

Helping Children Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School



April 2021

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Save these special days to enjoy learning together this month

In April, nature seems to reawaken. April is also full of opportunities to reawaken your child's interest in learning. Celebrate these special days with some fun activities:

- **International Children's Book Day** (April 2). This day is designed to inspire a love of reading. Read a story from another country with your child.
- **National Walking Day** (April 7). Get out a map and help your child plan a new walking route to a familiar place. Walk there together. What new things do you notice?
- **Teach Children to Save Day** (April 11). Encourage financial literacy. Talk with your child about the difference between needs and wants, and about the different ways people save (in piggy banks and bank accounts, by using coupons, etc.). Have him decide on something to save for.
- **National Laundry Day** (April 15). Look online together for pictures of early washing machines. Then teach your child how to do his own laundry.
- **World Creativity and Innovation Day** (April 21). What would your child like to invent? Have him draw a picture of his idea.
- **National Honesty Day** (April 30). Talk with your child about why it is important to be honest *every* day!



Help your child get started writing

A blank piece of paper can make any writer's mind go blank. Getting started is often the hardest part of writing. When your child has a case of writer's block, help her get off to a running start by asking questions.

If the assignment is to write about a personal experience for example, ask your child to:

- **List her recent experiences:** the day the power went out and she brushed her teeth by flashlight; the day she saw a baby deer in the yard, the day she learned to ride her bike; the day she sprained her ankle. Then, have her choose one experience to write about.
- **Tell you the story** of the experience. What happened first? Next? In the end?
- **Answer the basic** newspaper reporter questions: *who, what, when, where, why* and *how*. This will help her collect all the important details she'll need to include in her writing.

Source: C. Fuller, *Teaching Your Child to Write*, Berkley Books.

Teach your child to look for clues to word meaning

Context clues help students figure out the meaning of an unfamiliar word they read from other information in the sentence.

For example, in the sentence "Joe wanted to buy new shoes, but the price deterred him," context clues (the qualifier *but* and the word *price*) indicate that the sentence is about the cost of the shoes. That can help your child figure out that *deterred* means "prevented him" from buying the shoes.



Model motivation to learn

The examples you set for your child have a huge influence on her. Here are three key ways to show her that learning is exciting:

1. **Be a learner** yourself.
2. **Share what** you learn.
3. **Show an interest** in what your child is learning, in and out of school.

Reinforce online safety

Technology has made school possible for millions of students in the past year. But as kids become comfortable learning, creating and sharing content online, they can lose sight of the need to do it safely. To protect your child:

- **Review rules** and expectations. Your child should communicate online only with people you both know. Remind him never to share passwords.
- **Learn about the websites** he wants to visit and the apps he wants to download. Make sure you approve.
- **Ask him to tell you** if anything odd or inappropriate occurs while he's online.





How can I encourage my child to move a little faster?

Q: I feel as though I'm always telling my child to hurry up. I don't like rushing her, but she tends to dawdle over everything. How can I help without constantly nagging?

A: Children are naturally curious, so a little dawdling can be a good thing. Some children may enjoy watching an ant walk up the window, or stop to see if they can see the clock hands move. This helps them learn.

But when kids dawdle too much, it can keep them from completing necessary tasks. It can also inconvenience others. Here are some things to try:

- **Be specific about things** you want your child to do. Saying "Please get dressed and brush your teeth now" is better than "Get ready for school."
- **Follow up.** If you say, "It's time to do your math," make sure that your child gets started. Otherwise, you'll probably have to make the same request 10 minutes later.
- **Avoid overwhelming your child.** If you ask her to do several things at once, she may do one but forget what else you said.
- **Use encouraging words.** Don't ask, "Why are you always so slow?" Your child won't know how to answer that. Instead say, "When you have finished your reading we can go outside and look for birds nests."



Are you taming test anxiety?

If your child approaches tests with anxiety and dread, it will be harder for him to show what he knows. Are you helping your elementary schooler stay calm and do his best on tests? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

1. **Do you help** your child make and stick to a study plan to prepare for a test?
2. **Do you tell** your child that you expect him to do his best, but that you will love him no matter what grade he earns?
3. **Do you encourage** your child to tell the teacher if tests make him nervous?
4. **Do you share** calming techniques with your child, such as deep breathing, picturing a happy place or pushing against a wall?

5. **Do you teach** your child to reassure himself with self-talk, such as "I studied. I know this. The answer will come to me"?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are reducing causes of test anxiety. For each no, try that idea.

"A day of worry is more exhausting than a week of work."

—John Lubbock

Strengthen a grasp of math

April is Mathematics Awareness Month. Creating a "fist list" is a fun way to build your child's awareness of the steps or concepts related to a math skill. Have her:

- **Trace her hand** on a piece of paper.
- **Write the skill** on the palm. For example, "Adding three digit numbers."
- **Think about the ideas** she needs to remember, such as "line up the ones, tens and hundreds columns" and "work from right to left."
- **Choose the five** most important steps or tips and write them on the fingers of the hand. She can study her fist list, and look at her own hand to help her recall it.

Source: H. Silver and others, *Math Tools, Grades 3-12*, Corwin.

Self-talk is empowering

A strong self-image will help your child do what he knows is right, even when others seem to be doing something different. Teach him to repeat these statements to himself:

- **I can say no** to things that would put me in danger.
- **I can make** good choices for myself.
- **I can say** "You're my friend, but I don't choose to do that."
- **It's OK** if I make different choices.

Focus on essential rules

Can you count your family's written-in-stone rules on one hand? If not, you may be trying to enforce too many.

Keep things simple by regularly emphasizing just your most important basics, such as no hitting, give every assignment a try, limit non-school screen-time, etc. Then as your child matures, you can modify your home and school-related rules, knowing she has the basics down pat.



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