

Elementary School Parents[®] *make the difference!*

Educational Service Unit #8



Give your child the time and space to think critically

Critical thinking—the ability to go beyond basic knowledge and consider “the bigger picture”—is a crucial skill for school success. The better students are able to think critically, the more deeply they will grasp new concepts and ideas.

To promote these skills:

- **Let your child figure things out.** Resist the urge to solve every problem. Instead, give her time to work through problems herself. If she’s forgotten what she is supposed to do for homework, don’t offer to email the teacher. Instead, ask, “How could you find out?” Can she call a classmate? Look over last night’s assignment for clues? Give her space to come up with a plan.
- **Discuss current events.** Is there a news story that might interest her? Print out an article and chat about it over dinner. Find out what she thinks about the issue, but don’t stop there. Once she’s shared her opinion, press her a bit. “I can see how you feel about this. But why do you think other people might feel differently?”
- **Encourage reflection.** Once your child completes a big project for school, talk about it. Ask her, “How difficult was it to finish? Did you give yourself enough time to complete it?” Regardless of how the project went, reflecting on the process will help her hone her critical-thinking skills.

Historical fiction brings the past to life!



History can be fascinating. But reading about it in textbooks can often seem a bit dull and

dry to students.

That’s where historical fiction can help. The best historical fiction brings a past time to life. It shares the details about what people wore, what they ate and how they really lived. It gives the reader a vivid glimpse of history.

To provide the most enjoyable experience with historical fiction:

- **Ask a children’s librarian** to suggest a book that presents history accurately and avoids myths or stereotypes.
- **Look for a book** with some illustrations. This is when a picture really can be worth a thousand words.
- **Try reading the book** aloud if it’s too challenging for your child to read on his own.
- **Have your child read** more than one book about the same period. Talk about how people see the same event or period of history differently.

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

Reinforce learning by having your child teach you something



Students are more motivated to learn when they feel capable, connected and in control. Having your child teach you things nurtures these feelings.

When your child tries to teach you about what he is doing, it can help him understand assignments better, reinforce what he knows and reveal gaps in his own comprehension.

Try these strategies:

- **Show an interest** in what your child is learning in school. Have him show you a homework assignment, explain a concept or read a chapter in his textbook aloud to you.
- **Let your child quiz you.** See if you can name the state capitals or the first five presidents. Try to define

vocabulary words and recall math or science facts.

- **Ask your child to help you** solve a problem or create something. What does he think you should do first, second, next?
- **Ask your child to teach** you how to play one of his favorite games.
- **Ask for your child's opinion** and consider it before solidifying your own.

“When children and parents talk regularly about school, children perform better academically.”

—National Education Association

Geography comes to life with fun and educational activities



Helping your child learn about geography can help her relate to the world around her. Here are some educational and

fun activities to boost her interest in geography:

- **Have your child draw a map** of how to get from your home to school, the grocery store or a friend's home. Then follow the map.
- **Walk outside** and identify *north*, *south*, *east* and *west*, as well as *northeast*, *northwest*, *southeast* and *southwest*. Ask your child to use these words to describe where things in your town are located. “My school is *northeast* of my house.”
- **Look for street patterns.** In some towns, streets run north and south, while avenues run east and west.

Street names may be alphabetical: Adams St., Bay St., Club St., etc. Help your child recognize the patterns.

- **Encourage your child** to start a collection of objects from countries around the world. Stamps, post cards and coins are all easy items to collect and store.
- **Tell your child** where her ancestors came from. Find these places on a map. If possible, learn about the routes they traveled when they came to this country.
- **Go through your house** and talk about where things came from. Have your child read labels to see where items were made. A calculator may have come from Taiwan. A box of cereal may have a Michigan or Illinois address. Together, locate these places on a map.

Are you setting an example of respect?



Children learn about respect from watching their parents. Are you modeling the behavior you want your child to

have—so that he will respect you, himself, his teachers and others?

Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

___1. **Do you treat** your child and others with kindness and honesty?

___2. **Do you admit** mistakes when you make them and apologize for them?

___3. **Do you listen** attentively to your child when he is speaking to you? If you aren't able to listen right then, do you schedule a time to talk later?

___4. **Do you maintain** self-control and find healthy ways to vent your anger—rather than taking your frustration out on your child?

___5. **Do you enforce** household rules and the consequences for breaking them fairly and consistently?

How well are you doing?

If most of your answers are *yes*, you are modeling a life of respect for your child. For *no* answers, try those suggestions.

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Retelling can improve your child's reading comprehension



You've just finished reading a story with your child. One of the best ways to check comprehension and

boost his understanding of the story is to ask him to retell it.

Retelling a story requires your child to think about the details and decide what's really important.

Give your child these three rules for retelling a story:

1. **Tell what's important.**
2. **Tell it in a way that makes sense.**
3. **Don't tell too much.**

Your child should be able to tell you what happens at the beginning, the middle and the end of the story. He should also be able to name the main characters.

You can prompt your child by asking open-ended questions, such

as, "What happened next?" It's OK if he doesn't remember all the details. That gives you a chance to say, "Let's go back and look at that part of the story again." Revisiting parts of the story will show your child that he sometimes has to read things more than once to gain a thorough understanding.

Studies show that this simple activity will help your child become a more thoughtful reader. He will start to pay attention to words whose meanings he doesn't know. He will focus on the story structure and pay more attention to important details. All of these things will improve your child's reading comprehension and make him a better reader—and a more successful student!

Source: B. Taylor and J. Ysseldyke, *Effective Instruction for Struggling Readers: K-6*, Teachers College Press.

Q: My fifth grader has never been a bubbly child. But in the last year, she has become so negative. Nothing is ever right. She doesn't like school. She doesn't like her teacher. Last week, I asked her to plan something special for the two of us to do. Later, she said it was "All right, I guess." I'm losing patience. What can I do?

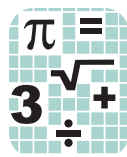
Questions & Answers

A: Parents want their kids to be happy. And it is draining to be around someone who is always down in the dumps.

Here are some steps to take:

- **Listen to your daughter.** Ask her to tell you about things that get her down. If there is one issue (or person) that comes up over and over, you may have hit on the problem. Brainstorm ways she can address the situation.
- **Let her complain.** It's OK to let her complain once in a while. If she whines about homework, let her go for a minute or two. Then redirect her by saying, "Well, you still need to finish it before school tomorrow." Remind her that everyone has responsibilities—whether they like them or not.
- **Model the attitude** you'd like her to have. Try to be positive when you are faced with disappointments. Say things like, "I'm bummed I have to work on Saturday, but it will feel great to get this project finished!"
- **Realize you aren't responsible** for fixing everything in your child's life. Help her take responsibility where you can. It's a way of empowering her.
- **Make an appointment** with your child's doctor. If you think she may be anxious or depressed, it's important to take action now.

Simple strategies can help your child master math vocabulary



When children learn math, they also need to learn a whole new vocabulary. If they have to stop to think about

words like *product* or *quotient*, they won't be focused on doing the math.

Just as your child needs to commit basic math facts to memory, she also needs to know many math terms. So make a game of learning them.

Here are a few activities to try:

- **Play Math Concentration.** Write a math term on an index card. Write its definition on another card. Then place five or six pairs of cards face down. Your child can only turn over two cards at a time. The goal is to make a match by turning over a math term and its correct definition.
- **Link math symbols** to math words. Have your child create flash cards with a symbol on one side and the word it represents on the other. Use the flash cards to help your child review.
- **Create memory aids** that show a term doing the thing it represents. The math term *circumference*, for example, is the distance around the edge of a circle. So your child could write the word *circumference* around the edge of a circle.
- **Make connections.** Help your child connect new terms to concepts she is already familiar with. Is she learning about *centimeters*? Talk about how there are 100 *cents* in a dollar, 100 years in a *century*, and 100 *centimeters* in a meter.

It Matters: Attendance

Make school attendance a family priority



One of the most vital parts of your child's education is also one that's easy to overlook.

It's attendance! Study

after study shows that when kids regularly miss school, their learning, and especially their literacy skills, take a serious hit. Not only that, but young students with poor attendance tend to turn into older students with poor attendance.

Don't let your child become one of them! To keep her on the road to school success:

- **Take attendance seriously.** As the parent, *you* set the tone. So be sure your child understands how much you value school and learning. If attendance is a priority for you, it will be a priority for her.
- **Prepare at night.** In the evening, help your child set out everything she needs to take to school the next day—her backpack, completed homework, gym shoes, signed papers, etc. She should also pick out her outfit and decide what she'll have for breakfast.
- **Respect the school calendar.** When possible, avoid scheduling appointments or family vacations that conflict with school. It will remind your child that there's nowhere more important for her to be during the week than in school!
- **Talk to your child's teacher** if you are experiencing problems that often result in school absences. Many families face challenges with health, child care, transportation and other issues. Community programs may be able to help.

Frequent hand washing can reduce school absences

Scientists estimate that up to 80% of infections are spread through poor hand hygiene. That means a simple step—hand washing—is the top way to stay healthy and avoid missing school. Teach your child to:

- **Wash properly.** He should wet his hands, lather with soap and wash 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. After washing, he should use a clean paper towel to turn off the faucet and open the bathroom door.
- **Wash his hands often**, especially before eating. Soap and water work best. If they aren't available, he can use a hand sanitizer. To be effective, a sanitizer should have at least 60% alcohol.



- **Sneeze or cough** into his elbow instead of his hand to reduce the spread of germs to others.

Source: P. Boshell, “Hand Hygiene at Home and School,” InfectionControl.tips, niswc.com/elem_hands.

Understand what's at stake when your child misses school



“Does it really matter if my child misses school?” parents sometimes wonder. “Yes!” say experts.

Research shows that regular attendance is linked to current and future school success.

Excused and unexcused absences take a toll on learning. And not everything students miss can be made up with homework. The class discussion about the book they are reading can't be captured in homework. Neither can the

science demonstration or the group project for history. In some subjects, like math, missing even a few days is a problem because learning builds on what students already know.

In addition to missing out on daily lessons, students who are absent miss the chance to build social and academic foundations that help with future learning.

So, support your child's school attendance today and watch him reap the benefits for years to come.

Source: “The Importance of School Attendance,” AbsencesAddUp.Org, niswc.com/elem_absence.