

Helping Children Learn®

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School



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Eastside Elementary School

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Teach fairness and compromise to foster teamwork skills

There's a lot to be said for encouraging children to show leadership. But it's just as important for success in school to help them learn how to work with others without taking over.

Whether your child has a group project in science or a part in a play, she'll get more out of it if she understands how to be a team player.



To encourage fairness, consideration and compromise:

- **Share some family decisions.** Have family members take turns making choices that affect everyone, such as what toppings will go on the pizza, or which movie to watch. Talk about considering everyone's tastes.
- **Establish some basic house rules.** For example, if one child cuts the cake, the other gets to choose the first piece. If one child chooses the game, the other gets the first turn.
- **Encourage fair decision-making.** Teach your children to flip a coin or play Rock, Paper, Scissors to see who gets the first choice of chores or the first turn with a toy.
- **Praise your child** when she demonstrates teamwork. "Your help let us get the leaves raked faster. Now we have time to bake cookies."



Plan for a conference with the teacher

At a parent-teacher conference, you and the teacher can focus exclusively on your child. It's a direct way for you to find out more about your child's strengths and weaknesses, what he's learning and how you can help.

For the most productive meeting:

- **Ask your child** beforehand to tell you what subjects are easiest and hardest for him—and why. Ask if there is anything he'd like you to discuss with his teacher.
- **Write down your questions.** For example: Is my child in different groups for different subjects? Is he working up to his ability? Does he participate in class? How well does my child get along with the other students in the class?
- **Make a list** of things to tell the teacher about your child. You know him better than anyone!
- **Arrive on time.**
- **Create an action plan** with the teacher. Ask for one or two specific things you can do at home to reinforce what your child is learning in school.

Repeating helps kids focus on what they hear

To sharpen your child's listening skills, practice reflective listening. Here's how:

- **When you say** something to your child, ask her to repeat it in her own words.
- **When she asks** you a question, restate it and then respond.

Attitude counts in math

Research shows that having a positive attitude about math improves kids' brain function during math tasks—and boosts their performance in school. To promote a positive math mindset:



- **Remind your child** that he *can* do math, and the more math he learns, the smarter he will become.
- **Send the right message.** Don't say "That looks really hard." Let your child know that figuring out challenging math problems is rewarding and fun.

Source: E. Digitale, "Positive attitude toward math predicts math achievement in kids," Stanford Medicine News Center, Stanford University, nismc.com/positivemath.

Set limits on multitasking

When students multitask, they aren't really concentrating on several tasks at the same time. Instead, their minds are moving quickly from one thing to another without paying full attention to anything.

Help your child schedule time to do tasks consecutively, instead of all at once. For example, study spelling words at 4:00, draw at 4:30, clean the fish tank at 5:00. Limit multitasking to activities that don't require attention, like eating a snack while chatting.



Source: "Multitasking: Switching Costs," American Psychological Association, nismc.com/elem_multitask.



Mornings with my three kids are mayhem. What can I do?

Q: Getting ready for school is a challenge. First one child won't get up. Then somebody else can't find a library book. Another kid refuses to dress without his lucky shirt. Too often, my kids miss the bus and I have to drive them to school. What can I do?

A: It can be a real scramble to get kids up and ready for the bus on time. But as long as your children know that there's really no rush—because you will drive them to school—they don't have much reason to change their ways.

Here's how you can begin to turn things around:

- **Make an announcement.** Say that from now on, anyone who misses the bus and has to be driven to school will have to pay "taxi fare." This could be a chore or another small "fee" of your choice.
- **Establish evening organization time.** Have your children lay out their clothes for the next day, pack their backpacks and set their alarms.
- **Sound a five-minute warning** before it's time to leave in the morning. Then calmly walk out the door and head for the bus stop.
- **Enforce consequences.** Collect your taxi fare. You probably won't have to do it many times before your children learn to be ready on time.



Are you using expectations to motivate?

Children care what their parents think. Setting expectations for your child that are both high and realistic can improve her chances of success in school. Are you using expectations to inspire your child? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

1. **Do you tell** your child that you expect her to do *her* best? Avoid comparing her to others.
2. **Do you help** your child set specific goals she can meet in a relatively short time?
3. **Do you work** with your child to plan steps she can take to meet her goals?
4. **Do you keep** your child's strengths and weaknesses in mind when establishing expectations?
5. **Do you praise** your child for making effort and progress

toward her goals—and not just for the end results?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean your child knows what you expect, and you are supporting her on the way. For each no, try that idea.

"Success is making those who believed in you look brilliant."
—Dharmesh Shah

How long does that take?

The more your child understands about time, the more responsible he can be about managing it. To give him a better sense of how much time things take to do, have him:

1. **Choose a task.**
2. **Estimate how many** minutes it will take him to complete it.
3. **Use a timer** or stopwatch to track the time as he carries out the task.
4. **Check to see** how close his estimate was.
5. **Repeat the process** with another task.

Discuss basics of discipline

To encourage appropriate behavior, experts recommend that you talk with your child about discipline. Why is it helpful? How does it work? After considering her ideas, list basic rules and consequences. Then follow through with consistency, fairness and respect. And be sure to acknowledge your child's good behavior. "It's nice that you invited the new girl to sit with you at lunch."

A sibling can be a great reading role model

Your child may have a special ally when it comes to developing a love of reading—an older sibling! When older kids read for pleasure, their younger siblings are more likely to read, too. To foster this dynamic:



- **Read as a family.** Gather once a week to enjoy reading. Ask everyone to talk about books they like.
- **Visit the library together.** A sibling may be able to suggest titles your younger child might like. Let your little kid watch the big kids browsing and reading, too.

Source: M. Knoester and M. Plikuhn, "Influence of siblings on out-of-school reading practices," *Journal of Research in Reading*, John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

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