

Elementary School Parents[®]

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make the difference!



Research shows that free time builds your child's brain

While extracurricular activities can enrich your elementary schooler's life, it's important to balance them with unstructured play. Free time allows your child to goof off, explore interests, develop creativity and simply relax.

Studies show that even when children's brains are in a "resting" state—that is, not being fed a formal stream of instruction—they're still active. They are simply learning in a different way. So, just because your child may not *look* busy, it doesn't mean your child's brain isn't busy!

To provide some brain-boosting during your child's downtime:

- **Allow occasional boredom.** Don't race to solve your child's every

"There's nothing to do!" whimper. Instead, challenge your child to figure out how to fill the time. Who knows? It might be just the spark your child's brain needs to come up with something innovative!

- **Turn off digital devices.** It's easy to hand your child a smartphone or tablet to occupy downtime. But consistently doing so robs your child's brain of the chance to actively acquire information (instead of passively being "fed" information by a screen). Let your child look out the car window instead of at an app during your next drive. Just think what new knowledge might take hold.

Source: L. Waters, Ph.D., "How Goofing Off Helps Kids Learn," *The Atlantic*.

April activities can boost your child's learning



April may bring showers, but it also brings opportunities to promote responsibility and learning.

Try these activities with your child:

- **April 2**—International Children's Book Day. This day is designed to inspire a love of reading. Select a book and spend some time reading together.
- **April 8**—National Library Workers Day. Have your child make a card to thank the school librarian for helping in the library.
- **April 15**—National Laundry Day. Teach your child how to do a load of laundry.
- **April 22**—Earth Day. As a family, think of things you can do to protect the earth, such as using less water.
- **April 23**—Shakespeare's birthday. With your child, act out a scene from one of Shakespeare's plays. Or, challenge your child to write a play.
- **April 30**—National Honesty Day. Talk to your child about why it is important to be honest *every* day!

Boost reading comprehension and writing skills with summaries



Whether it's a passage on a handout or a novel from the library, elementary school assignments often involve reading.

One effective way students can check comprehension after reading is to write a summary of the material.

Encourage your child to answer the following questions when writing a summary:

- **Who are the characters** or people involved? Your child should write about each person or character and what's important about each one.
- **What did the characters** or people do? This is the basic plot.
- **Where did the story take place?**
- **When did the events take place?**

- **Why did things occur as they did?**
- **What events or feelings** affected the characters' choices?

It's OK if your child has to go back and reread the material—more carefully this time—to answer these questions. Over time, your child will get the knack of summarizing.

“The unread story is not a story; it is little black marks on wood pulp. The reader, reading it, makes it live: a live thing, a story.”

—Ursula K. Le Guin

Reinforce your child's academic skills with these simple activities



Learning doesn't happen *only* during school. You can reinforce your child's academic skills any time! Here's how:

- **Have conversations** with your child about everything. Ask what your child thinks about certain topics—and really listen to the answers.
 - **Ask about** what your elementary schooler is learning in school. What does your child find most interesting about each subject?
 - **Ask your child to explain** a new concept or idea to you. When students retell the things they learn, they reinforce those things in their own minds.
 - **Help your child** engage in analytical thinking. Discuss the similarities and differences between things.
- Think out loud when you are trying to solve a challenging problem.
 - **Give your child** meaningful responsibilities. If you have a pet, ask your child to help with its care. Demonstrate how to prepare simple snacks, dust the family room and do other household chores.
 - **Respect your child's abilities.** Let your child use newly acquired knowledge and skills to help you. For example, ask your child to sort laundry, or count out napkins and forks for setting the table.
 - **Expose your child to new things.** Every meaningful experience your child has—from a walk around the neighborhood to a trip to a store—has an impact on learning. On your next outing, ask how the things you both see relate to what your child is learning in school.

Are you teaching your child to use time wisely?



Learning to prioritize tasks, manage time effectively and stay organized helps elementary school students reduce stress

and improve academic performance. Are you helping your child use time wisely? Answer *yes* or *no* to each of the questions below:

- ___ **1. Do you review** your child's schedule and made adjustments as necessary when priorities change?
- ___ **2. Do you help your child** make a list of weekly “must-dos” and plan when to complete them?
- ___ **3. Do you try** to keep a balance between your child's schoolwork and the rest of your lives? Elementary schoolers need plenty of time for exercise, family time and sleeping.
- ___ **4. Do you help** your child break down big assignments into smaller tasks to complete step-by-step?
- ___ **5. Do you make** sure that your child has some time each day for pleasure reading?

How well are you doing?

Each *yes* means you are helping your child learn to use time wisely. For *no* answers, try those ideas in the quiz.

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to Help Their Children.

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Strong thinking skills enhance learning and problem solving



Does your child often feel overwhelmed by detailed assignments, like a big history project or a research paper? Helping your child develop strong thinking skills provides the tools to tackle the challenge.

When students gain insight into their own thinking strategies, they are better equipped to approach and solve complex problems. Students who are effective thinkers:

- **Are aware of how they think.** Educators call this *metacognition*, or the ability to think about the thinking process. These students have a plan before they take action. They know if they need more information in order to draw a conclusion. And if they get new information later, they adapt. If your child is struggling, say something like, “Let’s think this through.”

Talk about your child’s strength as a problem solver. “Remember that when you make a plan, things seem to fall into place.”

- **Apply past experiences** to current challenges. Your child may not have had an assignment exactly like this one, but has likely worked on other large assignments. Ask your child, “How did you approach your last project? What did you learn from that experience?”
- **Focus on momentum.** Progress, not perfection, is the key to success. “It’s not that I’m so smart,” Albert Einstein once said, “it’s that I stick with a problem longer.” So when your elementary schooler gets discouraged, point out the headway already made.

Source: A.L. Costa, *Developing Minds: A Resource Book for Teaching Thinking*, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Five easy strategies can help you build your child’s self-confidence



Self-confidence can have a positive impact on your child’s academic and social life. When students believe in themselves, they’re more likely to take on challenges, persevere through frustration and achieve goals.

To inspire self-confidence, celebrate your child’s effort, progress and achievements. Consider these ideas:

1. **Send “fan mail.”** Praise your child’s efforts in a short note, poem or silly riddle. Sign it, “From your biggest fan” and leave it where your child will find it.
2. **Create a mini-museum.** In addition to the refrigerator, designate a wall in the house as a place to hang your child’s art, writing, test papers and certificates. Change the “exhibits” often.
3. **Make a date.** Each month, devote one day to doing something your child enjoys and does well. Write it on the calendar. Let your child choose what to do.
4. **Have a testimonial dinner.** Put your child at the head of the table and have each family member say something nice about the honored guest. Encourage siblings to participate by reminding them that their turn will be coming.
5. **Give a good night boost.** When your child is getting ready for bed, take time to chat about something your sleepyhead did well today.

Q: My children just don’t get along. They fight constantly and I always get caught in the middle. How can I teach them to treat each other respectfully and resolve their conflicts peacefully?

Questions & Answers

A: You aren’t alone! Even the friendliest of siblings have times when they don’t get along—and many families feel like they have to act as referees.

Instead of getting in the middle of every squabble, teach your children some basic strategies for resolving conflicts peacefully and respectfully. These strategies will also help them when they face conflicts at school.

Teach your children to:

- **Talk about issues before** they become conflicts. When little things are ignored, they tend to grow into big disputes.
- **Use “I-messages.”** Encourage your children to talk about their feelings, not the other person’s mistakes. Instead of, “YOU always steal my supplies,” try, “I feel angry when you take something without asking to borrow it first.”
- **Avoid the “blame game.”** If there’s a problem, it probably doesn’t matter whose fault it is. Help your children focus their attention on fixing the problem, not placing the blame.
- **Listen.** Your children will never understand another person’s point of view if they don’t listen to what that person has to say.
- **Cooperate and compromise.** If two people have a conflict, they each have a problem. To solve it, they’ll probably both have to make some changes.

It Matters: Building Character

Respond to failure in positive ways



Sooner or later, your elementary schooler will experience a failure or setback. The way you react to it can help shape your child's character and academic achievement.

To help your elementary schooler bounce back after setbacks:

- **Remind your child** that your love is unconditional—it is not tied to school performance.
- **Say that mistakes** are actually opportunities for learning. Help your child think about what to do differently in the future.
- **Praise what you can.** “Most of your answers were correct on this test. That’s an improvement.”
- **Be realistic.** If your child is unable to raise a class grade despite working hard to do so, don’t show disappointment. Instead, work with the teacher to help your child create a plan for improvement.
- **Teach your child** to respect teacher’s decisions—even if your child does not like them.
- **Move on.** Don’t dwell on the failure. When families spend too much time talking about setbacks, children can have a harder time getting past them.
- **Offer support** without taking over. If your child earns a low grade on a writing assignment, discuss ways to improve.
- **Be a role model.** Handle your own mistakes and failures in positive ways.

Source: D. Walsh, *No: Why Kids—of All Ages—Need to Hear It and Ways Parents Can Say It*, Free Press.

Focus on four areas as you help your child develop character

Children are born with unique personalities. Their character; however, is shaped by their experiences and the values they learn.

To guide your child’s character development, focus on teaching:

1. **Flexibility.** Model compromise and negotiation by listening to the opinions of others. Encourage your child to do the same.
2. **Empathy.** Teach your child to imagine how others might feel and to treat them with kindness. Make caring for others a priority in your family.
3. **Self-control.** Explain that while people can’t control others’ actions, they can control their own behavior. Encourage your child to always think before acting.
4. **Responsibility.** Let your child know that responsibilities are like promises. They are things that must be done—especially when others are counting on your child.



Try these effective strategies to encourage respectful behavior



A positive and respectful learning environment is linked to higher academic achievement and better overall school performance. To instill a strong sense of respect in your child:

- **Set an example.** Seeing you treat others with respect—from the teacher to the homeless person on the street—teaches your child the proper way to behave.
- **Name it when you see it.** When you see other people behaving in respectful ways, make a positive comment. “Did you see how that man gave up his seat so that elderly woman could sit down? What a respectful thing to do.” No lecture is necessary. Your child will get the message.
- **Praise it** when your child demonstrates it. “I felt very proud of you when you held the door for Mrs. Jones. I know she appreciated that respectful gesture.”
- **Correct it.** If your child slips up, suggest a course correction. In private, say something like, “Remember what we said about how to greet guests?”
- **Report what you hear.** If someone tells you that your child greeted them politely, pass on the compliment to your child and say how proud it makes you.