

Elementary School Parents[®] *make the difference!*

March 2019
Vol. 30, No. 7

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Responsibility is linked to your child's school success

Educators agree that responsible children do better in school. Luckily, parents have endless opportunities to foster responsibility.

To boost your child's responsibility:

- **Enforce a few age-appropriate rules and consequences.** State them clearly so your child knows exactly how you expect her to behave—and what will happen if she doesn't.
- **Trust her with meaningful tasks.** School-age children are capable of handling responsibilities such as picking up their rooms, setting the table and helping with the laundry.
- **Talk about financial responsibility.** Many kids receive an allowance. This provides a great opportunity to teach about budgeting, spending, saving and giving.
- **Let your child make decisions,** such as which homework assignment to tackle first. Having the responsibility of making decisions builds confidence.
- **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 donating gently-used clothing to a charity or volunteering your time for an important cause.
- **Adjust rules and responsibilities.** As your child matures, her abilities will change. Perhaps she can take on more grown-up chores. Or perhaps she can make new and exciting decisions. Talk about how great it feels to be responsible!

All parents can be involved in education



If English is not your first language, you may hesitate to get involved at school. But don't let

that stop you! There are many ways to be involved in your child's education—no matter what language you speak. Here are just a few:

- **Attend conferences** and other events at the school. Don't be afraid to request translated documents. Or, ask a friend who speaks your language and English to come with you to interpret what's being said.
- **Ask the teacher** what you can do to help. The most important things you can do to support your child can be done in any language: Ask your child about school. Schedule a regular homework time. Encourage your child to read every day.
- **Connect with other parents.** Form a group to share ideas and opportunities for better communication. Discuss ways you can partner with the school to help school staff meet the needs of all students and their families.

Tackle social problems before they affect school performance



Learning how to deal with “friends” who turn out not to be friends is a tough lesson. And it’s one that can distract your child from learning and affect his performance in school.

Talk to your child about the qualities that make someone a true friend and suggest he avoid classmates who seem:

- **Selfish.** Does the person seem to think and talk mostly about himself? Is he using your child in order to *get* something?
- **Phony.** Does the person say one thing and then do another?
- **Dishonest.** Someone who is a friend only because he wants to cheat on a test is not really a friend at all.

- **Unreliable.** Did he say he’d walk home with your child after school, but then head off to someone else’s house instead?

Remind your child that he is worthy of *real* friends and should stay clear of those who are not.

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

Set the stage for a successful transition to middle school



Will your child be heading to middle school next year? If so, the time to start preparing for that exciting transition is now.

- At school, teachers are helping students get ready. At home, you can do the same thing. To support your child’s progress and independence:
- **Learn about the middle school.** Read its website regularly. Sign up for notifications on its social media pages. Visit the school. Ask for a tour. The more comfortable you and your child are at the school, the easier it will be to adjust.
 - **Build school spirit.** Learn about the school’s clubs, teams, classes, colors and mascot. Talk about your child’s interests. What new and exciting things do students learn and do in middle school? Attend a student performance or game together.

- **Encourage important habits.** Your child should stick to a daily homework routine and practice staying organized. These skills will be critical in middle school and beyond.
- **Find out about summer activities** for rising middle schoolers, such as library reading programs. Ask the school for suggestions.
- **Attend events** for new students and families. Join the parent-teacher organization and ask about the volunteer opportunities. Introduce yourself to staff and other parents.
- **Find a mentor.** Do any of your neighbors or friends have children currently attending the middle school? Perhaps one could talk to your child about what it’s like.
- **Keep communicating.** Talk with your child about any concerns or questions she may have.

Are you teaching your child how to be resilient?



All kids face obstacles. Encouraging resilience helps kids overcome them. Resilient students deal with challenges in

positive ways—at home and at school. Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to see if you are helping your child develop resilience:

- ___ **1. Do you give** your child plenty of opportunities to make decisions? It’s a skill that improves with practice.
- ___ **2. Do you listen** to your child when he is trying to make a decision without solving the problem for him?
- ___ **3. Do you talk** to your child about how you find a solution when you are faced with a problem?
- ___ **4. Do you talk** to your child about his strengths? Children draw on their strengths when facing challenges.
- ___ **5. Do you remind** your child when he’s struggling how he has handled tough situations in the past?

How well are you doing?

Mostly *yes* answers mean you are helping your child become more resilient. For *no* answers, try those ideas from the quiz.

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Practical Ideas for Parents to Help Their Children. ISSN: 1523-1275

For subscription information call or write:
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P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474.
Fax: 1-800-216-3667.

Or visit: www.parent-institute.com.

Published monthly September through May.
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a division of PaperClip Media, Inc., an
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Publisher: Doris McLaughlin.
Publisher Emeritus: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.
Editor: Rebecca Hasty Miyares.

Positivity is key when talking to your child about grades



Your child's report card came home and it was disappointing. You know she has the ability to do well. Her teachers have told you that every year. But she doesn't work up to her potential. What should you do?

The most important thing to remember is to keep your emotions in check. Getting angry or showing your disappointment just won't help. Instead, look for ways to encourage your child to do the best she can.

After you have had time to "digest" your child's report card:

- **Ask her to talk** about her grades. What does *she* think is going on? Does she complete her class work in school? Is she turning in her homework on time? Does she understand the lessons? Does

she think there is anything she could do differently?

- **Talk with her teacher.** Are there any issues at school? Discuss ways you can work together to boost your child's performance. Perhaps your child could stay after school for extra help.
- **Enforce a regular homework time.** During that time, the TV should be off and the computer should be used only for studying. Set a timer for 20 minutes, then let her take a short break before getting back to work.
- **Offer support.** Provide help when necessary, but don't *ever* do your child's homework for her. Let your child take responsibility for completing her work. It's the only way she will get the practice she needs to succeed in school and in life.

Help your child gain a better understanding of fractions



Learning fractions can be challenging for some students. But if your child understands how useful this math concept will be in his everyday life, he may be more motivated to master it.

Point out all the ways you use fractions. For example, when you are cooking for four people but the recipe serves 10, you need to use fractions to divide the ingredients. When you go out to eat with two friends and the waiter brings one check, you have to figure out what one-third of the bill amounts to.

Here are some simple activities to help your child understand fractions:

- **Pour a pile of cereal on a tray.** To illustrate the concept of

one-fourth, divide the pile into four equal sections. Rearrange the pile to illustrate other fractions. Then, challenge your child to illustrate some different fractions.

- **Use measuring cups** and spoons. There is no easier way to see how many one-third cup measures it takes to make one cup. Let your child experiment to find out.
- **Make up fraction facts** with your child. One-third of the rooms in our house have windows. One-half of our family members have birthdays in October. One-fifth of the cars on this street are red.
- **Mark the passing of time** with fractions. Say, "If it takes us 20 minutes to get to Grandma's, how long will it take to get halfway there?"

Q: My older daughter is in middle school. She is a good student and talented athlete—learning and sports have always come easily to her. My younger daughter is in third grade and is quite different from her sister. She has some learning challenges and is not athletic at all. She has begun to compare herself to her older sister and always says, "I'm the failure in this family." How can I help her realize that she isn't a failure and that we love her just the way she is?

Questions & Answers

A: Younger siblings often feel like they're running to catch up. But with your love and support, your younger daughter can find ways to grow into her own special self—and improve her grades at the same time!

Research consistently shows that positive self-esteem is linked to higher school achievement. And the best way to give your child's self-esteem a boost is to discover some areas where she can be successful. Success in one area truly does lead to success in another.

What are your child's interests? If her sister is an accomplished soccer player, maybe she should try a different sport. Or maybe she'd be happier playing an instrument or acting in a school play. Help her find activities that are different from her sister's and that will give her an opportunity to shine on her own.

Point out the things your child does well. Whether it's her sense of style or her kindness to others, remind her that these are important—and that you are just as proud of those achievements as you are of her sister's soccer goals.

It Matters: Reading

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 crawling, for example, can help a young child understand the word *crawl* 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 and cheer him on.
- **Do a dramatic reading.** Act out the story as you read it aloud. Take turns with your child or let him 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 your local library can help your child love 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 five things:

1. **Your child's hobbies.** He might find an irresistible book about baseball, video games or cooking. Ask the librarian for suggestions.
2. **Different genres.** Perhaps your child would like to read a mystery, a how-to book or a biography. Consider everything!
3. **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.
4. **Alternatives to books.** Your child might prefer shorter materials, such as articles, comics or recipes. All of these count as reading!



5. **Activities.** See if your local library hosts read-aloud times, or has reading-related computer games for kids.

Inspire reading by filling your home with reading materials



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

- **Let 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 or magazine racks. These can fit in small spaces, such as next to beds, couches and tables. They can even go in the car.
- **Create a special reading spot** in your child's bedroom. Provide good 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 read.