

Helping Children Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

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ENCOURAGING READING

Use a dictionary to play fun learning games

The more words kids know, the greater their reading comprehension. The more they understand what they read, the better they do in *all* academic subjects. To make new words fun, play dictionary games. Some helpful tips include:

- **Choose the right dictionary.** A regular dictionary is often fine for older kids. But younger elementary schoolers may need a children's dictionary, which can be found at the library.
- **Review how to look up words.** If your child isn't familiar with using a dictionary, talk about how words are listed in alphabetical order. Explain that they're followed by definitions and sometimes examples of how to use the words.
- **Play "Guess the Word."** Have your child secretly select a word from the dictionary. He should read only the definition aloud. Other players guess the word. The person who says the right word gets to pick the next one.
- **Play "Guess the Definition."** Find a word your child doesn't know in the dictionary. Say it aloud, and then give two definitions for it. (One must be wrong.) Have your child guess which one is correct. Then switch!

Sources: Fran Lehr, Jean Osborn and Elfrieda H. Hiebert, "A Focus on Vocabulary," Pacific Resources on Education and Learning, www.prel.org/products/re_/ES0419.htm, and Peggy Kaye, *Games with Books*, ISBN: 0-374-52815-2 (Farrar, Straus and Girous, 1-888-330-8477, www.fsgbooks.com).



DISCIPLINE

Children expect parents to set rules

Every child misbehaves from time to time. When your child is out of line, try one of these options:

- **Use words and actions.** For example, if your child is watching TV when she should be doing homework, say, "You know the rule—Finish homework before watching TV." Then turn off the television.
- **Manage the situation.** If your child fights over a toy with a friend, tell her you will allow each of them to play with it for 10 minutes. Then set a kitchen timer. Children need and want parents to be adults and to be in charge. So set rules for behavior and explain them to your child. Then be firm, fair and consistent in enforcing them.

Source: Jan Faull, *Darn Good Advice ... Parenting*, ISBN-13: 978-0-7641-3226-1 (Barron's Educational Services, Inc., 1-800-645-3476, www.baronseduc.com).

BUILDING RESPONSIBILITY

Review following directions

Is your child capable of doing well in school, but still getting low grades? She may not follow directions well. Talk with her. Explain that part of being a successful student is working well with the teacher and following instructions in the classroom. Ask her to explain instructions for assignments to you in her own words.

STUDY SKILLS

Discuss big school projects

When your child has a big project, ask:

- **Do you have an assignment sheet?** Go over it with your child. Together make a list of supplies he will need.
- **When is it due?** Mark this date on the calendar.
- **What steps do you need to complete to finish the project?** Give each step its own due date.



Source: Mike Coles, *Learning to Learn*, ISBN: 1-551-38153-2 (Stenhouse Publishers, 1-800-988-9812, www.stenhouse.com).

HEALTHY HABITS

Breakfast supports learning

Studies show that eating breakfast can help children learn. But parents know that kids don't always have time for big morning meals. Try these solutions:

- **Prepare meals at night.** This can be as easy as setting out cereal, bowls and spoons.
- **Have a few "take-along" breakfasts.** Dry cereal in a plastic bag, fruit, muffins and toasted waffles are good options.
- **Be creative.** Kids may go for sandwiches or leftover pizza.



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QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

How can parents help children with stuttering?

Q: My daughter stutters. She told me that some of the kids in her class make fun of her. They never do it when the teacher is around—they know he wouldn't stand for it. What can I do to help her?

A: Stuttering is a problem for about four percent of all children. Most kids who stutter are boys, but girls can also be affected by stuttering. Here are some things you can do:

- **Don't finish your child's sentences.** Focus on *what* she's saying, not *how* she says it. And look for patterns—children often are more likely to stutter if they are excited, under stress or very tired.
- **Make sure your child gets plenty of rest.** Keep mornings calm so she goes out the door feeling relaxed. And teach her to take a deep breath or two before she speaks in public. That little extra confidence may help.
- **Ask for a meeting with your child's teacher.** Talk with him about the teasing. Ask for his help. A word or two from him to the children who are making fun of your daughter may be all it takes to end the teasing. Ask him if your school system has a speech therapist who can help your child.



PARENT QUIZ

Are you keeping your child healthy?

You know how important attendance is to your child's school success. But do you know how to keep him well—and what to do if he's too sick to go to school? Answer the following questions *yes* or *no* to see:

- ___ **1. Have you taught** your child the importance of handwashing to prevent the spread of germs?
- ___ **2. Have you spoken** with your child's school to learn more about when kids are too sick to go to school?
- ___ **3. Do you know** how to contact the school if your child is too sick to attend?
- ___ **4. Have you sent** a box of tissues or hand sanitizer to be used in the classroom?
- ___ **5. Do you make sure** your child gets enough rest?

How did you do? *Each yes means you're doing your part to keep your child healthy. For each no answer, try the suggestion from the quiz to change your answer to yes.*

"Kids go where there is excitement. They stay where there is love."

—Zig Ziglar

SOLVING SCHOOL PROBLEMS

Find out why your child lies about homework

Some kids say they have no homework when they do. Before you fly off the handle, find out why your child is lying. It may be that your child would rather say he has no homework than admit that he doesn't know how to do it. If he's struggling, ask his teacher how you can help.

YOUR CHILD AND YOU

Use every minute together

Have a few extra minutes with your child? Make the most of them. You can:

- **Read** a short story aloud.
- **Do** a math problem together.
- **Ask** your child about school.
- **Give** her a hug and a compliment.

Find ways to make those minutes count!

DEVELOPING THINKING SKILLS

Video games can promote thinking skills

If your child loves video games, use them to teach thinking skills. Have your child:

- **Read to find clues** to solve problems.
- **Observe carefully.** Looking for details is a skill that is useful in science class.
- **Talk about strategy.** Ask your child to tell you how he plans to succeed in a game.
- **Set limits** on your child's screen time. Remember to schedule time for outdoor play and reading, too.



Source: "Thinking and Learning Skills Potentially Developed by Some Simulation/Adventure/Role Playing Video Games," Creative Teaching, www.creativeteachingsite.com/videogames.htm.

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