

# Helping Children Learn<sup>®</sup>

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

Watson Williams Elementary School



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## Teach your child four strategies for achieving learning goals

Setting goals gives students something to work toward, and visualizing them can keep kids motivated when the going gets tough. You have probably helped your child set learning goals. But does your child know what to do after setting a goal to make it easier to reach?

Help your elementary schooler put these four strategies into action:

- 1. Define the goal in writing.** Make sure that your child's goal is specific, and can be accomplished in a short time frame: "I will learn my multiplication facts by the end of the month" rather than "I will do better in math." Post the written goal in a visible place.
- 2. Decide on steps to take.** What work is your child willing to do to achieve the goal? Together, make a step-by-step plan.
- 3. Share the goal and plan with others.** Making goals public builds commitment. Encourage your child to discuss the plan with the teacher.
- 4. Carry out the plan,** one step at a time. If problems crop up, brainstorm possible solutions together. For example, if your child is too tired to review flash cards in the evenings, reviewing over breakfast might work.

As your child works toward the goal, offer encouragement and support. Praise effort and progress. And when your child achieves the goal, celebrate!



## Help your elementary schooler go into tests with confidence

Test anxiety is often caused by self-doubt, and it can keep students from achieving the results they are capable of. Poor performance then reinforces that self-doubt. To help your child break the test-anxiety cycle:

- **Take the pressure off.** Tell your child that tests simply show the teacher what students have learned so far, and what they need help with. Make it clear that you love your child no matter what—and a test score won't change that.
- **Schedule time to review.** Preparation is the best cure for test-anxiety. It's best to study a little each day for several days before the test. Help your child focus first on not-yet-mastered material.
- **Teach your child to use positive self-talk,** such as "I have studied and I am prepared to be successful."
- **Encourage your child to visualize doing well.** You might say, "Close your eyes and picture yourself knowing the answers."

## Play an observation game

Scientists notice and remember details. To encourage this, ask your child to describe the front of a familiar building from memory. How many stories is it? What color is the front door? Together, check the reality against the details your child remembered.

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

## Stir up interest in exercise

Research shows that regular exercise improves children's health and performance in school. To increase your child's physical activity level:



- **Set an example.** Seeing you stay fit can motivate your child.
- **Link screens to movement.** Build fitness breaks into your child's screen time.
- **Play active games,** such as catch, tag and Simon Says.

Source: A. McPherson and others, "Physical activity, cognition and academic performance," *BMC Public Health*.

## Encourage critical thinking

Critical thinking helps students analyze information and understand how it relates to a bigger picture. To help your elementary schooler develop this skill:



- **Allow time** for your child to try to solve problems independently. Ask questions like "How could you figure that out?"
- **Encourage reflection.** Ask how your child thinks a completed project or task went. "Did you plan enough time to finish? What did you learn from doing it?"
- **Consider current events.** Have your child read an article and express an opinion on an issue. Then ask, "Why might other people might think differently?"



## How can I make writing less painful for my child?

**Q:** My fifth grader hates to write. When there's a writing assignment, my child just stares at the blank piece of paper. What can I do to help?

**A:** Many elementary schoolers freeze up at the thought of writing. They worry that what they write won't be any good.

To help your student beat writer's block and learn to communicate effectively in writing:

- **Ask what your child is feeling.** Listen, and allow your child to express frustration. Explain that professional writers have difficulty writing sometimes, too.
- **Encourage your child to make a list** of as many ideas as possible, without worrying about grammar or spelling. Editing for those things can come later.
- **Discuss the ideas with your child.** Ask questions to help your child think them through. After your conversation, it may be easier for your child to write the first draft.
- **Provide positive feedback.** When reviewing written work, focus on what your child is trying to say, not just the rules of writing. Praise what you like. Don't fix your child's mistakes—this sends the message that you don't think your child is capable of fixing them.



## Are you teaching your child to be civil?

In school and in life, children must cooperate and learn from other people. Civil behavior smooths the way. Are you showing your child how to interact respectfully with others? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you set** an example by being kind and honest with your child and others?
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you encourage** your child to admit mistakes and try to make amends?
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you show** your child healthy ways to vent anger instead of taking it out on other people?
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you model** attentive listening by making eye contact with your child and restating what you hear?

- \_\_\_ **5. Do you uphold** rules and consequences fairly and consistently?

### How well are you doing?

*More yes answers mean you are demonstrating respectful actions and attitudes. For each no, try that idea.*



*"Respect is how to treat everyone, not just those you want to impress."*

—Richard Branson

## Foster 'conscientiousness'

*Conscientious* students work hard, think through choices and fulfill responsibilities. To encourage conscientiousness at home:

- **Teach** your child to take the time to work carefully—even when another activity seems more exciting.
- **Encourage** your child to keep trying—even when work is challenging.
- **Have** your child double-check work.

## Boost an interest in history

The best historical fiction gives your child a vivid view of the human side of history's facts, dates and statistics.



To bring history to life through reading:

- **Ask a teacher or librarian** to recommend titles that present history accurately and avoid myths or stereotypes.
- **Choose books** with illustrations.
- **Read books aloud** that are a little above your child's reading level.
- **Have your child** read more than one book about the same era to get different perspectives.

Source: E. Codell, *How to Get Your Child to Love Reading*, Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill.

## Chores build school skills

Children who do chores at home can develop skills and attitudes that help in school. Assign chores that help your child learn to:

- **Follow directions.** Completing multi-step chores correctly is good practice for taking tests.
- **Plan and manage time.** Figuring out when to do chores to meet a deadline helps your child learn to prioritize time.
- **Consider others' needs.** This is an important part of teamwork.

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