

# Helping Children Learn<sup>®</sup>

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

Sangster ES  
Springfield, VA

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## DISCIPLINE

### Life is stressful for children, too

Elementary-age children may seem mature. But sometimes they resort to toddler-style fits. That's because just like adults, they have stress in their lives, but they don't have the emotional skills to cope with it. To minimize your child's outbursts, figure out what leads to them. To help her recognize and deal with signs of stress, suggest that she:

- **Become aware of signs that she's "losing it,"** such as clenched fists, rapid breathing, tears, a stomachache or a headache.
- **Remove herself from the situation** for a five-minute breather. She can return when she feels composed enough to deal with it calmly.
- **Try to relax.** Breathe deeply. Dribble a ball. Count to ten slowly. Or think, "I can work through this."
- **Imagine herself as a cartoon character** with steam pouring out of her ears. Count out loud until she sees the steam disappear.
- **Write or draw her feelings.** Wad up the paper. Throw it away.
- **Talk about things.** When your child is having a hard time, encourage her to name her feelings.
- **Recall her funniest family memory.** Picture it several times a day until she can "switch it on" when she's angry.



Source: Ann Colin Herbst, "Temper, Temper," *Parents Magazine*, August 2003 (Meredith Corporation, 1-800-727-3682, [www.parents.com](http://www.parents.com)).

## REINFORCING LEARNING

### Games help make history memorable

Memorizing a bunch of names, dates and places can be boring. To make history more meaningful and fun, play games such as:

- **People memory.** Prepare cards that describe historical figures. Make sure each one has an identical match. Then play traditional "memory."
- **History bingo.** Make bingo cards with important dates or events on them. When playing, call out the name of the matching person.
- **Character charades.** One player pretends to be someone in history without talking or saying the name; the others guess who it is.
- **Guessing.** Discuss the reasons for moments in history. Why does your child think these things happened? What might people have thought at the time?

Source: Margaret Helmstetter, "Help Your Child Learn History," PageWise, [http://inin.essortment.com/learninghistory\\_rxfw.htm](http://inin.essortment.com/learninghistory_rxfw.htm).

## TALKING & LISTENING

### Allow kids to solve conflicts

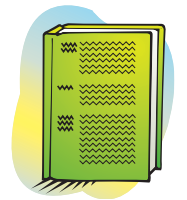
It's tempting to interrupt children's bickering and solve problems yourself. But kids need to learn about conflict resolution. Offer guidelines, such as, "Each child gets a chance to explain his side" and "No being mean allowed." Help them find a solution.

## BUILDING WRITING SKILLS

### Help your child tackle book reports using these tips

Even kids who love to read can dread writing book reports. To make the job easier, help your child learn to:

- **Ask** exactly what the teacher expects.
- **Divide** the task into small parts.
- **Use** sentence starters, such as, "The most exciting part of the book was ..."
- **Build** in extra work time just in case.



Source: Cheri Fuller, *Teaching Your Child to Write: How Parents Can Encourage Writing Skills for Success in School, Work, and Life*, ISBN: 0-425-15983-3 (Berkeley Publishing Group, 1-800-788-6262, [www.penguinputnam.com](http://www.penguinputnam.com)).

## BUILDING ROUTINES

### Use routines after holidays

Children thrive on routines. So do their grades. To get back into effective routines after the long holiday break:

- **Talk** with your child about his classes. Review grades together.
- **Help** your child set goals. Ask what he wants to work on. What does he want to achieve? Be specific.
- **Establish** a daily routine that supports success *and* fun. After homework time, for example, the family might play a game.



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## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

### How much homework is too much?

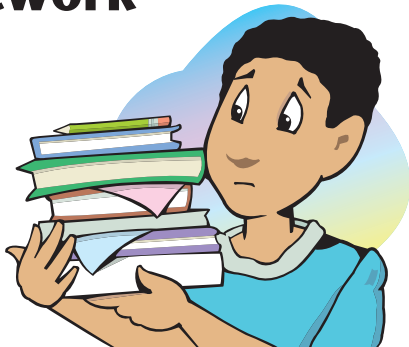
**Q. My fifth grader has a lot of homework. He studies at least three hours every day—sometimes more. It makes it hard for him to do anything else. How much homework is too much?**

**A.** Homework helps students do better in school. But three to four hours a day is excessive. Most experts say that in grades K-2, children should do about 10 to 20 minutes of homework daily. In grades 3 - 6, most can handle from 30 minutes to an hour each day.

Start by pinpointing the source of the problem. Does your son use time wisely? Does he work right away or does he dawdle? Does he work steadily (for at least 15 minutes at a time), or does he daydream and take constant breaks?

If time management is the problem, make homework a game. Set a timer and a goal—such as ten math problems. If he can “beat the clock,” give him a reward or a short break.

But if he’s studying hard and consistently, talk with the teacher. It may be a classwide problem. If not, get extra help. By working with the teacher, you can balance homework with other important uses of time.



## PARENT QUIZ

### Is your child building listening skills?

Students need to be good listeners to be successful in school. Answer each question *yes* or *no* to see if you’re encouraging this skill at home:

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you make** eye contact with your child during conversations?
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you have** rules against interrupting others while they’re talking?
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you sometimes restate** what your child says to make sure you understood?
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you ask** questions when you don’t understand what someone says?
- \_\_\_ **5. Do you take turns** talking instead of dominating conversations?

**How did you do?** Each yes answer means you are helping your child become a better listener. Try to change each no answer to yes.

“Children need models rather than critics.”  
— Joseph Joubert

## BUILDING SOCIAL SKILLS

### Let shy children practice class participation at home

If your shy child hesitates to speak up in class, help her do it at home. For example, ask for her opinion often. Which TV show is best? Who is going to win the Super Bowl? This will help her practice putting thoughts into words.

Source: Kenneth H. Rubin, *The Friendship Factor*, ISBN: 0-670-03018-X (Skylight Press, 1-800-788-6262, [www.penguininputnam.com](http://www.penguininputnam.com)).

## SOLVING SCHOOL PROBLEMS

### Share your stance on cheating with your child

Sometimes kids encourage their peers to cheat. If parents haven’t taken a firm stand against cheating, it may be even more tempting to give in. Tell your child that cheating is wrong. Explain why. And if your child confesses that she has cheated, react calmly. Compliment her honesty and help her learn from the mistake.

## BUILDING CHARACTER

### Help others, help everyone

Good citizens think of other people’s needs, not just their own. They feel responsible for making the world a good place. Kids who have such qualities also get along better in school.

Help your child:

- **Meet “helping” role models.** You might talk to a police officer or nurse. Ask what they do and how they feel about it.
- **Thank community helpers.** Take something special (a homemade thank-you card, for example) to someone who deserves it, such as a school volunteer.

Source: “Character Counts!: A Guide for Reinforcing Positive Character Traits Within the Family,” University of Nebraska-Lincoln, <http://character.sketches.unl.edu/booklet.htm>.



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