

# Elementary School Parents

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*make the difference!*



## Start the new school year with a focus on attendance

**P**oor attendance damages academic success. Unfortunately, more than seven million students in the U.S. miss three weeks or more each school year. The pandemic increased absences as students struggled with hybrid and remote learning last year.

When students miss school or arrive in class late, *everyone* suffers. Teachers spend time collecting makeup work and reteaching. Meanwhile, other students—who are ready to learn—must wait.

Your child's most fundamental school-related responsibility is to start school on time every day—whether it is in person or online.

To support your child:

- **Stick to a schedule.** Establish evening and morning habits that

help your child be prepared. Select outfits and gather materials needed for school at night.

- **Schedule carefully.** Make medical and other appointments during non-school hours when possible. School should be a priority when planning family trips, too. If your child must be absent, work with the teacher to help your child complete makeup work.
- **Seek help when needed.** Many factors contribute to missing school. If your family struggles with health, transportation, work, child care or other issues, talk with school staff. Our shared goal is to help children do their best in school.

Source: P.W. Jordan and R. Miller, *Who's In: Chronic Absenteeism under the Every Student Succeeds Act*, FutureEd.

## 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 for families. Don't be afraid to request translated documents. Or, ask a friend who speaks your language and English to help you 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 every 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.

# Help your child build social awareness, appreciate diversity



Social awareness allows kids to feel compassion for others—even when their background and culture may be different. It's

important for kids to see all people as equal and to accept and recognize the strengths of people of all races, ethnic groups, religions and abilities.

To guide your child:

- **Remember** that you teach by example. Have you formed opinions about people based on their color, religion or culture? If so, your child may, too.
- **Talk about** your family background. Unless you are a Native American, someone in your family came here from another country. Remind your child that at some point, everyone has struggled to fit in.

- **Let your child know** it's never OK to judge, insult or treat someone badly because of their appearance or background.
- **Talk about** prejudice and stereotypes. Help your children recognize these behaviors when they see them.
- **Explain** that rules and laws have not always treated everyone fairly, and that we are trying to change that.
- **Welcome** people of many backgrounds into your family's life. Encourage your child to do the same.

**"It is time for parents to teach young people early on that in diversity there is beauty and there is strength."**

—Maya Angelou

# When parents talk less, their children actually listen more!



When your child was younger, he needed to hear you talk a lot.

It's how he learned the language that describes the world around him.

Now that your child is older, he needs a lot less repetitive narration. Yet many parents of elementary schoolers find themselves talking on and on—even while their children are listening less and less.

Of course you still want to talk with your child about his day. You want to have conversations about what he did in school and what he's thinking about. But if you're like most parents, you'd like to spend less time talking about whether it's time to feed the pets or why his clothes are still scattered all over his bedroom floor.

Experts have identified three strategies to help parents effectively communicate with children:

1. **Make infrequent requests.** As much as possible, help your child develop regular routines for things like homework and household chores. Routines reduce the need for nagging.
2. **Keep the volume down.** Your child doesn't hear you any more clearly if you yell. As a matter of fact, he will probably just tune you out.
3. **Keep it short.** When you do have to give your child directions, limit the number of words you use. So instead of saying, "Jack, I need you to get to the car. Don't forget your backpack. Do you have your homework?" try saying, "Homework and backpack in the car, please."

# Are you teaching your child how to be resilient?



All children face obstacles.

Encouraging resilience helps kids overcome them. Resilient students deal with challenges in positive ways—at home and in 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 discuss** your child's strengths and encourage him to draw on those strengths when he's facing challenges?
- \_\_\_ 5. **Do you remind** your child how he has successfully 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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The Parent Institute, 1-800-756-5525,  
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# Family meetings promote communication and closeness



The pandemic altered the day-to-day life of families all over the world. Social distancing, disruptions to school and work routines and an overall sense of uncertainty all add stress to family life. Fortunately, family meetings are an effective way for family members to counteract stress by connecting, addressing concerns and having some fun.

For successful family meetings:

- **Meet regularly** at a convenient time. For instance, Tuesdays after dinner, over dessert.
- **Keep meetings short**—about 30 minutes or less. (But if the family is having fun, don't stop!)
- **Have parents lead meetings.** You should make sure rules are followed and have the final say on big decisions.

- **Designate someone to take notes** at each meeting. This will help everyone remember what was discussed or decided.
- **Discuss family news, concerns, goals and successes.** Reward accomplishments.
- **Give everyone** a chance to speak. No one interrupts anyone else. Each person's opinion deserves respect.
- **Don't use meetings** as a time to criticize. Discipline problems should be handled separately.
- **Include a fun activity.** Play a short game, sing a song or learn a tongue twister.
- **Brainstorm** ways to improve your meetings. Ask family members how they think the meeting went and see if they have any suggestions for improvement.

# Boost your child's vocabulary with these five strategies



Reading at home is one of the best ways to boost your child's vocabulary. That's because reading exposes your child to new ideas, concepts and words.

Here are five effective strategies that will help you increase your child's vocabulary:

1. **Read different kinds** of books to your child. If you usually read fiction, go to the library and get a book that explains how something works instead. Check out a book about a sport or activity your child enjoys. Or, read a biography about a person she admires.
2. **Look for words** your child might not know as you read. "It says here that George Washington went to school to become a *surveyor*. What do you think that word means?"
3. **Listen for new words** as you're watching TV. News programs often include words your child may not know. "Have you ever heard the word *tsunami* before? Let's look it up to see what it means."
4. **Consult a thesaurus.** Find synonyms for words your child uses often when writing or speaking.
5. **Help your child create** her own dictionary. All you need is a notebook with a page for each letter. When your child discovers a new word that she wants to remember, have her write it and its definition in the notebook. Review those words from time to time.

**Q:** My daughter spends hours playing online games. From the minute she wakes up until she falls asleep, she wants to be playing one of her games. She is rushing through her school assignments and I'm worried her grades will suffer. How can I get her to start living in the real world again?

## Questions & Answers

**A:** Used responsibly, online games can be a fun way for kids to relax. Some games promote physical activity, some encourage play with others and some even build important academic skills.

However, studies show that children are spending more and more recreational time in front of screens. And that amount has increased drastically in the last 18 months due to the pandemic.

Video game designers know how to create games that keep players hooked. But you must not let online games interfere with your child's responsibilities, her grades or the amount of time she spends with friends and family.

The American Academy of Pediatrics encourages parents to set recreational screen time limits—and the start of a new school year is the perfect time to do it. Here's how:

- **Talk with your child** and let her know that you will be setting limits on the amount of time she spends online.
- **Establish times** when online games are never allowed, such as during schoolwork time, meal time and family time.
- **Provide alternatives.** Plan daily family activities, such as reading aloud, taking a walk or playing a board game. All these will replace some of the screen game time with more productive activities.

# It Matters: Building Responsibility

## Doing chores develops your child's skills



There are significant benefits for children who do chores—and those benefits carry over into school.

Chores help children:

- **Become “stakeholders.”** When your child does some of the tasks that keep the household running, he makes an investment in your home. A child who swept out the front hall is less likely to walk through it in muddy soccer cleats.
- **Develop skills.** Each time you give your child a new chore, he learns how to do the job and also learns skills he'll use throughout his life.
- **Understand** that the world doesn't revolve around them. We all know people who expect others to clean up the messes they make. Your child won't grow up to become one of those people.
- **Learn to work well with others.** If you have more than one child, ask them to do a chore together. Or, encourage them to create a weekly chore chart and alternate responsibilities.
- **Develop self-discipline.** There will be lots of things throughout your child's life that he'll need to do, even though he won't want to.
- **Develop a sense of pride.** If your child is responsible for doing his laundry, having a stack of clean shirts is an accomplishment. He can take pride in what he has accomplished.
- **See that they are an important part of the family.** Your child will know he is helping to keep your home running smoothly.

## Four tips to help your child take responsibility for learning

**W**hile your child is a student, learning is her job. To do it well, she has to be an active learner—one who takes action instead of just listening.

Encourage your child to:

1. **Be prepared.** It's not enough just to show up to class. It's also important to get a good night's sleep, eat a nutritious breakfast and complete assignments.
2. **Participate in discussions.** Your child should ask questions, offer opinions and exchange ideas with others in her class.
3. **Stay organized.** Help your child create a system for organizing assignments and other materials. Have her collect a few classmates' phone numbers. If she misses a class, she can call to find out what she's missed.



4. **Be persistent.** Support your child as she tackles assignments and studies for tests. Show confidence in her ability. Let her know that her efforts will pay off!

## Respect is essential for a positive learning environment



When students have respect for teachers and classmates, they help create the positive academic environment all kids need in order to be successful.

To promote respectful behavior:

- **Discuss respect.** What is it? Why is it important? How does it feel to be treated with respect or disrespect?
- **Be a role model.** Do what you want your child to do. If you want her to say *please* when asking for something, remember to say *please*

yourself. If you want her to knock before entering your bedroom, do the same for her.

- **Criticize constructively.** When you need to correct your child, do it privately and respectfully. “Next time, please hold the door for Grandpa. That will make it easier for him to get through the door.”
- **Notice times** when your child is respectful. “You listened to the coach even when other players were joking around. I was impressed.”