

April 2018
Vol. 29, No. 8

Elementary School Parents[®]

Educational Service Unit #8

make the difference!



It's not too late to connect with your child's school!

When parents and schools work together, the results can be incredible, including increased academic achievement and better student attitudes and behavior.

In today's busy world, however, the idea of getting involved can be overwhelming. "What do I have to do?" you may wonder. "I'm already short on time!" Don't worry. Involvement doesn't need to be complicated or time consuming.

Even though the end of the school year is right around the corner, it isn't too late to get involved. Starting right now, you can:

- **Attend school events.** While at school, make an effort to talk to staff and other families.
- **Pay attention** to school information sent home and posted online. Keep track of important dates, such as end-of-year tests and celebrations.
- **Volunteer.** Ask your child's teacher if there is anything you can do to help out. Perhaps you could prepare items at home for a craft, organize a class party, read to students or help in another way.
- **Join the parent-teacher group.** If you can't make it to meetings, take time to read the minutes from each meeting.
- **Ask the teacher questions.** "How can I help my child succeed?" "What are the most important school tasks for us to accomplish each day at home?"
- **Keep talking to your child** about school. Let her know her education is important to you!

Attendance is still important at year's end



You know that it's important for your child to be in school. But this would be such a wonderful time to take a family trip. And, after all, your child is only in first grade. Surely a few days' absence won't matter, will it?

It will. In fact, research shows that elementary schoolers don't have to miss much school before their learning suffers. In the early grades, students are mastering reading and basic math skills. And these are the skills most affected when children miss school. Being in school consistently is the only way students can develop a strong foundation on which to build the rest of their learning.

When your child misses school, he is not the only one who pays a price. When the teacher has to stop to meet the needs of a student who was out of school, everyone else's learning comes to a halt.

Source: H. Chang and M. Romero, *Present, Engaged, and Accounted For: The Critical Importance of Addressing Chronic Absence in the Early Grades*, National Center for Children in Poverty.

Building your child's social skills can give learning a big boost



Students learn much more at school than academics. In every class, they practice an important skill—getting along with others.

Research shows that problems with social skills can interfere with learning and make it difficult for students to succeed in school or in life.

To reinforce social skills:

- **Be a role model.** Kids notice how parents interact with others. Do you introduce yourself to new people? Get together with friends? Support people you care about? Let your child see you being a good friend.
- **Read stories.** There are many books about friendship. After reading, talk about the story.
- **Role-play.** Kids need help practicing manners. Before going to the park, for example, you and your child might pretend you're meeting new people. "Hi, I'm Jane. Nice to meet you!" Also focus on sharing and kindness.

- **Socialize.** Give your child plenty of opportunities to spend time with other children. Invite friends to play. Go to story time at the library. Visit busy playgrounds. Sign up for children's programs at community centers, museums and elsewhere.
- **Relax.** Children don't need lots of friends. Just one good buddy is fine, as long as your child cooperates well with others. If you have any concerns, talk with her teacher and work together on solutions.

Source: K. Steedly, Ph.D. and others, "Social Skills and Academic Achievement," *Evidence of Education*, National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities.

"Nothing is ever lost by courtesy. It is the cheapest of pleasures, costs nothing, and conveys much."

—Erastus Wiman

Use homework to teach your child how to be conscientious



Conscientiousness is a student's ability to set and meet goals, make informed choices, and understand his responsibility to others.

While this trait should naturally develop as your child grows, studies show there's an easy activity that can hone it. And believe it or not, it's homework!

Here's how to help your child strengthen conscientiousness with homework:

- **Remind him not to rush.** He should take his time and complete tasks carefully. He shouldn't race through

work just because he'd rather be doing something else.

- **Ask him to check his work.** Once your child finishes an assignment, have him spend a few minutes going back over it to confirm that his answers are correct.
- **Cheer him on.** Is that art project challenging your child? Has he had enough of that lengthy book report? Encourage him to keep at it and not give up! Conscientious students meet their obligations—and deadlines—even when the going gets tough.

Source: R. Gollner and others, "Is doing your homework associated with becoming more conscientious?" *Journal of Research in Personality*, Elsevier Inc.

Are you helping your child be a confident reader?



When your child starts reading, he will probably ask you to listen to him. How you do this can affect his motivation to read—

and his progress.

Are you doing all you can to boost your child's reading confidence? Answer *yes* or *no* to each question below to find out:

___ **1. Do you have the right books?** Try books with pictures, predictable stories and repetitive words and phrases.

___ **2. Are you a good listener?** Don't interrupt your child to correct him or to use teaching techniques such as sounding out words. Just have fun, laugh and enjoy the story.

___ **3. Do you encourage your child to use picture clues and his memory to tell the story?**

___ **4. Do you give lots of praise and encouragement when your child reads?**

___ **5. Do you avoid criticizing?** If your child gets discouraged, he can lose his confidence and desire to read.

How well are you doing?

Each *yes* means you are boosting your child's reading confidence. For *no* answers, try those ideas.

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Practical Ideas for Parents to Help Their Children. ISSN: 1523-1275

For subscription information call or write:
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P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474.
Fax: 1-800-216-3667.

Or visit: www.parent-institute.com.

Published monthly September through May.
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Publisher: Doris McLaughlin.
Publisher Emeritus: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.
Editor: Rebecca Hasty Miyares.

Mild hearing loss can impact your child's ability to read



Does your child struggle with reading? The issue could be her hearing. According to research, up to 25 percent of

younger school-aged children may have mild to moderate hearing loss. Unfortunately, it often goes undetected by parents and teachers.

The degree of impairment need not be dramatic, either. Simply having multiple ear infections can be enough to damage your child's hearing. But because the effects may be subtle, she might not notice.

Have your child screened by her doctor and be aware of these signs of hearing impairment:

- **Favoring one ear.** When you talk to your child, does she turn one ear toward you? If so, it may mean that's her "good" ear, even if she doesn't realize it.

- **Creeping TV volume.** Does your child gradually turn up her program when everyone else thinks the sound is fine? It could be a sign she's not hearing clearly.
- **A loud speaking voice.** If your child speaks more loudly than necessary (assuming she's not angry), it might be because her voice sounds muffled to her.
- **A drop in participation.** Has the teacher mentioned that your child raises her hand in class less than she used to? There could be many reasons why, but one may have to do with her hearing.
- **An uneasy feeling.** If you have a hunch that something is wrong with your child's ears, trust your gut. Ask her doctor how to proceed.

Source: Coventry University, "Screen children with reading difficulties for hearing problems," ScienceDaily, nswc.com/elem_hearing.

'Quick writes' make writing fun for elementary schoolers



Writing can be hard work. But a *quick write* is a fun and easy way to encourage your child to get his ideas down on paper.

Quick writes are just what they sound like—writing that people do in short periods of time. Usually, a quick write is based on a question or an idea. You ask a challenging question and set the timer for five minutes. Then both you and your child write down everything you can before the timer beeps.

Once the quick write is finished, compare what each of you has written. The next time, let your child choose the quick-write topic.

Here are some quick-write ideas:

- **Would it be a good or a bad idea** if dogs could talk? Why?

- **The best birthday** I can imagine would be ...
 - **If I were invisible**, I would ...
 - **It was a stormy day**, so I decided to ...
 - **Zebras have stripes** because ...
 - **Ten years from now**, I will be ...
 - **I invented** the most amazing machine. It can ...
 - **When I woke up** this morning, I was a different person. I was ...
- Even students who usually stare into space when it's time for a writing assignment may like a quick write. They are often surprised to discover just how much they know or have to say about a particular subject. Your child will gain confidence when he sees how much he can write in just a few minutes.

Q: My daughter wants a cell phone. Most of her friends have them. And to be honest, there are times when I'd really like to be able to reach her. How can I tell if she is old enough to have a phone? What advice do you have for parents before they get a phone for their child?

Questions & Answers

A: You are the only one who can decide whether your daughter is old enough to handle a phone. If she is generally responsible about her belongings, she is likely to be able to keep track of a phone. And if she usually follows your rules on other issues, she'll probably be agreeable to limits you set on her cell phone.

If you decide your child is ready to handle the responsibility of a phone, establish a clear outline of what will, and will not, be acceptable. Do this *before* you give her the phone.

Below are just a few of the things to make your child aware of:

- **She will need to stay within** the limits that you set for talking, texting and other phone use. Some experts recommend getting an unlimited texting plan so there are no surprises when the phone bill comes. However, *you* can still set limits on your child's usage.
- **You will have the right** to look at any text messages and photos she sends and receives.
- **If she uses the phone** in an inappropriate way, you will take it away.
- **She must follow** the school's rules about cell phone use.

If your daughter agrees to all of your limits, write up a parent-child contract outlining the details—and make sure both of you sign it.

It Matters: Building Respect

Be a respectful role model for your athlete



It's natural to want to cheer for a young athlete. But when parents get too involved, children say they would rather

their parents just stay away.

Here are things your young athlete wants you to know:

- **She loves having you** on the sidelines—except when you go too far. Your child wants you to be supportive of her entire team, not just her. She doesn't want you to yell at the referee. And she doesn't want you to yell at the parents of the children on the other team!
- **She wants you to recognize** that the coach is in charge. Most youth coaches are volunteers. Most of them are trying to give children a chance to play a game. Even if you think you could do a better job, don't yell directions at your child or other players. And if you really want to help, volunteer to be a coach next season!
- **She wants you to be happy** when her team wins. But she doesn't want winning to become so important that she doesn't enjoy just playing the game. It's fine to talk about the game when it's over. But don't go on and on about it for days.
- **She wants you to be realistic.** If no one in your family is taller than 5'5", you are probably not raising a basketball star. Help your child learn to enjoy all types of sports and let her pick the one that she thinks is right for her.

Source: J. and J. Sundberg, *How to Win at Sports Parenting*, Waterbrook Press.

Teach your elementary schooler how to see beauty in diversity

Your child knows that no two people—or families—are exactly alike. But does he accept and appreciate this? To be successful in school and in life, he'll need to respect people's differences.

You can nurture your child's respect for diversity if you:

- **Are a positive role model.** Kids are naturally open minded. When parents show respect for others—through actions and words—children imitate them. Let your child know that while people can be different from one another, they also have a lot in common.
- **Learn about other cultures** by leaving your "comfort zone." Visit a new place, try a new food and read books about other ways of life.
- **Speak openly about diversity** issues. It's normal for your child



to notice differences. They're fascinating and amazing! Correct any stereotyping with kid-friendly explanations.

Source: C.J. Metzler, Ph.D., "Teaching Children About Diversity," PBS, nswc.com/ec_diversity.

Help your child understand why it's important to follow rules



One of the ways kids show respect is by following rules. This is easier for children to do if they understand

why rules are important.

In addition to explaining the reasons for specific rules, you can:

- **Play a game without rules.** After a while, stop and talk about how things are going. Then play with rules and see which way is better.
- **Imagine a world without rules.** Talk about what would happen if people could steal ... if kids could

talk in class ... if drivers could run red lights. What would that be like?

- **Encourage your child** to be a leader. Being a student council member or crossing guard, for example, will give him experience making and enforcing rules.
- **Let your child play** a team sport. He'll learn the benefits of following rules and working together.
- **Praise your child** for obeying rules. You might say, "Thanks for getting up on time. Now we can eat breakfast together." This encourages him to keep respecting rules.