Elementary School
Parents®
make the difference!
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Three simple ways to nurture your child's love of science

A recent survey showed that only about half of moms and dads felt "very confident" in their ability to help their kids learn science. But you don't need to be a scientist in order to boost your child's scientific know-how. You only need to be willing!

To promote your child's interest in science:

1. **Investigate together.** There's no shame in admitting that you don't have all of the answers. So, if your child asks a question like, "Why is the sky blue?" or "Where does rain come from?" you can simply say, "I'm not sure, but let's find out together." Go online or visit the library to discover the answer. You'll both learn something!
2. **View educational programs.** There are lots of kid-friendly science shows on TV. Watch them with your child. If you're not sure where to start, ask his teacher for suggestions. Afterward, talk about the shows. "Wasn't it neat when they explained how fish breathe through their gills?"
3. **Go online.** There are tons of STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) websites, games and apps available. Visit *www.commonsensemedia.org* to find one that looks cool and check it out with your child!

Source: M. Silander and others, "What Parents Talk About When They Talk About Learning: A National Survey About Young Children and Science," Education Development Center, niswc.com/elem_STEM.

A set of house rules can make discipline easy

Children who are expected to follow rules at home are much more likely to follow rules at school. And when students follow the rules, there is more time for learning!

To make rules memorable, create a set of house rules. These should be rules and consequences that govern the things that are your biggest concerns. In one family, it might be behavior toward siblings. In another, it might be helping out around the house.

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

- **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 put her belongings away, place them in a closet. Once a week, she can earn them back by completing a small chore.

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Boost your child's reading and writing skills with conversations

In elementary school, teachers expect students to think about what they've read, and then draw conclusions. To give your child the practice he needs to develop this ability:

- **Ask questions** that require him to think. If you watch a TV show together, talk about it afterward. "Why do you think the character did that?" or "Do you think things like that happen in real life?"
- **Share your thoughts** when you haven't made up your mind. You might say, "I am still not sure who I'll vote for in the mayoral election." Then talk about the strengths of the people running for that office. Your child may have some great insights.
- **Set aside time to read together**—and then talk about what you've read. Some families make one meal a week their "reading dinner." Everyone brings a book to the table. After a few minutes of reading, family members talk about what they've read and ask questions about what everyone else has read.
- **Make the most of car time.** Parents know that the best talks often take place in the car. So ask your child about what's going on in his life. Listen to his answers.
- **Keep a shared journal.** Try reading the same book. Take turns writing notes to each other about your reactions to what you've read.

"Listen to the desires of your children. Encourage them and then give them the autonomy to make their own decision."

—Denis Waitley

Reduce your child's screen time by tracking it and setting limits

A recent study looked at the difference in children's brain activity when they were reading a book versus consuming screen-based media. The researchers found that brain activity increased while children were reading and decreased while they were viewing screen-based media. Their findings highlight the importance of limiting screen time for healthy brain development.

The first step in limiting recreational screen time is to help your child become aware of how much time she actually spends staring at a screen. Have her track the amount of time she spends watching TV, playing video games, texting friends and fiddling with a tablet. She may be surprised how quickly those minutes add up.

If your child is spending less 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 an average of more than three hours a day!

Source: T. Horowitz-Kraus and J.S. Hutton, "Brain connectivity in children is increased by the time they spend reading books and decreased by the length of exposure to screen-based media," *Acta Paediatrica*, niswc.com/elem_brain.

Are you teaching your child how to be a good citizen?

The same qualities that help people live together in families can help them live in their communities—and get along with others in school. Are you helping your child develop good citizenship? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

___**1. Do you talk** with your child about school and family rules and why they're important?

___**2. Do you volunteer** as a family on a regular basis?

___**3. Do you show** your child that it is important to honor commitments by keeping your promises?

___**4. Do you model** sportsmanship when you are watching sporting events and playing games?

___**5. Do you expect** your child to take responsibility for her actions and do you hold her accountable for her choices?

How well are you doing?

More *yes* answers mean you're doing your best to raise a model citizen. For *no* answers, try those ideas to help your child get along with others.

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Navigating social challenges leads to increased confidence

When parents are overly involved in their children's social lives, their kids can't develop the confidence and resilience they need to thrive. Swooping in and saving your child from every social challenge won't help her in the long run—it might actually hurt her.

Your child is more likely to establish healthy friendships and feel more sure of herself if she is armed with "social survival" skills. And these skills won't just help her navigate the playground successfully. They'll make her feel more confident in the classroom, too.

To help your child strengthen her social skills:

- **Empower her to take action.** If she comes to you with a problem, listen closely while she tells you about it. Say, "That sounds frustrating. What did you do next?" Then, give her a chance to find her own solution. Sometimes, all kids need is someone to listen to them.
- **Model resilience.** Talk about your own struggles and how you faced them. Studies show that when children hear stories about how family members overcame obstacles, they become more resilient in the face of challenges.
- **Teach her to be assertive.** Help your child learn how to speak up for herself. When she wants something, ask her to make a strong case for it. Or, have a family debate night. When you encourage your child to speak up at home, she'll find her voice at school and in the world!

Source: D.F. Kris, "Helping Young Girls Find Their Voice While Developing Friendships," Mindshift, niswc.com/elem_navigate.

Family meetings promote communication and closeness

Sometimes parents and children get so caught up in outside activities, they forget to make time for one another. Family meetings are a great way to reconnect and remind everyone that family comes first. Here are a few guidelines:

- **Meet regularly** at a convenient time. For instance, Tuesdays after dinner, with 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.

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 approaches to homework can both be improved with the same three steps:

1. **Talk with their teachers.** Share what your boys are doing at home. Two hours of homework a day might be more than the teachers expect. Could your son have so much because he's not finishing his classwork in school?
2. **Establish a daily study time** at your house. Your younger son might as well bring work home from school, because otherwise you'll give him work to do during that time. You could, for example, ask him to solve math problems or review.
3. **Set some ground rules.** At the start of every study session, go over the work they have to do. Help them set priorities and make to-do lists. Stay nearby doing your own work, but let your older child learn to do the work himself. Check at the end to see if they finished everything on their lists.

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It Matters: Working Together

Set the stage for effective communication

Parent-school communication is critical to students' success. Whether your child is a stellar student, an average student or has special needs, it's important to establish a positive relationship with his teachers.

For effective home-school communication:

- **Stay in touch with school staff.** Attend meetings and follow up to see how things are going. Always contact the teacher if concerns arise.
- **Arrive prepared.** Before meetings, write down notes so you are sure to remember everything you want to say and ask.
- **Be optimistic.** Remind yourself that you and the 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 you find confusing or don't understand.
- **Stay calm.** It's natural for parents to feel defensive about their children. If you accidentally say something you regret, 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.

Nine questions to ask at your next 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 nine 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 assignments so far?
3. **How are my child's** work habits? Does she use time in class well?
4. **Does my child get along** well with the other students?
5. **Are my child's reading and math** skills at the level you would expect for 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. **What can I do at home** to support my child's learning?

Parent involvement supports students' academic success

Getting involved with your child's education doesn't just feel rewarding. It *is* rewarding! Hundreds of studies link parent involvement—at home and at school—to student success.

Parent involvement raises students' chances of earning higher grades, getting along with others, finishing homework, graduating from high school, and more!

To benefit your child the most, be sure to:

- **Start early and stay involved.** When parents get involved early on, kids benefit more. And research shows parent involvement should continue through middle and high school.
- **Explore your options.** Your involvement can be as simple as asking, "What did you learn at school today?" or as complex as running a fundraiser. Ask about the school's needs and match them to your time and talents.
- **Be confident.** No matter how you get involved, remember that it makes a difference. All primary caregivers—mothers, fathers, grandparents and others—have valuable contributions to make.