

Helping Children Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL



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PAMPA ISD, ESL/Bilingual Department
806-669-4700

Use everyday items to help your child make sense of fractions

Fractions can seem intimidating to some children. If this is true for your child, help her relate them to things around her. Lots of things in her everyday life can be represented by fractions.

Have fun with these hands-on activities:

- **Eat your fractions.** Share a pizza and ask some questions. If the pizza is cut into 12 slices, how many slices equal one half or one third of the pizza? Or give your child 12, 24, or 36 pieces of cereal. Have her divide them into piles that represent halves, thirds, fourths, etc.
- **Measure up.** Give your child some measuring cups. Have her pour one cup of water into a glass. Then have her guess: How many half cups will it take to fill another glass the same size to the same level? How many quarter cups or third cups?
- **Take a fraction walk.** Have your child count the cars you pass and figure out how many of that number (what fraction) are a certain color. Take turns choosing a color. Which color represents the largest fraction?
- **Change the recipe.** Give your child a recipe for a food she loves. Ask her to rewrite the amount of each ingredient to double the recipe—so the next time you make it, there will be enough for seconds!



Spark an interest in history with an interview game

In this game, your child pretends to be a historic figure she's learning about, while you play a TV reporter. First, have her learn all she can about the person. Then, ask questions she'll likely be able to answer:

"Ms. Anderson, why did you sing at the Lincoln Memorial?"
Adding life to history makes it more fun!



Boost reading vocabulary

The more words your child learns, the more he'll get out of reading. To help him build his vocabulary:

- **Read many types** of materials together.
- **Point out words** your child may not know. "This says most owls are *nocturnal*. Do you know what that means? Let's look it up." Suggest that he keep a notebook of new words.
- **Pull out a thesaurus.** Find synonyms for words your child uses often when speaking or writing.



Set the tone for productive learning by teaching respectful behavior

It's hard for much learning to happen when students behave disrespectfully. When it comes to teaching your child about respect, the best way is to demonstrate what respectful behavior looks like.

Here are some simple ways to model respect every day:

- **Be fair.** Before passing judgment or imposing consequences on your child, get all the facts. Take the time to listen to his side of the story.
- **Be honest.** Tell your child the truth. Admit your mistakes. Apologize when you are wrong.
- **Be kind.** Don't insult or make fun of your child when he makes a mistake.
- **Be dependable.** If you tell your child you'll do something, do it.
- **Be polite.** Treat your child with the respect you'd like to see from him. Say *please*, *thank you* and *excuse me* to him. Knock before going into his room.

Prepare for tests five ways

When your child has a test coming up, you know she'll have to study. But you may not know how to support her effort. You can:

1. **Encourage your child** to clarify with the teacher what the test will cover.
2. **Help her plan** several short study sessions in the days before the test.
3. **Have your child practice** recalling the material.
4. **Make sure her bedtime** allows her at least nine hours of sleep every night.
5. **Ease anxiety.** Don't talk about grades. Just remind your child that she is prepared, and you think she'll do fine.



How can I motivate my child to tackle challenges?

Q: If my eight-year-old's schoolwork gets hard, he refuses to do it. If he starts a project and it gets difficult, he gets angry and quits. How can I help him develop the ability to stick with a tough task?

A: Often, children who lack perseverance are afraid of failure. Rather than risk it, they simply give up. In order to motivate your child, help him conquer this fear.

To get started:

- **Help your child understand** that effort is a good thing. It's one of the main ways people learn. Say things like, "It's important to try your best."
- **Show him examples** of people who failed, kept trying and then succeeded. It took Thomas Edison hundreds of tries before he found the right components for his light bulb. Remind your child of things he can do easily now that were hard to learn, like riding his bike.
- **Teach your child that mistakes** are really chances to learn. And let him know that everyone makes mistakes, even you. Talk about a mistake you made and what you learned from it.
- **Offer encouragement** when he wants to quit. Tell him not to worry about mistakes, just to keep thinking about other strategies he could try.



Are you teaching listening skills?

What one skill will boost your child's success in every subject? It's listening. Strengthening listening skills helps her get the most from her schooltime. Are you showing your child how to be a good listener? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

1. **Do you focus** on listening to your child when she is talking? If you're busy, say, "Let's talk about this at dinner when I can give you my full attention."
2. **Do you allow** your child the time she needs to find the words she wants to say?
3. **Do you avoid** interrupting your child, and ask her not to interrupt you?
4. **Do you "listen"** to your child's behavior? A child who is acting up is communicating a need.

5. **Do you avoid** jumping in with the answer when your child is talking something through?

How well are you doing?

More *yes* answers mean you are modeling important listening skills. For each *no*, try that idea.

"If you're not listening,
you're not learning."
—Lyndon B. Johnson

Ask your child to apply new skills in new ways

To reinforce learning, help your child think about the skills he's building and apply them. Here are some ways to reinforce:

- **Reading.** When you read together, encourage him to ask *What*, *Why* and *What if* questions. "What if Cinderella hadn't gone to the ball?"
- **Math.** Challenge him to catch mistakes. If you count by fives and say "5, 10, 15, 25," can he figure out what's wrong?
- **Science.** Encourage him to use what he knows. "Look at this leaf I found. Do you think it's a *monocot* or a *dicot*? How can you tell?"

Start the day with a lesson in time management

Students need to learn to use their time responsibly—and that time starts when they wake up. Help your child figure out how much time she really needs to get ready in the morning. Show her how to set her alarm, and make it her responsibility to get up when it goes off.

To make it fun, try playing Beat the Clock. If she took 20 minutes to get to breakfast yesterday, can she do it in 18 minutes today?



Talk about report cards

Your child's report card is more than a way to find out his grades. It is also a chance to talk with him about your expectations. When you review the report card with your child:

1. **Start by finding** something to praise—a grade that shows progress, or a positive comment from the teacher.
2. **Calmly discuss** things he could do to improve disappointing grades.
3. **Let him know** you expect him to give schoolwork his best effort.

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