Elementary School
# Parents®
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## A positive mindset can help your child succeed in math

Think your child's state of mind has nothing to do with his performance in math class? Think again. According to research, the brain's "emotion" and "intellect" centers are connected. In fact, they are permanently entwined.

What this means for your child is that his mindset can affect his ability to solve math problems. Think about it: If he's nervous about an assignment in front of him, he may struggle to answer the questions. But if he's calm and confident, he'll likely do much better.

To encourage a positive mindset when it comes to math:

- **Remind your child** that effort leads to achievement. Does your child claim he can't do math because he's "just not smart"? That implies people are either born intelligent or not. But that isn't true. Buckling down can lead to smarts.
- **Send the right message.** Don't say, "That problem looks hard." If your child worries about something being too difficult, he may decide he can't do it. Instead, say, "That problem looks challenging." Let your child know that figuring out challenging math problems is rewarding and fun.
- **Teach your child to relax.** Suggest that he picture something happy or fun. Remind him that he knows more than he thinks he does. If you can help your child calm his nerves before he picks up his pencil, he'll have a better chance for success!

**Source:** E. Digitale, "Positive attitude toward math predicts math achievement in kids," Stanford Medicine, niswc.com/elem_mathpositive.

## Reinforce the concept of time with your child

Time management is essential for school success. However, there's a lot for young students to learn when it comes to the concept of time: How long is a *second, minute, hour* and *day?* What about a *week, month* and *year?* How do *past, present* and *future* relate?

The more your child understands time and how it's measured, the more responsible she can be. She can "be ready in 10 minutes" or estimate how long it will take to do her homework.

While a real mastery of time doesn't come until later in the elementary years, this four-step process can help your child have a better sense of time:

1. **Ask your child** to select a task. She could jump up and down 50 times, draw a picture or complete two math problems.
2. **Have her estimate** how many minutes it will take her to complete the task.
3. **Help her use a timer** to track the time it takes to complete the task.
4. **Have your child check** how close her estimate was to the actual time it took.

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# Frequent hand washing keeps students healthy and safe

Scientists estimate that up to 80% of infections, including COVID-19, are spread through poor hand hygiene. That means hand washing is an important way to stay healthy. Regular hand washing not only removes germs, it prevents the spread of germs to others.

Teach your child to:

- **Wash properly.** He should wet his hands, lather with soap and scrub for 20 seconds. It takes about this long to sing the "Happy Birthday" song twice.
- **Include all parts of his hands**—front, back, fingernails, between fingers, etc.
- **Rinse and dry thoroughly.** After washing, he should hold his hands under running water to rinse. Then, he should shake his hands a few times and dry them with a clean towel.
- **Wash his hands often**. Soap and water work best. If they aren't available, he can use a hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol. Remind your child to avoid touching his face unless he washes his hands first.

**Source:** "Clean Hands Save Lives," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, niswc.com/elem_handwash.

> **"Coronaviruses are not particularly tough. Soap and water, used properly, will dislodge the virus from your hands and can destroy their outer surface area."**
>
> *—Daniel M. Parker, Ph.D.*

# How to get the most out of parent-teacher conferences

Some parents say that the parent-teacher conference is one of the most valuable things they participate in all year. Whether in person or online, these one-on-one meetings are great for learning more about your child's strengths and weaknesses, and will give both you and the teacher a better idea about the year ahead.

To get the most from your meeting:

- **Talk to your child.** Ask him to tell you what he thinks are his easiest and most difficult subjects—and why. Does he have any questions he'd like you to ask the teacher?
- **Make a list** of things to tell the teacher. You know your child better than anyone else. For example, has there been a change in your family situation? Sharing some personal information will make it easier for the teacher to meet your child's needs.
- **Write down your questions.** Ask things such as:
  - » *Is my child in different groups for different subjects?*
  - » *Are my child's reading and math skills on target?*
  - » *Does my child participate in class discussions?*
  - » *Is my child working up to his ability?*
- **Be on time.** Teachers usually schedule conferences back to back. Promptness will allow you to take full advantage of the time the teacher has available.
- **Create an action plan.** Ask the teacher what you can do to reinforce what your child is learning. Try to get at least one or two specific suggestions.

# Are you helping your child tackle that big project?

It's a fact of school life: The older the child, the bigger the project. Do you know how to support your child as she tackles a big school project? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

___**1. Do you guide** your child if she needs to select a topic? Help her narrow down a broad topic to specifics she can manage.

___**2. Do you help** your child break down the project into lots of small steps? She can schedule time for each step on a calendar. As she finishes each step, she can cross it off.

___**3. Do you help** your child make a list of all the supplies she will need to avoid last-minute crises?

___**4. Do you help** your child locate reliable books, websites and other resources that can help?

___**5. Do you review** your child's work, but avoid doing it for her?

**How well are you doing?**

Each *yes* means you are taking positive steps to help your child succeed on the big school project. For *no* answers, try those ideas from the quiz.

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# Help your child understand and appreciate diversity

Now more than ever, it's important to teach children to respect and celebrate people from different cultures and backgrounds. To promote diversity:

- **Learn about the challenges** and contributions of people of different races in this country. Read books together, such as *Resist: 35 Profiles of Ordinary People Who Rose Up Against Tyranny and Injustice* by Veronica Chambers.
- **Talk to friends, neighbors** and coworkers who are from different backgrounds. Ask them to share some of their experiences and traditions with you and your child.
- **Find an international pen pal**. Check out free pen pal sites, such as *www.studentsoftheworld.info*.
- **Learn about holiday customs** of people around the world. Go online and check out books to discover how other people celebrate their special days.
- **Watch television programs** about people from other cultures.
- **Learn simple words** in different languages. Teach your child to count to 10 in another language. Learn how to say *hello* and *thank you.*
- **Cook authentic recipes.** Pick a culture and search online for a recipe to try. Prepare the dish with your child and enjoy it together.
- **Learn about crafts** from around the world. Search online for examples and make a few with your child. You could make a mask, drums, a hand fan, worry beads, tissue paper flowers and more.

# Your child's vision plays a vital role in academic success

Students with vision problems may struggle more than their classmates. If your child can't see what's on the screen—or what's on a worksheet—she's likely to fall behind. And that means her grades can suffer.

Unfortunately, kids don't always know that they can't see well. They simply rub their eyes, squint and try their best to see. It's important to get your child's eyes examined yearly.

To protect her eyesight overall:

- **Provide good light.** Be sure her reading lamp is bright enough. If it's too dim, she'll strain to see the page.
- **Build in breaks.** If your child spends long stretches in front of a screen, have her take frequent 10-minute breaks. Experts believe too much screen time leads to blurry vision and problems with focusing.
- **Provide sunglasses.** Bright sunlight can damage children's eyes. Your child may not think to wear sunglasses when she's outside, so remind her to put them on.
- **Commit to safety.** Does your child play sports? Make sure she wears the proper protective eye wear, such as safety glasses or swim goggles.
- **Serve healthy foods.** Good vision starts with good nutrition, so feed your child a variety of healthy foods. From leafy greens to fortified milk, nutritious foods are proven to support strong minds, bodies and eyes.

**Source:** S.L.J. White and others, "Vision screening outcomes of Grade 3 children in Australia: Differences in academic achievement," *International Journal of Educational Research*, niswc.com/elem_vision.

**Q: My child studies before test time—but he can't always recall the facts! How can I help him improve his memory?**

## Questions & Answers

**A:** There are many memorization tricks that may help your child remember facts. Here are a few:

- **Acronyms.** Your child can make a word out of the first letter of terms to be memorized, such as HOMES for the Great Lakes (Huron, Ontario, Michigan, Erie, Superior).
- **Sentences.** Help your child use the first letter of each word to make a silly sentence, such as "My very educated mother just served us noodles" for the planets in order of their distance from the sun: Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune.
- **Grouping.** Have your child group things into manageable chunks. Instead of memorizing the capitals of every state, he should divide them into geographic regions and memorize each region.
- **Recitation.** Have your child repeat facts out loud and focus on the meaning of what he is saying.
- **Rhymes.** Have your child think of rhymes about facts, such as "In 1492, Columbus sailed the ocean blue."
- **Images.** Your child can draw or imagine a picture of what he's studying. Then he can recall that image during the test.
- **Personalization.** Have your child relate the information to his own life. An important date in history might also be a relative's birthday.
- **Singing.** Your child can replace words in a familiar song with facts he needs to remember.

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# It Matters: Responsibility

## Overprotective parents hinder responsibility

When children are born, it's the job of their parents to protect them in every way they can. Once kids reach elementary school, however, they become more capable and are able to do lots of things for themselves.

Unfortunately, many parents still try to protect their children from *everything*. And all of that well-intended "protection" can smother their children's budding independence.

Overprotective parenting makes it difficult for children to learn essential skills—such as communication, negotiation, perseverance, responsibility and decision making.

To avoid the many pitfalls of overprotective parenting:

- **Don't do everything** for your child. Let him do things for himself. Will he make mistakes? Probably. But he will learn from those mistakes.
- **Don't rescue your child** when he forgets things. If he forgets to complete an assignment, don't contact the teacher to ask for an extension. Instead, help your child learn from the consequences.
- **Don't try to negotiate** a better grade for your child. If you or your child are confused about a grade he receives, encourage your child to talk to the teacher about it first.
- **Don't call the parent** of a child your child is complaining about. Give your child a chance to work it out. However, if it is a serious problem, such as cyberbullying, contact the school immediately.

## Promote independence with a checklist of responsibilities

Whether it's keeping track of assignments or taking care of school property, responsible behavior is a must for school success. And the best way to *teach* your child responsibility is to *give* her responsibilities.

Sit down with your child and make a list of tasks she's ready to handle on her own. Then make a checklist of everything you expect her to do. Agree on small rewards for a job well done, and consequences for times your child shirks responsibility.

Here is a starter checklist of responsibilities you can adapt:

- **Going** to bed on time.
- **Getting** up on time.
- **Fixing** breakfast.
- **Completing** homework.
- **Maintaining** grades.
- **Getting along** with siblings.

- **Keeping** room clean.
- **Completing** assigned chores.
- **Reading** at least 15 minutes a day.
- **Taking care** of personal hygiene.
- **Feeding**/caring for pets.
- **Limiting** recreational screen time.

## Help your elementary schooler establish a homework routine

You want to help your child take responsibility for learning and for completing homework. Creating and following a daily homework routine can do just that.

To establish an effective routine, make sure your child has:

- **A quiet study area**. If possible, occupy younger siblings in another room, and have everyone else read or work quietly.
- **A set study time.** When does your child prefer to do homework? Right away, leaving the evening for free time? Or does she prefer to blow off some steam first and begin homework after dinner? Experiment, then have her schedule the time that works best for her.
- **A homework survival kit.** Include all of the supplies she might need to complete her homework—pencils, pens, paper, sharpener, erasers, crayons, markers, glue stick, scissors, ruler, etc.
- **Standby support.** Encourage her to get phone numbers of classmates she can call when she has homework questions.