

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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Meaningful connections help students recall what they learn

When your child has really learned something, she has stored it in her long-term memory. She can recall the information when she needs it.

Research shows that linking new information to something that has meaning makes it easier to retain. To learn new words, for example, instead of just repeating them again and again, your child could think about their meanings. Although both approaches may work in the short-term, emphasizing meaning leads to better long-term recall ability.



To help your child learn and remember new information:

- **Create a story.** If she is trying to memorize the first three presidents in order, turn the list into a story she can relate to: "One day, George Washington went to the park. He met John Adams and the two of them played on the seesaw. When Thomas Jefferson came along, all three presidents went on the swings together."
- **Focus on the bigger picture.** Rather than have your child simply repeat the fact that "Jupiter is the largest planet," help her tie it to a broader concept. "Everything about our solar system's biggest planet is big. Jupiter's Great Red Spot is even bigger than Earth."

Source: J.A. Meltzer and others. "Electrophysiological signatures of phonological and semantic maintenance in sentence repetition," *NeuroImage*, Elsevier.



Listen to emotional complaints, but don't rush to sympathize

Is it possible to be too supportive of kids' negative emotions? Experts say *yes*. In one study, parents who were overly sympathetic to their children's troubled feelings thought their kids were more socially well-adjusted than other kids.

But the children's teachers said they were *less* well-adjusted. Why the disconnect? It could be that when parents endorse every bad mood a child has, the child never considers that a mood may not really be justified.

This doesn't mean you should ignore your child's feelings. If he feels he has been wronged:

- **Ask what happened.**
Encourage your child to open up,

but don't automatically agree that he's a victim.

- **Dig deeper.** Was his quiz really "unfair?" Ask, "Why wasn't it fair?" If the truth is that he didn't study, point out that he wasn't mistreated; he was irresponsible.

Source: V.L. Castro and others, "Changing tides: Mothers' supportive emotion socialization relates negatively to third-grade children's social adjustment in school," *Social Development*, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., nswc.com/elem_negative.

Try timing work sessions

Working in short segments of time helps some students stay focused. If your child becomes distracted or discouraged with her homework, set a timer for 10 minutes. Have her work until the timer goes off. After a short break, reset the timer and have her work for 10 more minutes.



Three tools support success

Learning is hard work! Support your child's efforts in school by making sure he has these essential tools for the job:

1. **Enough sleep.** Children ages six to 13 need between nine and 11 hours a day.
2. **A healthy breakfast.** Many studies show that eating breakfast helps kids focus and behave in class, and earn higher grades.
3. **Self-confidence.**

When you believe your child can succeed in school, he'll believe it, too. Send him out the door with an "I know you can do it!"



Play a silly grammar game

In elementary school, children learn how different parts of speech (*nouns, adjectives, verbs, etc.*) fit together to form sentences. For some fun practice, make your own fill-in-the-blank game:

1. **Write a story** about 10 sentences long. Don't show it to your child.
2. **Replace some words** with blanks. For example, "After school, the girl enjoyed a ____ (*adjective*) snack."
3. **Ask your child** to supply words of the types needed to fill in the blanks. You can help by saying things like "An *adjective* is a word that describes something, like *slimy*." Silly words add to the fun.
4. **Read the completed story** together.



How can I keep deployment from derailing my child?

Q: My husband is serving overseas and won't be home for the holidays. This is really affecting my third grader, and his grades are suffering. What can I do to help my child get through this challenging time?

A: Separation from a parent is hard on kids, and it can be worse during the holidays. To help your child cope and get back on track:

- **Explain that it's OK** for him to miss his father. "We love Daddy very much. Of course we miss him." Let your son know he can talk to you whenever he feels sad.
- **Let the teacher know** the situation. Your child may feel he has to be brave at home, but could confide in the teacher. Ask how you can help your child improve his schoolwork.
- **Encourage father and son** to stay in touch as much as possible. Help your child call, send videos and email.
- **Talk with your child** about festive traditions you want to continue. The holidays won't be the same as in other years, but they can still be special.
- **Look for ways** you and your child can aid others. This can help your child put his own troubles into perspective.



Do you help your child handle projects?

As children get older, their school projects get more complicated and take more time. Are you helping your child manage the demands of a big project? Answer yes or no to the questions below:

1. **Do you brainstorm** with your child if she needs help selecting a topic?
2. **Do you show** your child how to divide the project into small steps? Have her write each step on her calendar, and cross it off as she completes it.
3. **Do you help** your child make a list of all the supplies she will need, to avoid last-minute trips to the store?
4. **Do you take** your child to the library to ask the librarian for resources that might help?
5. **Do you review** your child's work, but let her do it herself?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are fostering your child's success on large projects. For each no, try that idea.

"Every project has challenges, and every project has its rewards."
—Stephen Schwartz

Have an honest discussion

By elementary school, most children know the difference between being honest and lying. But they don't always understand the value of telling the truth. To instill honesty:

- **Discuss its importance** with your child. Does he want others to tell him the truth? Does he think it is ever OK to lie?
- **Make it clear** that you value honesty. You will be happy if he tells the truth—even if he has done something wrong.
- **Talk about the consequences** of lying. If your child tells lies, people won't believe him when he's telling the truth.
- **Set an example.** Kids notice when parents tell the truth—and when they don't.

Set expectations that fit

Setting high, but still realistic, expectations for your child can motivate her to meet them. Gear your expectations to your child and avoid comparisons to other people. Encourage her to do her best. Then let her know you are proud of her hard work—and that she should be proud of it, too.

Fill the break with learning

Winter break is a perfect time to help your child discover fun ways to learn outside the classroom. Try these activities together:

1. **Attend seasonal events.** With your child, look in the paper or online for free concerts, performances or places to visit.
2. **Explore culture** through food. Let your child help you prepare holiday foods you remember from your childhood. Or do some research and cook a dish you've never tried.
3. **Learn about family history.** Help your child interview relatives. He can record the chats, or write them down.



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