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Elementary School Parents[®]

make the difference!

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Give your child opportunities to practice writing at home

Good writing takes practice and there's not enough time in the school day for as much as kids need. So experts recommend that students spend at least 15 minutes a day writing at home.

Writing is vital to success in school. Learning to write well will also boost your child's confidence and allow him to express his feelings and ideas.

To give your child the regular writing practice he needs, ask him to:

- **Help.** When you write a letter, make a grocery list or decide on the dinner menu, dictate it to your child. Have him write the words down.
- **Keep a journal.** Give your child a notebook and encourage him to

write in it daily. Suggest he write about things that happen to him and how he feels about them.

- **Make lists.** Ask your child to make lists of things he wants to do or things he needs to remember.
- **Copy.** Encourage your child to write down the words to his favorite songs. Your child may also enjoy copying down favorite quotations or poems.
- **Record.** When you take your child out, ask him to bring a notebook. In it, he should describe what he sees and experiences. Views from the car window or sights and sounds while walking in nature are great places to start.

A study buddy can make learning fun



Sometimes, kids can learn better if they work with another student. Having a study buddy can

be an effective way for students to master challenging material.

Study buddies can help each other practice math facts. They can prepare for a class presentation. They can test each other to see what they know—and don't know.

Of course, without a bit of planning, a session with a study buddy can turn into nothing more than social time. Here are some tips to make a study session productive:

- **Commit to the purpose.** Both students should agree that they are getting together to study math or social studies—not to play Fortnite or other games.
- **Choose someone responsible.** Both students should be focused on learning.
- **Set a schedule.** Your child and her buddy might meet at the library. Or they could take turns going to each other's houses.
- **Set goals.** Decide what is going to be covered during a session. Then stick to it!

Midyear is the perfect time to review your child's attendance



The halfway point of the school year is approaching. It's time for a mid-year checkup on your child's attendance.

Each year in the United States, close to eight million students are at risk academically because they are chronically absent. Here's what researchers have found:

- **School absences add up.** When students aren't in school, they miss out on valuable learning.
- **Missing school becomes a habit.** Students who miss a lot of school in kindergarten are still frequently absent in fifth grade.
- **There is a clear relationship** between early attendance and later achievement. Kids who come to school regularly in the early grades

are still doing well in secondary school—and they are more likely to graduate from high school.

How many days of school has your child missed this year? If you're unsure, contact the school to find out. It's not too late to get back on track so he can have a successful school year—and school career.

Source: "Why Attendance and Chronic Absence?" *Count Us In! Toolkit 2018*, Attendance Works, niswc.com/elementary-chronic-absence.

"Students are at academic risk if they miss 10 percent or more of the school year, or about 18 days a year."

—Attendance Works

Talk to your elementary schooler about cheating and why it's wrong



Many parents think cheating doesn't happen in elementary school. But cheating often begins during competitive

elementary school games. A child may say she wasn't "out," for example, when she really was. Other kids may think, "No fair! Now I have to cheat to win!"

Around third grade, when many students begin receiving letter grades and taking standardized tests, academic cheating often rears its head.

Keep in mind that parents play an important role in cheating prevention, and that:

- **Cheating is more tempting** to elementary schoolers than preschoolers, and the pressure increases in middle school.
- **Young kids are confused** about cheating. Although they believe it is wrong, they also think it might be OK on some occasions. The line between right and wrong can be tricky for them.
- **Peer pressure influences** cheating. When a classmate suggests cheating (such as by asking to copy a homework assignment), it can be difficult to say *no*. Role-play possible responses with your child.
- **Cheating is an ethical issue** that affects more than academics. For example, some people cheat in sports or lie to get a job.
- **Too much pressure from parents** increases the risk of cheating. Let your child know that working hard and being honest is more important than getting a certain grade.

Are you finding time to spend with your family?



To reach their full potential in school and in life, children need frequent, meaningful, undivided attention from

parents. But today's busy lifestyles make finding that time difficult.

Are you finding ways to spend quality family time together? Answer *yes* or *no* to each of the questions below to find out:

___1. Do you strive to eat dinner as a family regularly?

___2. Have you set limits on the number of extracurricular activities your child can participate in?

___3. Do you have a bedtime routine that includes spending at least five minutes talking with your child?

___4. Do you schedule one-on-one time with each of your children each week?

___5. Have you designated screen-free times? Digital devices can cause separation even when family members are together.

How well are you doing?

More *yes* answers mean you're finding ways to make family time a priority. For *no* answers, try those ideas.

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Boost reading comprehension and writing skills with summaries



Homework in elementary school often involves reading something—a chapter in a textbook or a few pages in a library

book. One way to make sure your child understands what she has read is to have her write a summary.

One night, after your child has finished her homework, tell her you'd like to find out what she's learned and what she's read about. Ask her to write down the most important points in her own words.

Your child may need to go back and read the material again. When she knows she has to write about it, she'll read more carefully. She'll think more as she reads.

After your child writes her summary, give her this set of questions to help her write more complete summaries in the future:

- **Who** are the characters or people involved? Suggest that she write about each person and what's important about each one.
- **What** did the characters do? Your child should write down the plot in her own words.
- **Where** did the story take place? Have your child describe the setting in some detail.
- **When** did the events take place? Your child should give the time span of the action.
- **Why** did things occur as they did? Have her explain why the characters behaved the way they did.

Once your child gets the hang of writing summaries after she reads school material, she will soon reap the benefits. Not only will she have a much better understanding of what she reads, she will improve her writing skills as well!

Show your child how to give meaningful gifts this season



Many people exchange gifts over the holiday season. While children love receiving gifts, they also enjoy being able to give them.

Does your child know that the most meaningful gifts don't have to cost money? They simply take time and come straight from the heart.

Share these thoughtful gift ideas with your child. She could:

- **Offer to do chores** for an elderly neighbor.
- **Record herself** reading a book for a younger sibling to listen to while reading.
- **Make a list**, such as "My 10 Best Memories With Grandpa."
- **Play a favorite game** with a family member or a neighbor who is homebound.
- **Record an audio** or video message for a loved one who lives far away.
- **Create a playlist** with a bunch of her favorite songs to share.
- **Bake cookies** and deliver them to someone who may not receive many homemade gifts.
- **Create a calendar** for 2019 and decorate it with personalized artwork, one drawing for each month.
- **Make a gift certificate** good for two hours of help around the house.
- **Create a beautiful picture** or poem about a special person.

Q: I wondered why I wasn't hearing about the school events that other parents knew about. Then I opened my son's backpack. I found crumpled papers, a dirty shirt and a smashed up pack of crackers. His chronic disorganization is affecting his schoolwork—he loses things and can't find what he needs. How can I help him get on track?

Questions & Answers

A: There are costs to being disorganized, as you and your son have discovered. Luckily, a child doesn't need to be born with a special organizing gene. Organization skills can be taught.

Talk with your son about *why* you're going to help him get organized. Wouldn't he like to know where his homework is? Wouldn't he like to be able to find his math folder?

Then follow these three steps:

1. **Have your child** give his backpack a thorough cleaning. After he straightens out all the wads of paper, help him decide what's important and what can be tossed. (And he can also return the forms his teacher is probably waiting for.)
2. **Make sure your child** has a binder or a folder for each subject. Color code them so he can remember that green = science and blue = math, for example. Everything for each subject goes in its folder.
3. **Teach your child** to empty his backpack every day after school. He can put papers and forms for you to review in one pile, and things he needs to do for homework in another.

Your child might never be super organized, but now he'll be able to find his math homework!

It Matters: Building Character

Persistence is key to success in school and in life



It's wonderful for students to be talented and smart, but educators know it's just as important for them to

be persistent. At one time or another everyone faces a challenging task or a heartbreaking setback. The key is to remind children to keep trying until they are successful. Pushing forward—even when it's tough—is a key to success in school and in life.

To promote persistence in your child:

- **Talk about it.** How has persistence already helped your child? Maybe he learned to ride a bike or play an instrument. What new challenge can he tackle now?
- **Break big goals** into small parts. If your child is determined to raise his grade in English, support him by discussing steps and helping him develop a reasonable plan.
- **Offer encouragement.** When your child is working on something challenging, say things like:
 - » *I know you can do this.*
 - » *I bet you'll figure it out.*
 - » *You're making great progress. Keep at it. You'll get it.*
 - » *It will get better. You'll get the hang of it.*
 - » *If it doesn't work that way, try another way.*
- **Focus on the process.** Sure, it feels great to see an A on a report card, but it also feels great to do well on a test after studying hard. Even better, it feels great to learn! Talk with your child about his accomplishments and what makes each of them worthwhile.

Promote kindness and teach your child to take action

Children aren't always kind to one another. They pick on other kids. They say mean things behind people's backs.

But your child doesn't have to accept that unkindness as the norm. Instead, you can teach your child a simple rule: Do something about it.

If your child witnesses a classmate being treated unkindly or left out, help her think through actions she could take. She could:

- **Start a conversation** with the classmate about a book she has read or a school assignment.
- **Ask the classmate** to sit with her at lunch.
- **Compliment the classmate** on something. "Your handwriting is neat," or "I like that shirt."
- **Smile at the classmate.** Sometimes all it takes is a simple smile to make someone's day.

Challenge your child to do at least one kind thing for a classmate each



week and ask her to report on what she did—and how it made her feel.

As your child takes these actions, she will learn *many* lessons. She will learn how good it feels to do something positive to help another person. Even more importantly, she will learn that when she sees something wrong, she doesn't have to accept it. Instead, she has the power to make a difference.

Source: L. and R. Eyre, *Teaching Your Children Values*, Fireside Books, Simon & Schuster.

Focus on four areas as you help your child develop character



Your child may have been born with certain personality traits, but think of his character as a work in progress.

In other words, the kind of person he'll eventually become is still being shaped. Teach him to:

1. **Take responsibility.** We're all accountable for our actions. Tell your child that he can't control others, but he can control his choices and actions.
2. **Be flexible.** Model compromise and negotiation by listening to the opinions of others. Encourage your child to do the same.
3. **Show empathy.** Teach your child to imagine how others might feel.
4. **Be respectful.** Talk to your child about what respectful behavior looks like, at home and at school. He can show respect at school by raising his hand before speaking in class. He can show respect at home by helping out with chores.