

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

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Ease your family's 'rush hour' with these morning routines

In many families, “rush hour” begins before anyone even walks out the door. Your child doesn’t have time for breakfast. He may race out the door while leaving homework and school supplies behind. And even then, he may miss the bus.

If this sounds familiar, it’s time for you to develop a new morning “traffic pattern.” Here’s how you can create some morning routines to tame the chaos:

- **Prepare for the day the night before.** Help your child make his lunch and pick out his school clothes. Have him make sure his backpack and other items are ready to go and by the door.
- **Help your child figure out how much time he really needs in the morning to get ready.** Tell him it is his responsibility to set his alarm clock—and get up when it goes off.
- **Use charts and checklists.** Post a laminated list of all the steps your child must take to get ready in the morning: brush teeth, brush hair, get dressed, make the bed. Post another checklist of things that need to go to school. If it’s Tuesday, where’s the library book? If it’s Wednesday, does your child have his shoes for gym?
- **Make it a game.** Try playing Beat the Clock. If it took 20 minutes for your child to get downstairs for breakfast yesterday, can he do it in 18 minutes today? Let’s be honest. Some kids are late because they dawdle.
- **Create fun breakfast themes—**Waffle Wednesday, Fruity Friday, etc. Having a schedule takes the guesswork out of breakfast and may motivate your child to actually sit down and eat!

Learning about geography can be fun for kids!



You probably remember filling in the locations of countries and continents on

blank maps when you were in school. But geography is about much more than maps. It’s about how places shape people and how people shape places.

Celebrate Geography Awareness Week (Nov. 15–21) with these activities:

- **Look it up!** When you and your child hear a news story about an unfamiliar place, locate it on a map. Then challenge each other to learn a few facts about the location and the people who live there.
- **Go on a virtual trip.** Visit your library and check out books about a country you and your child would like to visit. Together, research fun things to do on your “trip.”
- **Explore your community.** Help your child discover why your town is located where it is. Who first settled there? How are you and your child connected to the rest of the world?

Increase your child's vocabulary with four effective strategies



Reading at home is one of the best ways to boost your child's vocabulary. That's because reading exposes your child to new ideas, concepts and words.

Here are four effective strategies that will help you increase your child's vocabulary:

- 1. Read many different kinds of books** to your child. If you usually read fiction, go to the library and get a book that explains how something works instead. Check out a book about a country you'd like to visit. Or read a biography about a person your child admires.
- 2. Look for words** your child might not know as you read. "It says here that George Washington went to school to become a *surveyor*. What do you think that word means?"
- 3. Listen for new words** as you're watching TV. News programs often include words your child

may not know. "Have you ever heard the word *tsunami* before? Let's look it up to see what it means."

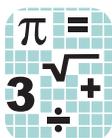
- 4. Help your child** create her own dictionary. All you need is a notebook with a page for each letter. When your child discovers a new word that she wants to remember, help her write it down in the notebook. Then go back and review those words from time to time.

Source: S. Darling, "Strategies for Engaging Parents in Home Support of Reading Acquisition," *The Reading Teacher*, International Literacy Association.

"Too often we give our children answers to remember rather than problems to solve."

—Roger Lewin

Teach estimation and calculation by measuring with your child



Think of how you use math in your daily life. Sometimes, it's important to get the answer exactly right.

You need exactly the right amount of money to buy groceries, for example.

But sometimes, estimating is good enough. You guess that you'll probably need about two gallons of paint to paint the bedroom.

Measuring can be a fun way to teach your child both skills—calculating exact amounts and estimating. You can make a game of measuring things around the house.

For example, you could get out the measuring spoons. "How many teaspoons do you think it will take to fill up this one-cup measure?" Have your child estimate, then check. Or show her a ruler and have her estimate how long her shoe is. After checking, ask her to calculate, "How many shoes would it take to stretch from one side of the door to the other?"

On a day when you are indoors, come up with a scavenger hunt. Include tasks, such as, "Find something that is six inches long."

Source: R. Yablun, *How to Develop Your Child's Gifts and Talents in Math*, Lowell House.

Do you let your child take charge of homework?



In homes everywhere, parents and kids argue about homework. To avoid conflict, some parents simply do the homework for their children!

Are you making sure your child takes responsibility for homework? Answer *yes* or *no* to each question below to find out:

- 1. Have you told your child** that homework is his responsibility? You offer support, but don't do the work.
- 2. Does your child** have a regular study time every day? Does he do academic work during that time?
- 3. Do you give your child** some choice in *how* he does homework, such as choosing which subject to study first?
- 4. Do you look over** your child's homework to see that it's finished?
- 5. Do you know to contact** the teacher if your child faces regular struggles with homework?

How well are you doing?

More *yes* answers mean your child is taking responsibility for homework. For *no* answers, try those ideas.

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The Parent Institute®, 1-800-756-5525,
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Take advantage of opportunities to build your child's thinking skills



Abstract thinking involves learning concepts and applying them to various situations. A child who has learned to count, for example, can get out the correct number of plates when setting the table for dinner.

Help your child think about common elementary school subjects, such as:

- **Language arts.** Before, during and after reading, encourage your child to answer questions. Try asking questions that start with “Why” and “What if.” “Why do you think the character did that?” “What if she had made a different decision?”
- **Math.** Challenge your child to catch mistakes. For example, you might count by twos and say, “2, 4, 6, 7.” Can he figure out what’s wrong? Also do activities that include building and sorting. “Let’s build a tiny model of our car.” “Can you help me reorganize this shelf of canned food?”
- **Science.** Read about nature and encourage your child to use what he learns. “The leaves are falling off that tree. What’s that type of tree called?” “The flowers we planted last year grew back. Are they *annuals* or *perennials*?” “Look at that fly. Do flies have four wings or two?”

Experts link diet, sleep habits and exercise to school success



It’s time for school, and your child is ready to go. He has his jacket, glasses, backpack and homework. But is he

really ready to learn?

That depends on many factors, including his diet, sleep habits and exercise routines. All of these have an impact on learning.

It’s important to:

- **Plan nutritious meals** and snacks. Eating well helps kids stay healthy, which means they miss less school. It also provides the energy kids need to do their best.
- **Make sure your child** gets enough rest. Experts say school-age kids need at least 10 hours of sleep, and some need more. Late bed-times make it hard to wake up and be on time for school. Lack of sleep also hurts focus and learning. Enforce a consistent bedtime that allows plenty of time for sleep. Make nighttime routines relaxing, too. Choose activities such as reading and talking instead of watching TV or using a computer.
- **Be active together.** It’s one thing to say, “It’s time to exercise.” It’s another to say, “Let’s play a family game of tag!” Help your child see that exercise is fun, and keep in mind that it builds strength and well-being for school, sports and other activities. Exercise also improves your child’s memory and ability to think. Put exercise on your family schedule. Take walks. Ride bicycles. Play music while cleaning up.

Q: Last year, my daughter put off her science project until the very last minute. She finished it on time, but stressed out our entire family in the process! What can we do to make sure this year is different?

Questions & Answers

A: Science fair projects teach students—and sometimes parents—valuable lessons. Last year, you learned what *not* to do.

Your daughter is obviously a person who can meet a deadline. So your job this year is to help her set *a lot* of deadlines before the science project is actually due.

Encourage your child to:

1. **Select her topic early.** The sooner she knows what she is going to do, the more time she will have to do it.
 2. **Make a list** of all the things she will need to do to complete the project. She should include the trip to the store for supplies and the time it will take to create a display. And build in at least two days for the disaster that always seems to happen.
 3. **Set a deadline** for each part of the project. Make sure your child knows the consequence for missing a deadline. (If she hasn’t done her work, for example, she certainly doesn’t have time to watch TV.)
 4. **Post the list of deadlines** in a place where you’ll both see it every day. Then as your child achieves each step, have her cross off that deadline.
- If she follows these steps, your daughter will not only learn something about science this year. She’ll also learn some valuable time management skills. Good luck!

It Matters: Homework & Study Skills

Planning ahead makes preparing for tests a breeze



Your child's teacher announces there will be a test next week. "Please start preparing now," she tells families.

What steps should you follow?

It's a good idea to:

- **Clarify what will be tested.** Have your child check with the teacher to find out what the test will cover. He should also find out what kind of test it will be (fill in the blanks, multiple choice, etc.).
- **Make a plan.** Studying works best when it's done over time—not at the last minute. Help your child schedule several study sessions and write them on the calendar.
- **Think of ways to reinforce the material.** Your child could make flash cards or take a practice test. You could quiz each other on the material.
- **Encourage good habits.** In addition to doing homework and studying, your child needs rest and nourishment to do his best in school. A regular bedtime and healthy meals go a long way!
- **Make attendance a priority.** It's hard for kids to keep up when they miss school or arrive late. Reduce stress on test day by making sure your child gets to school on time.
- **Ease anxiety.** Make plenty of positive comments. "You are prepared for this test. You're going to do great on it!" There's no need to pressure your child. Support and preparation are all he needs!

Stay involved and review your child's homework every day!

Homework is a vital link between home and school. In addition to helping students master concepts, homework gives parents a sneak peek into what their children are learning in school.

Experts say that reviewing your child's homework is important no matter what grade she is in—even if you don't understand it. Your daily interest sends the message that learning is important.

Be sure to:

- **Set aside time every day** to look at your child's homework. Even if you're not at home when your child does her homework, always ask to see it.



- **Ask your child** to tell you about her homework. What did she like best about an assignment? Was it easy or was it challenging?
- **Praise your child's effort.** Compliment homework that is completed and neat.

Successful students know how to be independent learners



It usually starts with a simple question: "Dad, how do you spell Illinois?" And before you realize it, you spend

the next 20 minutes answering all your child's homework questions.

Homework often involves finding and learning facts. Encourage your child to find information and learn facts on his own.

First, make a rule that your child has to try all the homework questions by himself. He should answer the questions he can, skipping over any that give him problems. Then have him go back and think about the questions he couldn't answer the first time around.

Then, and only then, should your child ask you for help. And when he does, keep your goal in mind: You want him to learn how to get the right answer by himself.

So if your child asks you to spell Illinois, don't rattle off the spelling. Instead, say, "Where could you find that?" Then get out the dictionary or a map and have your child find it. This way, your child not only learns about the silent *s* at the end of the word, he also learns how to use a dictionary and a map. That's the way to help your child learn facts now and be prepared to learn other facts in the future.

Source: D. Johnson and C. Johnson, *Homework Heroes*, Kaplan Publishing.