

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

Educational Service Unit #8
Linda Miller, Service Representative



Try family meetings to teach responsibility, communication

Now that your child is in elementary school, he's probably ready to participate in family meetings. Led properly, family meetings can teach your child about responsibility, communication, negotiation and cooperation. Here are some tips for your family meetings:

- **Meet once every week or two.** Since you're the parent, all final decisions will be yours. But be open to your child's views and let him request meetings when he wants to discuss important issues.
- **Make an agenda.** Each family member may bring one problem to the table. Make a list of topics to be addressed. Leave time for each concern, although the meeting should take less than an hour.
- **Put someone in charge.** The meeting "chairperson" will probably be an adult, but some older

children are mature enough for the job. The chairperson must stick to the agenda and give everyone a fair, uninterrupted say. This might not be easy!

- **Take turns.** After one person describes a problem, everyone else can explain how they feel about it. Brainstorm solutions, giving each person time to contribute. Choose an idea—or a combination of ideas—to try, with parents having the final say.
- **Write down decisions.** As each problem is solved, record the family's plan. Keep notes in a journal or post them as a reminder. Remember, however, that many solutions will need more work, and you can always revise them at the next meeting.

Source: Thomas W. Phelan, Ph.D., *1-2-3 Magic*, 3rd Edition, ISBN: 1-889140-16-3 (ParentMagic, Inc., www.parentmagic.com).

Remember the three keys to discipline



Some parents think that discipline means punishment. But the best discipline helps your child learn what she did wrong—and how she can make a better choice in the future.

Here are three keys to effective discipline:

1. **Stay calm.** If you lose your temper, you've also lost the upper hand. Giving in to an urge to scream teaches your child that it's okay to lose control when she's upset.
2. **Be consistent.** It doesn't take long for your child to learn whether you really intend to enforce rules. Say *yes* just once to watching TV before school and you'll have a battle *every* morning. Don't set rules unless you will consistently enforce them.
3. **Avoid criticizing.** Just describe the behavior. "It was Jen's time on the computer and you wouldn't quit playing your game." Then remind your child of the rule and of the consequence.

Source: "Discipline Guide for Children," Keep Kids Healthy, www.keepkidshealthy.com/PARENTING_TIPS/discipline/index.html.

Teach your elementary schooler the importance of a work ethic



Working hard and sticking to a tough task is a sign of strong character. As it turns out, it's also a great way to be successful in school. Students who keep at a task are more successful than those who quit at the first time of trouble.

Here are some ways parents can encourage effort:

- **Tell a story.** Talk about a time you had trouble learning to do something. How many times did you fall before you rode a bike? Let your child see that things haven't always come easily to you.
- **Notice effort.** When you see your child trying to do something, compliment her. Say, "I'm proud of how hard you are working on this project."

- **Help your child see progress.** Your child may be focusing on how far she still has to go. You can keep her motivated by helping her see how far she's come. "Last week, you could only run around the block. Today you were able to run over a ¼ mile."

Source: Robert J. Marzano, *A Handbook for Classroom Instruction that Works*, ISBN: 0-871-20522-X (Pearson Education, www.prenticehall.com).

"Children are unpredictable. You never know what inconsistency they're going to catch you in next."

—Franklin P. Adams

Help your child create knowledge cards to review math vocabulary



Learning math involves learning a lot of new vocabulary words. For example, in math, a *product* isn't something on the shelf of a store—it's the answer to a multiplication problem.

Creating knowledge cards is one way to help your child master and remember math vocabulary words. First, your child will write his own definitions and create illustrations for these math words. Later, he'll use them to review before a math test.

Here's how your child can create his own set of knowledge cards:

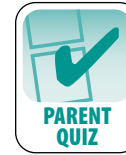
1. **Have your child** look through his math book. Help him make a list of the vocabulary words he needs to know. Often, these words will

be listed in bold letters the first time they appear.

2. **Give your child** a stack of index cards.
3. **Have your child write** the vocabulary word on the front of the card. Then have your child create a drawing or diagram that illustrates the meaning of that word.
4. **Have your child** write a definition on the back of the cards. He should not copy the definition from his math book. He should try to explain it in his own words.
5. **Use the cards** to review math vocabulary before a test.

Source: Harvey F. Silver, John R. Brunsting and Terry Walsh, *Math Tools Grades 3-12*, ISBN: 9781-4129-95782-3 (Corwin Press, a SAGE Company, www.corwinpress.com).

Are you a reading role model for your child?



There's no question that your attitude about reading has a big impact on how your child feels about picking up a book.

When you show your child how much you value reading, he's likely to follow your lead.

Are you a reading role model? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

- ___ 1. **Do you read** something for pleasure every day?
- ___ 2. **Do you share** something interesting that you've read with your child each day?
- ___ 3. **Do you keep** a book handy for times you may have to wait—in the doctor's office or in a long line?
- ___ 4. **Do you read** food labels at the store and talk about the information with your child?
- ___ 5. **Do you keep** books and magazines around your home—so it's easy to find something to read?

How well are you doing?

Each *yes* means you are a role model for helping your child love reading. For each *no*, try that idea in the quiz.

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Your elementary schooler will live up (or down) to expectations



Your child will live up to your expectations. Or, she'll live *down* to them. That's the advice of Dr. Kenneth Ginsburg. He says there are several ways you can help children learn to feel that they can handle any situation.

Here are some tips:

- **Help your child recognize** that she has individual strengths. Not every child (and not every adult) is good at everything. But knowing that she is a great reader—or Soccer player—can help her feel more competent and confident.
- **Don't overprotect.** Yes, parents always want children to be safe. But if you are always stepping in to handle every tough situation,

your child will assume it's because she can't do so for herself.

- **Let your child make** decisions. Even two-year-olds can decide if they want to wear the red shirt or the yellow one. As your child grows older, she should get to make more and more choices. But once she makes those choices, she needs to learn to live with the consequences.
- **Let your child know** you have faith in her. That doesn't mean you have to praise everything she does. But kids who know someone believes in them will grow up to believe in themselves.

Source: Bonny McClain, "Building Resilience in Children," *Healthy Children*, Winter 2007, www.aap.org/healthychildren/07winter/bldgresil.pdf.

Q: About once every two weeks, my fifth-grade daughter says she's too sick for school. She says she has a headache or her throat hurts. Now that we're all careful about spreading illnesses, I tend to give in. She rarely feels sick on the weekends. What should I do?

Questions & Answers

A: You're right to worry about sending a sick child to school. A sick child can infect the whole class. So there are times when she should stay home.

Does she have a fever? The National Association of School Nurses says children should not come to school if they have a fever or have had one in the last two days. Also keep her home if she's vomiting or has diarrhea. Check with the school for additional guidelines on when to keep her home.

But mysterious illnesses that never seem to occur on weekends are often signals that something else is going on. Ask her teacher if there are other problems. She may be struggling with a subject (in which case missing school will make it worse). Or she might be having problems with other students in the class.

If you suspect she's just avoiding school, don't let her stay home. Missing even one day every two weeks can lead to serious learning problems.

Meanwhile, take steps to prevent real infections. Practice proper hand washing. Teach her how to cover her cough (by coughing into her elbow, not her hand).

But don't let her beg off school unless she is truly sick. Otherwise, it could create bigger problems.

—Kristen Amundson,
The Parent Institute

Encourage the whole family to spend one 'green hour' per day



If you're like most parents, you agree that it's important for your kids to spend time outdoors. But nearly seven in 10 parents say their children are spending less time outdoors than they did.

Children not only want that chance for outdoor play—they want parents to be part of it. A survey by the Boys & Girls Clubs found that 43 percent of all kids said they'd like their parents to spend more time outdoors with them.

Doctors agree. There's been a dramatic rise in childhood obesity. Parents, too, are struggling to reduce stress and keep their weight down.

What's the solution? Think about giving your child one "green hour" each day. For 60 minutes, unplug

your child from all electronic media. Turn off the TV and the video game. Don't use the Internet.

Instead, give your child a chance for active play. Better yet, encourage the entire family to participate. To enjoy a "green hour":

- **Go for a walk,** run or bike ride.
- **Find a basketball court** and challenge your child to see who can get the most baskets in the least amount of time.
- **Explore nature.** Head to a nearby park, a wooded area or even your own backyard. What do you hear? What do you see? Focus on tiny insects and large trees. Later, look up answers to the questions you wanted to answer as you explored.

Source: National Wildlife Federation, "Be Out There Discussion Guide," www.nwfaffiliates.org/ht/a/GetDocumentAction/i/22557.htm.

It Matters: Reading

Make reading more appealing to your child



Some children resist, complain or even refuse to sit down with a book and read. What should you do?

Make sure your child's skills are developing well, since reading struggles can affect motivation. Talk with your child's teacher about any concerns. Also ask which reading materials she recommends.

Meanwhile, to make reading more appealing:

- **Set a good example.** Show that you enjoy reading. Mention things you learn, stories that make you laugh and words that inspire you.
- **Be positive.** Help your child see himself as a "reader." Choose a special spot in his room, such as a cozy corner, for books and reading. Let him read familiar books to a younger sibling.
- **Build interest.** Read irresistible books aloud—with enthusiasm. This may encourage your child to choose other books by the same author.
- **Visit the library.** Take time to browse and ask the librarian for advice. Only take home books (or magazines, newspaper articles, comics, etc.) that are likely to capture your child's attention.
- **Get creative.** There are so many things to read, including maps, video game instructions, jokes and menus. Read in different places, too, such as at the park or at the breakfast table.

Source: Joyce Cockson, M.S., "Creating Enthusiastic Young Readers," Literacy Connections, www.literacyconnections.com/creating-enthusiastic-young-readers.

Ask your elementary schooler to give you a reading quiz

Children are used to answering questions about reading, but asking questions is a whole new world! Start by reading a book together. Then have your child quiz you about the book.

Encourage her to challenge you with questions that can't be answered with a simple *yes* or *no*, including ones she wondered about herself. For example:

- **Why do you think** the author ended the book that way?
- **What would you change** about the story if you could?
- **How do you think** the main character felt?
- **What choices** did you agree or disagree with in the book?
- **Which role** would you want most if this book were a play?
- **What was your favorite** part of the story?



- **What does _____ mean?** (Your child can choose an unfamiliar word from the book.)
- **How would** you have felt if the story was about you?

Answer all of your child's questions, taking time to discuss her opinions. Soon she may be answering her own questions—and enjoying it!

Source: Esmé Raji Codell, *How to Get Your Child to Love Reading*, ISBN: 1-56512-308-5 (Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, www.workman.com/algonquin).

Build your child's reading fluency with simple steps



When someone is "fluent" in a language, they speak it in a flowing, natural manner.

The same is true for "fluent readers." They read so smoothly that it's almost as if they're talking. How can you help your child become a fluent reader? Help your child:

- **Recognize "sight words."** These are words that your child recognizes immediately. He doesn't have to sound them out. Talk with the teacher about the most important sight words for your

child to practice. Look for exciting books with these words, and read the stories often.

- **Read daily.** Read to and with your child. Let him read to you. When you read aloud, be a reading role model. Show how fluent reading sounds. Do your best to read with ease and expression. (If a book is new, you might practice before reading it to your child.)

Source: Marcia Davidson, *New Mexico Reading First*, "Building Reading Fluency in Struggling Readers: Effective Classroom Interventions," www.nmreadingfirst.org/ANRFC/06/Davidson-Building_Reading_Fluency_in_Struggling_Readers-Effective_Classroom_Interventions.ppt.