

Helping Children Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School



January 2012

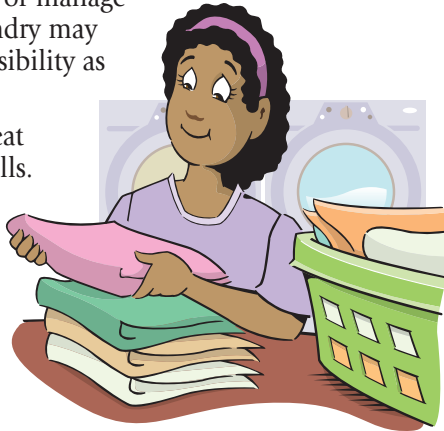
Westside Elementary School
Kelly Pohl, Counselor

Expect more responsibility in 2012

Adults who can't balance a checkbook or manage basic life skills such as cooking or laundry may not have been expected to take responsibility as young children.

The beginning of a new year is a great time start teaching your child these skills. Here's how:

- **Expect your child** to get up by herself in the morning. Even a first grader can learn to set an alarm clock.
- **Teach your child** how to do laundry. A young child can help sort clothes before washing and fold and put them away when they're dry. An older child can learn how to use a washing machine.
- **Help your child** manage money. Whether it's money from a birthday gift or an allowance, expect your child to put some aside for savings. Talk to your child about the importance of saving money for college.
- **Ask your child** to help. Every family member should do something that helps out the whole family. A young child can set or clear the table. An older child can learn how to prepare a simple meal. Be sure to say thank you when your child's help makes your home run more smoothly.
- **Volunteer.** Make time for your family to volunteer together. Doing something for others builds responsibility.



Source: W. Damon, *The Path to Purpose: Helping Our Children Find Their Calling in Life*, Free Press.



You can promote the trait of honesty

Most children know the difference between *honesty* and *lying*. But sometimes kids want to cover up an action or impress a friend. To promote honesty:

- **Be a role model.** Children are good "lie detectors." They notice when parents tell the truth—and when they don't.
- **Reward honesty.** When your child tells the truth—especially in a difficult situation—compliment him!
- **Avoid labels.** If your child lies, don't call him a "liar." Instead, express confidence that he can make better choices in the future.
- **Talk about it.** Note examples of honesty and dishonesty—and their effects.
- **Prevent lying.** It's better to say what happened ("You broke my vase") than to ask unnecessary questions ("Did you do this?"). Create opportunities for telling the truth—not lying.

Source: K. Stephens, "Lying, Fibs, and Tall-Tales: Teaching Children To Be Truthful," *My Small Wonders*, www.mysmallwonders.com/resources/pdf/LYING01PELibrary.pdf.

How was school today?

Ask your child about his day—with a twist. At dinner time, suggest that your child describe three things that happened at school. The twist is that one of them must be made up, and other players have to guess which it is. Encourage your child to include plenty of details. A parent or older sibling can help your child prepare if needed.

Exercise observation skills

Scientists are keen observers. They notice and remember details. To help your child develop this trait:

- **Ask** her to describe the front of a building she knows well, such as your house or apartment building.
- **Encourage** her to be specific. How many stories high is the building? What color is the front door?
- **Together**, check the reality against the details she remembered.

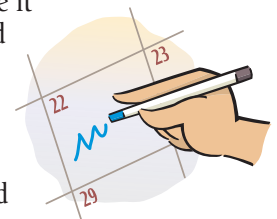


When you're out for a walk, say, "What color are the shutters on the Smiths' house?" See if she can remember without looking.

Source: S. Berman, *Thinking Strategies for Science*, Corwin Press.

Keep tabs on the calendar

Start the new year by placing your school calendar where you see it every day. If your child needs to miss school, talk with his teacher about making up work. Remember that excused and unexcused absences take a toll on learning. Keep track of how often your child is absent or tardy.



Source: H.N. Chang and M. Romero, "Present, Engaged, and Absent For: The Critical Importance of Addressing Chronic Absence in the Early Grades," *National Center for Children in Poverty*.



What can parents do when children dislike school?

Q: Lately, my son has been telling me he hates school. How can a parent sort out what's truth and what's exaggeration? And how can I help him without taking over his life?

A: Not all kids who say they hate school actually do. Sometimes, they're just looking for attention (or for a chance to put off homework).

It's important to listen to your son. Find a time when you can have an uninterrupted talk. Say, "You've said you hate school. What's making you feel this way?"

Then consider what he says. Is he struggling in science? Are kids mean to him on the bus? Is he feeling overwhelmed because he's in too many activities?

Once you figure out what's causing the problem, you can help him find solutions. For example:

- **If he's having trouble in a class**, ask his teacher for advice. Is he turning in homework? Does he need remedial instruction?
- **If he feels kids are mean to him**, ask for specific details. Then talk with his teacher. Ask how you can work together to help your son cope with this situation.
- **If he feels overwhelmed** by his activities, decide what could be cut.

Reassure your son that you will help him. Talk positively about school, his teachers and what he is learning.



How is your child doing in school?

The school year is about at the midway point. To see if you have a good idea of how well your child is doing, answer the following questions *yes* or *no*:

1. **Do you talk** with your child about graded tests and projects when she brings them home?
2. **Do you ask** your child to talk about why she thinks she received a grade and what she has learned—whether it's a good grade or a poor grade?
3. **Do you contact** your child's teacher to learn what is going on if your child has a problem with a subject?
4. **Do you check** your child's report card, paying attention to conduct and behavior grades as well as academic grades?

5. **Do you review** your child's state test results with her teacher?

How did you do? Each *yes* answer means you are keeping up with your child's progress in school. For each *no* answer, try that idea from the quiz.

"A child educated only at school is an uneducated child."
—George Santayana

Pacing bolsters test success

Tests require a good sense of timing. If kids work too quickly, they're likely to make careless mistakes. If they work too slowly, they won't finish in time.

Help your child learn how to pace herself. Start by talking about activities in which pacing is important. A 30-minute TV show can't last 27 minutes (or 33 minutes). If a child gets to the bus a minute late, she has still missed it!

When your child is doing homework, have her try to guess how long it will take. At first, you might need to help. "Do you really think you could do 15 math problems in five minutes?" Then see how close her estimate is to the time it really takes.

Source: G. Durham, *Teaching Test-Taking Skills*, Rowman & Littlefield Education.

Support your child's teacher

Children's school success starts at home—and kids' attitudes about school start there, too. What you say can influence how your child feels, so speak positively about your child's teacher. If you have a problem or concern, make an appointment to meet with your child's teacher rather than speaking negatively at home. After all, you both have the same goal in mind: your child's success.

Catalog + calculator = math

Use old catalogs to teach your child the skill of estimating and give him practice in using a calculator. Here's how:

1. **Have** your child look through a catalog and choose three or four items he wishes he could buy.
2. **Ask** him to estimate the items' total cost.
3. **Have** him use a calculator to check his work. How close was his estimate?



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