

# Helping Children Learn

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

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## BUILDING RESPONSIBILITY

### Responsibility, school success tied

Kids who learn to be responsible do better in school. They get along better with teachers and peers. They make better decisions. They're more apt to try, follow through and succeed. To teach your child responsibility:



- **Practice what you preach.** Be a role model for your child. If you want him to speak respectfully, for instance, talk to him with respect, too.
- **Discuss consequences.** Ask questions like, "How do you think Jose felt when you said that?" "When someone insults you, how do you feel?"
- **Enforce key rules.** Be clear about what will happen when your child does certain things. Then follow through.
- **Learn from the past.** For example, "Remember when Shelly pushed you? We talked about walking away. Later, you told her how you felt."
- **Allow freedom.** Let your child take minor risks as you guide his experiences and ensure his safety.
- **Develop understanding.** Pose questions that help your child think. "What did you do?" "Why do you think that happened?" "Are you happy with your decision?"

Source: Beth Tucker, "Building Responsibility: How do I teach my children to be more responsible?" Cooperative Extension, University of Arizona, <http://ag.arizona.edu/pubs/family/az1037.pdf>.

## TALKING AND LISTENING

### Encourage your child's 'big' dreams

With today's busy lives, it's tough to stay on top of the basics. Does your child have math homework? Is she going to Cindy's birthday party? Does she have a soccer game?

It is even harder for parents to stay in touch with what goes on inside a child's mind. But you can't help your child achieve her dreams if you don't know what she's dreaming about.

Ask what she loves to do and why she loves it so much. She'll be thrilled to tell you. And while you're listening, you may learn some things you never knew.

Meanwhile, share what you love to do also. Tell her stories about people who overcame obstacles to reach their dreams. Show confidence that your child will succeed in reaching her goals!

Source: Leslie Levine, "Helping Your Child Dream Big," *Our Children Magazine*, March 2004 (National PTA, 1-800-307-4PTA, [www.pta.org](http://www.pta.org)).

## DISCIPLINE

### You can deal with defiance

"I'm not putting away my laundry! I'm watching TV!" There are times when even the most mild-mannered child talks back. Instead of overreacting:

- **Stay calm.** In an even voice, state the facts. "You have to finish your chores." The calmer you are, the better.
- **Use consequences.** Remember, these can be positive. "When you're done, we can watch your favorite video."
- **Save it for later.** You might say, "I'm upset with your disrespectful behavior, but we will wait to talk about it until after dinner."

Source: T. Berry Brazelton, *Discipline: The Brazelton Way*, ISBN: 0-738-20783-7 (Perseus Book Group, 1-800-345-5359, [www.perseusbooks.com](http://www.perseusbooks.com)).

## REINFORCING LEARNING

### Add numbers to daily life

Kids need to be comfortable with numbers. Talk about useful numbers and what they mean, such as prices, speed limits and sports scores. The more time your child spends with numbers, the less anxious she'll be around them.



Source: William F. Russell, *Family Learning*, ISBN: 0-965-77529-1 (First Word Learning Systems, 1-888-414-8881).

## HOMEWORK

### Routines help with work

When your child was little, you probably developed a ritual to get him to sleep. ("Two books, then good night.") It may be time to do the same thing with homework. ("After dinner, it's time to hit the books. No TV until you're finished.") This can prevent procrastination and promote good grades.



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## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

### Approach teachers about problems

**Q: I'm afraid to talk with the teacher about a problem my child is having in class. How can I get over this?**

**A:** Having a problem with the teacher can put you in an uneasy situation. You want to resolve the issue, but you don't want to offend her. Parents often make a mistake, says Gifted and Talented Teacher **Lisa Dean**.



They discuss concerns with other parents or the principal rather than the teacher. Instead, when you have a complaint:

- **Prepare.** For example, if you don't understand a grade, gather the papers in question. If it's a discipline issue, know the facts. If the problem is something your child brought up, make sure you understand her perspective.
- **Meet.** Write a note or email requesting a short parent-teacher conference. Chances are, things will be resolved easily. You and the teacher might not agree, but you'll understand each other better and likely reach a compromise.
- **Follow up.** Meet with the principal if you still are not satisfied. Otherwise, keep in touch with the teacher. If everyone stays focused on what's best for your child, things should move in the right direction.

Source: Lisa Dean, Clegern Elementary, 501 South Jackson, Edmond, OK 73034, 405/414-6476, lisa\_dean@edmond.k12.ok.us.

## PARENT QUIZ

### Is your child responsible with money?

Kids who are responsible about money are often responsible about other things. Answer the following questions *yes* or *no* to see if you're teaching about money management.

- \_\_\_ 1. **Do you talk** about good money habits?
- \_\_\_ 2. **Do you give** your child an allowance (that isn't linked to chores)?
- \_\_\_ 3. **Do you have** allowance rules, such as "no loans"?
- \_\_\_ 4. **Do you help** your child make saving and spending plans?
- \_\_\_ 5. **Are you** a good money role model?

**How did you do?** Each *yes* answer shows that your child is learning about money management. For each *no* answer, try to change your answer to *yes*.

"It's not only children who grow. Parents do too. As much as we watch to see what our children do with their lives, they are watching to see what we do with ours."  
— Joyce Maynard

## BUILDING CHARACTER

### Caring starts at home

Many community service lessons—such as those about responsibility and caring—are learned at home. Help your child tune in to relatives. What are their feelings and needs? How can he help them? If a sibling has a hard day, for example, your child might do something special to cheer him up.

Source: Susan Solomon Yem, "Community Service for Kids," [www.babyzone.com/features/content/display.asp?TopicID=3000&ContentID=885](http://www.babyzone.com/features/content/display.asp?TopicID=3000&ContentID=885).

## ENCOURAGING READING

### Read for meaning together

Children often can read all the words on a page without understanding what was said. Asking questions can help:

- **Who** was the story about?
- **What** happened in the story?
- **When** did the story take place?
- **Where** did the story take place?
- **How** was a problem solved?

Talk about the answers with your child. As she gets used to asking herself questions, reading will become more meaningful.

## WHEN YOU NEED HELP

### Solve boredom problems

It's a big step when kids learn to manage—and enjoy—free time. To encourage your child to do this:

- **Limit** use of TV and other electronics.
- **Make** a box of emergency "boredom supplies."
- **Say**, "I know you can think of something fun to do."
- **Supervise** to make sure he's safe.



Source: The Search Institute, *Parenting At the Speed of Teens*, ISBN: 1-57482-845-2 (The Search Institute, 1-800-888-7828, [www.search-institute.org](http://www.search-institute.org)).

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