quiz to change your answer to yes.

"Make but few laws but see them well observed once made."
— John Locke,
Some Thoughts Concerning
Education

BUILDING CHARACTER

Help your child develop courage that lasts a lifetime

To do well in school, children must muster their courage. They must read to the class, for example, perform in plays and express thoughts. Children need courage throughout life to overcome fears and do what's right. To help your child with this:

- **Explain** that courage doesn't require physical strength, bullying or boasting.
- **Praise** your child's everyday acts of strength and courage.
- **Encourage** your child to express his feelings and fears.
- **Allow** your child to try new activities and learn from his mistakes.
- **Be calm and positive** when you watch your child's performances.
- **Show** that you find courage to face your problems.

Source: Bobbi Corner, *Everyday Opportunities for Extraordinary Parenting*, 2000, ISBN: 1-57071-625-0 (Sourcebooks, Inc., 1-800-432-7444)

HOMWORK

Don't ask you child, "Do you have homework?"

It's homework time and your child says, "I don't have any." She should study anyway. She can always read or review. It's important to maintain homework habits—even when there's not an assignment.

MOTIVATING YOUR CHILD

Help your child achieve resolutions for 2006

Perhaps your child has made a New Year's resolution. If so, help him achieve it. Write down a step-by-step plan with multiple deadlines. Support him along the way. Show that a reasonable goal plus hard work equals success.



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