

# Helping Children Learn

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

Sangster ES  
Springfield, VA

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## BUILDING RESPONSIBILITY

### Good manners, good grades linked

When children use good manners at school, it makes it easier for everyone to learn. Schools spend some time teaching about behavior, but children learn most about it at home. Here are some ways you can help:

- **Discuss the Golden Rule:** "Treat others as you would want them to treat you." Help your child experience what this means. If he says something unkind, for example, say, "How would you feel if someone said that to you?"
- **Use helpful words.** Encourage your child to use words instead of actions to express his feelings. For example, "I'm angry that you cut ahead of me in line. Please go behind me."
- **Share.** Your child can practice sharing with his family and friends. Set a good example by sharing yourself: "This sandwich is great! Would you like half of it?"
- **Be honest.** Everyone makes mistakes. Admit it when you're wrong and encourage your child to do the same. You'll both learn from mistakes—and sometimes find humor in them. An apology and a laugh can make everyone feel better.



## ENCOURAGING READING

### Ask questions after reading aloud

Some of the best reading experiences take place after you've closed the book. Once you've finished a read-aloud time, it helps to:

- **Ask** your child to sum up the material. Have her start at the beginning and tell the story in her own words.
- **Think** about different points of view. For example, how would "Little Red Riding Hood" be different if it were told from the wolf's perspective?
- **Discuss** opinions. What did your child like? Dislike? Why? You might even challenge your child to write a review of the book.
- **Consider** a new ending. How else could the story have ended? Retell it that way.
- **Make** connections to real life. Has your child ever felt like the main character? When and why?
- **Imagine** being a character. Who would it be? Would you change that person's actions?

Source: "How to Get the Most from Any Story After You've Read to Your Kids," PBS Kids, <http://pbskids.org/lions/parentteachers/resources/tips/any-story-after.html>.

## DISCIPLINE

### Correct behavior calmly

Out of anger or frustration, sometimes parents criticize children. "What's wrong with you?" "You're such a baby."

These words don't improve behavior, though. They destroy children's confidence and motivation. They actually make behavior worse.

Instead of saying, "You're lazy," for example, say, "Homework needs to be a priority. I know you can do it. Let's make a homework schedule."

Then, when your child tries hard, make sure you compliment her. Watch her feelings—and her performance—soar.

Source: Stephanie Marston, "There's No Such Thing as a 'Bad' Kid: Focusing on the Behavior, Not the Child," *OurChildren*, January/February 2004 (National PTA, 1-800-307-4782, [www.pta.org](http://www.pta.org)).

## BUILDING WRITING SKILLS

### Make writing practice fun

Your child might not respond well to, "Let's practice writing!" But how about, "Want to make Grandma a birthday card?" Combining drawing and writing can make a

difference. Let your child decorate the front of a card and write a note inside. Stamp, address and mail it together, too.

Source: "25 Activities for Reading and Writing Fun," Reading Rockets, [www.readingrockets.org/article.php?ID=246](http://www.readingrockets.org/article.php?ID=246).



## BUILDING SELF-ESTEEM

### Be patient with fear of the dark

Fear of the dark can keep children awake at night—and make them tired the next day. If your child is afraid of the dark, talk about his fears. Put him at ease. Allow a little light and gradually work toward a dark room.



## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

### How hard should upper elementary grades be?

**Q. My daughter is in fourth grade. She has always done pretty well in school, but this year she struggles with homework and staying organized. Is this normal as kids get older?**

**A:** It's a good idea to talk with her teacher, just to make sure she doesn't have any big concerns. But fourth grade is a transitional time. In the early grades, most work is simple and clear cut (learning spelling words, solving math problems, etc.). In fourth grade, students may take on new kinds of responsibilities, such as long-term assignments.

When you talk with the teacher, ask about expectations. How much should your child study each night? Does she need to plan for lengthy projects? Should you review basic skills with her? How much should you help?

Also encourage good school habits. Have your child write down assignments. She should study at the same time, in the same place, every day. She may want to tackle the hardest assignments first and get them out of the way. As she finishes tasks, she can check them off proudly. Help her find logical spots to keep school supplies.

Finally, make sure your child still enjoys learning. Look for classes she'll like, such as creative writing or music. If she stays curious, challenging subjects will be easier.



## PARENT QUIZ

### Are you promoting responsibility?

When children do chores at home, they learn about responsibility, and that helps them at school. Answer the following questions *yes* or *no* to see if you're encouraging this.

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you give** your child daily jobs, such as putting laundry in the hamper?
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you ask** your child to keep his backpack in a regular spot each day?
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you teach** your child new skills, such as how to set the table?
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you compliment** your child's efforts to pitch in?

\_\_\_ **5. Do you set** a good example by taking care of your own household duties?

**How did you do?** Each yes shows that you are teaching your child responsibility. For each no answer, consider using that idea from the quiz to change your answer to yes.

*"Responsibility cannot be imposed. It grows from within, fed and directed by values absorbed at home."*

— Kathy Wagoner

## BUILDING CHARACTER

### Encourage your children to participate in giving

Giving to charity is a way to teach about helping others. But where should your family's money or volunteer time go? Consider involving your kids in making the decision. You can:

- **Have** each family member choose a cause.
- **Research** the charities online.
- **Compare** them to your family's values.
- **Decide** which group (or groups) to support.

## YOUR CHILD AND YOU

### Invent a family holiday

You don't have to wait until the calendar tells you there's a holiday. Why not celebrate something all your own? Make up a holiday (such as "Favorite Food Day") or look up new holidays at the library.

Whatever holiday you choose, think about how your family will recognize it. Will you exchange cards? Decorate the house? Play games? Dress up?

Plan the holiday in advance. Write it on the calendar. Get your child involved in preparations. Then get out the balloons and streamers and have a great time!

Source: John Lithgow, *A Lithgow Palooza!* ISBN: 0-743-26124-0 (Fireside Books, 1-800-456-6798, www.simonandschuster.com).

## BUILDING MATH SKILLS

### Popcorn can make math fun

Most kids love popcorn. And popping it can build math skills. Here's how: Have your child estimate how many kernels of popped popcorn it takes to fill his favorite popcorn bowl. Count (and eat) to check his answer!



## Helping Children Learn<sup>®</sup>

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