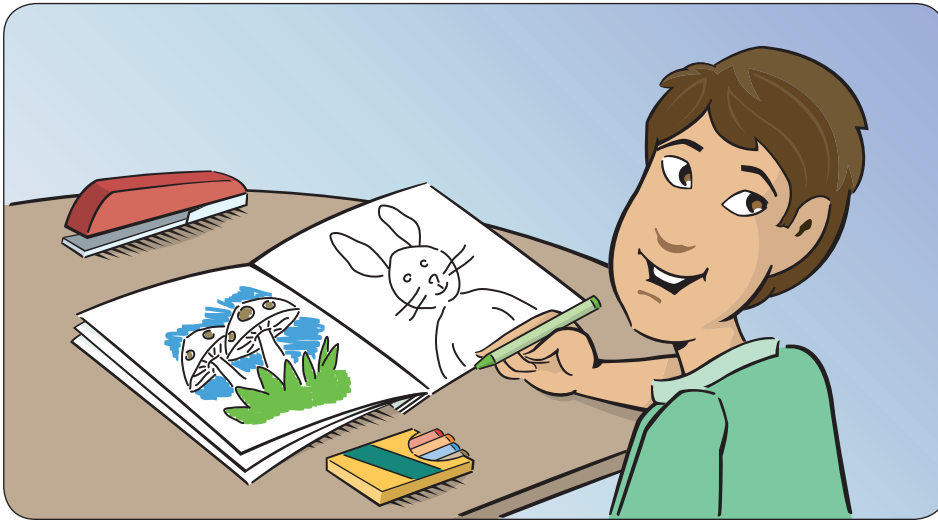


# Elementary School Parents<sup>®</sup> *make the difference!*

J. R. Irvin Elementary



## A reading response journal builds reading & writing skills

**W**hen your child starts elementary school, he is just learning to read. He can only sound out a few words. But, with your help, he can create his own reading response journal. This is a book that helps him remember some of the best books he's read.

All you need are some large pieces of paper, pens and crayons. For young children, six pieces of paper is about right. Staple the pages to create a "book."

Ask your child to tell you the name of his favorite book. Then on each page, have your child draw a picture that reminds him of something in that book. It can be an exciting scene or a picture of his favorite character.

Once he has all the illustrations complete, ask him to dictate a sentence about the picture. Write that sentence on a separate sheet of paper. Write exactly what he says. If he says "The bunny gets big ears," that's exactly what you should write.

Read the sentence back to him. If it's a long sentence, have him circle the words he wants to write. You can write the others.

When your child is finished, go back through the pages. Read them to him. Then let him read as many words as he can. When he sees he can be a "real" writer, he will be more excited about reading and writing.

**Source:** J.W. Lindfors, *Children's Language: Connecting Reading, Writing, and Talk*, Teachers College Press.

## Use 'house rules' to make discipline easy



If you are a stickler for rules, but your spouse lets things slide, your kids may not be sure of what's expected of them.

Create a set of "house rules" that everyone knows will *always* be enforced. These should be rules and consequences that govern the things that are your biggest concerns. In one house, it might be behavior toward siblings. In another, it might be pitching in to meet responsibilities.

Come up with a catchy phrase that sums up both the rule and the consequence:

- **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 keep track of belongings, put them in a closet. Once a week, she can redeem them for a small fee.

**Source:** R. Guarendi, *Discipline that Lasts a Lifetime: The Best Gift You Can Give Your Kids*, St. Anthony Messenger Press.

## Parents play an important role in building children's character



If parents are committed to developing their child's good character, they'll get results. It takes dedication and constant watchfulness to raise a child with good morals. But it's worth it. Your child will grow up with a strong moral compass that will serve him well in school and in life.

To build your child's character:

- **Keep a strong focus** on good morals in daily activities. Incorporate the ideals of honesty and respect into dinner and car conversations with your child.
- **Explain to your child** why you make certain decisions. Talk about the values—such as tolerance and generosity—that guide your decisions.
- **Watch TV with your child.** When a character does something wrong, ask why it's wrong. When

the character makes a good moral decision—such as returning something lost—discuss why that's the right thing to do.

- **Catch your child** showing good character. Tell him you're proud of him for telling the truth or working hard to finish a task.
- **Evaluate how your efforts** are working. If you need help, turn to friends, family and books about character and morals.

**Source:** M. Berkowitz, "Character Must Matter to Parent First," Topeka: City of Character, The Topeka Capital-Journal, [http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_qn4179/is\\_20010812/ai\\_n11768486/](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qn4179/is_20010812/ai_n11768486/).

**"There are many little ways to enlarge your child's world. Love of books is the best of all."**

—*Jacqueline Kennedy*

## Studies show that when parents set limits, screen time is reduced



Today's kids spend seven and a half hours a day in front of a screen—a TV, a computer, a video game. They spend just 25 minutes a day reading.

That means they may grow up to be great at playing games like *Angry Birds*, but not able to do the reading in their high school history class. All that time spent sitting in front of a screen also means that today's kids aren't getting the exercise they need. (Well, except for their thumbs.)

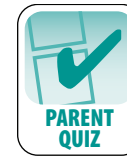
What can you do as a parent? First, help your child become aware of how much time she actually

spends sitting in front of a screen. Have her track the amount of time she spends watching TV, playing video games, texting friends and fiddling with her iPod. She may be surprised how quickly those minutes add up.

If your child is spending fewer than two hours a day in front of a screen, she is on the right track. If she is spending more, it's time to set limits. Studies show that when parents set *any* media rules, kids' screen time drops by more than three hours a day!

**Source:** "Reduce Screen Time," U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, [www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/obesity/wecan/reduce-screen-time/index.htm](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/obesity/wecan/reduce-screen-time/index.htm).

## Are you helping your child make and keep friends?



Friends are important, and as kids get older they become even more important. While you can't take charge of your child's social life, you can help her make and keep friends. Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to see if you are helping your child handle friendships:

\_\_\_ 1. **Have you talked** with your child about what it takes to be a good friend?

\_\_\_ 2. **Have you met the parents** of your child's friends?

\_\_\_ 3. **Do you ask your child** if she'd like your help when she's facing a problem with a friend? Otherwise, trust her to handle her friendships.

\_\_\_ 4. **Are you supportive** of your child when a friendship ends? Listen, give her hugs and a shoulder to cry on.

\_\_\_ 5. **Will you consult** your child's teacher if there is a problem with a friend at school that doesn't go away?

**How well are you doing?**

Each *yes* means you are helping your child handle friendships. For *no* answers, try those ideas.

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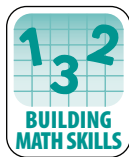
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# Research shows parents influence children's views on math, science



Look at any list of the best-paying jobs. You are likely to see they have one thing in common: they require a knowledge of math and science. People who prepare to become engineers, computer specialists, and doctors find great jobs when they graduate.

So why don't more students—especially girls—prepare for these careers? The answer is found as far back as elementary school. That's when students' attitudes toward math and science seem to be set.

Researchers took a look at how parents influence their children's views on math and science. The study found that, in general, parents are more likely to encourage boys rather than girls to take an interest in science. As a result, girls tend to lose interest in math by high school—even though they may continue to get good grades.

So what can parents do to make sure their sons *and* their daughters stay interested in math and science? Here are some suggestions:

- **Play games that encourage math and science.** If you're in the car, see who can add the numbers on the license plate in front of you. If you're at the store, see if your child can figure the change.
- **Help your child see herself as someone who is good in math.** Teach her that brains, like muscles, get stronger with practice. Remind her that "smart is something you *get*, not something you *are*."
- **Look for role models.** Look for TV shows or news stories featuring a wide diversity of people who are doctors, engineers and scientists.

**Source:** J. Jacobs and others, "I Can, But I Don't Want To": The Impact of Parents, Interests, and Activities on Gender Differences in Math, in A. Gallagher and J. Kaufman, *Gender Differences in Mathematics*, Cambridge University Press.

## Try a study buddy to motivate your elementary schooler



Sometimes, kids can learn better if they work with another student. Having a study buddy can be a great way for children 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 some planning, a session with a study buddy can turn into nothing more than a play date. Here are some tips to make a study session productive:

- **Be clear about the purpose.** Both students should agree that they are getting together to study math or science—not to play the latest computer game.
- **Choose someone responsible.** Both students should be focused on learning.
- **Set a schedule.** Students might meet at the library. Or they could take turns going to each other's house.
- **Set goals.** Decide what is going to be covered during a session. Then stick to it!

**Source:** G. Wood, *How to Study: Use Your Personal Learning Style to Help You Succeed When It Counts*, Learning Express.

**Q:** My two sons could not be more different about homework. The older one spends about two hours a day on his school assignments. He asks for help constantly. He wants me to check over everything. My younger son says he doesn't have homework or he did it at school. When he does homework, he races through it. How can I help them find a happy medium?

### Questions & Answers

**A:** This is a snapshot of the challenges teachers face every day! Your children have the same parents and the same home environment. Yet they are as different as can be.

Surprisingly, however, their two takes on homework can in part be solved by the same remedies. First, ask to talk with both boys' teachers. Share what your boys are doing at home. Two hours of homework a day for an elementary school student seems like a lot—could he have so much work because he's not doing anything in school?

Next, set a rule that there is daily study time at your house. So the younger son might as well bring home work from school, because otherwise you'll give him things to do. You could, for example, ask him to solve math problems to review.

Then set some ground rules. At the start of every study session, you'll go over the work they have to do. You'll help them set priorities. Then you'll be nearby doing your own work. Check at the end to see they did what was on the list. But let your older child learn to do the work himself.

—Kris Amundson,  
The Parent Institute

# It Matters: The Home-School Team

## Keep the lines of communication open with school



Parent-school communication is critical to students' success. Whether your child is an average student or has special needs, these

tips will ensure effective home-school communication:

- **Meet with school staff** regularly. Attend meetings and follow up to see how things are going. Always contact the teacher if concerns arise.
- **Arrive prepared.** Before meetings, jot down notes so you are sure to remember everything you wanted to say and ask.
- **Be optimistic.** Remind yourself that you and your child's school have a mutual goal: your child's success. A positive attitude makes conversations more productive.
- **Listen attentively.** Keep an open mind as you focus on the teacher's view, which may be different from yours. Ask for clarification about anything confusing.
- **Stay calm.** It's natural for parents to feel defensive of children. If you accidentally say something you regret, just apologize and refocus on solutions.
- **Offer suggestions.** You know your child best. Explain what you think will help him most—and why you believe it will work.
- **Don't give up.** If an initial meeting doesn't get results, try again. You could also ask for another staff member to join you.

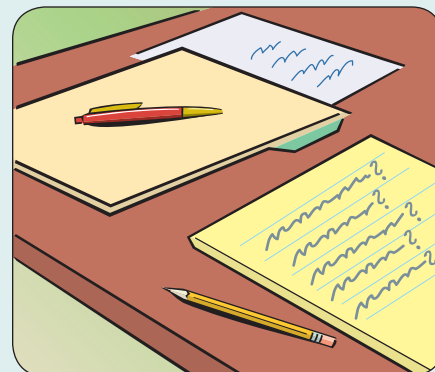
**Source:** "Parenting Children with Learning Disabilities: Tips for Helping Your Child," Helpguide, [www.helpguide.org/mental/learning\\_disabilities\\_treatment\\_help\\_coping.htm#school](http://www.helpguide.org/mental/learning_disabilities_treatment_help_coping.htm#school).

## Ask these questions at your parent-teacher conference

Parent-teacher conferences can help you learn more about your child's strengths and weaknesses. They can also give you a better idea about the year ahead.

Here are 10 questions you might ask your child's teacher:

1. **What will you cover** in this grade or subject this year?
2. **What are your expectations** for homework? Has my child missed any of her assignments so far?
3. **How are my child's work habits?** Does she use time in class well?
4. **Does my child read** at the level you would expect for this grade?
5. **Is my child able** to do the math you expect for a student in this grade?
6. **Is my child** in different groups for different subjects?
7. **Has my child missed** any classes other than the ones I contacted the school about?
8. **Does my child qualify** for any special programs?
9. **Does my child get along well** with the other students?
10. **What can I do at home** to help my child be more successful?



## Teachers offer strategies for helping kids do better in school



The National PTA asked teachers what they wished parents would do to help their children in school. Here's what

teachers said:

- **Ask your child** about school every day. Check homework and ask him questions about his assignments.
- **Set a learning example.** When you spend time reading, you show your child that reading is enjoyable and useful. Play games together that build thinking skills. Talk about current events.
- **Emphasize academics.** Talk about how everyday experiences

relate to what your child is learning in school.

- **Follow daily routines** that encourage healthy sleeping and eating habits.
- **Encourage your child** to do his best. Show you believe that education is important.
- **Take advantage of community learning opportunities.** Take your child to the library, museums, concerts, etc. Encourage your child to join community programs such as clubs, scouts and after-school sports.

**Source:** "10 Things Schools/Teachers Wish Parents Would Do," National PTA, [www.pta.org/EducationNation/10\\_Things\\_Schools.pdf](http://www.pta.org/EducationNation/10_Things_Schools.pdf).