

# Helping Children Learn<sup>®</sup>

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School



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Family and School Partnerships  
Fairfax County Public Schools

## Supporting science learning is easier than you might think

In a national survey, only about half of parents in the United States felt “very confident” in their ability to help their children learn science. But you don’t need to be a scientist in order to boost your child’s science knowledge. All you need is curiosity and enthusiasm!

To spark interest in science and build your child’s skills:

- **Encourage questions** and investigate answers. Children want to know how the world works. So if your child asks a question like, “How do boats float?” just say, “Let’s find out together!” Ask your child what he thinks the answer might be (this is his *hypothesis*). Then help him look in a book or go online to discover the answer and learn more.
- **Watch educational programs** together. There are a lot of kid-friendly science shows on TV. After watching one, discuss it with your child. “Wasn’t it neat when they explained how fish breathe through their gills?”
- **Explore online.** The National Science Teaching Association ([www.nsta.org/science-resources-parents](http://www.nsta.org/science-resources-parents)) offers resources for families. On Common Sense Media’s website ([www.common Sense Media.org](http://www.common Sense Media.org)), you can find reviews and lists of science websites, apps and games for your child’s age group.

Source: M. Silander and others, “What Parents Talk About When They Talk About Learning: A National Survey About Young Children and Science,” Education Development Center, [niswc.com/elem\\_STEM](http://niswc.com/elem_STEM).



### Establish a communication link by contacting the teacher

In a one-on-one discussion with your child’s teacher, you can learn about your child’s strengths and weaknesses and get a better idea about the year ahead. And you can form a working relationship that helps your child.

Whether you meet in person, on the phone or online, it helps to make a list of your questions in advance. Here are some you may want to ask:

- **What are your expectations** about work habits? Is my child using her time well?
- **Are my child’s reading** and math skills at the level you would expect for this grade?
- **Is my child in different** groups for different subjects?
- **Does my child qualify** for any special programs?
- **Has my child missed** any assignments so far?
- **What are some things** I can do at home to help my child learn the topics the class will cover this school year?

### Catchy rules catch on

Teaching your child to respect your house rules makes it easier for him to follow school rules. Creating catchy phrases that link rules and their consequences can help him remember. For example:

- **If you leave it out, you go without.** Toys not put away properly go into time out for a week.
- **If you hit, you sit** (in time out).
- **If you partake, you take part** (in meal prep or clean up).



### How to help with struggles

The pandemic has affected every student’s learning. If your child is struggling with schoolwork this year, sympathize with her feelings. Then, take these actions:

- **Ask the teacher** what help might be available.
- **Help your child set** realistic short term goals. Plan small steps to overcome obstacles, so she can experience success.
- **Maintain a study routine** to help your child stay on top of work.
- **Share a story** about how you struggled with something when you were young. Explain how you worked through it.

### Write ‘accordion’ sentences

Here’s a fun way to show your child how descriptive words add interest to writing. Write a short sentence. Then take turns adding one adjective at a time. For example:

- **The cat sat by** the window.
- **The orange cat sat by** the window.
- **The orange cat sat by** the sunny window.



Source: M. Cheney, *How to Develop Your Child’s Gifts and Talents in Writing*, Lowell House.



## How can I make homework time better for my kids?

**Q:** My two girls could not be more different about homework. The older one takes hours to complete assignments. She asks for help constantly and wants me to check everything. Her sister “forgets” assignments or races through and does a sloppy job. How can I help them find a happy medium?



**A:** Although your two children have opposite approaches to homework, both can be improved by using the same three steps:

- 1. Contact their teachers.** Share what your daughters are doing at home. Hours a day may be more than your older daughter’s teacher expects. Your younger child’s teacher may suggest specific material to focus on.
- 2. Establish a daily study time** for each child, based on what their teachers think is appropriate. Your younger child may as well spend her time doing her assignments carefully, because otherwise you’ll give her extra math problems or review to do to fill the time.
- 3. Set some ground rules.** At the start of every session, go over your daughters’ assignments. Help them set priorities and make to-do lists. Stay nearby as they work, but encourage your older daughter to do her work herself. Check at the end that they have finished everything on their lists.



## Are you instilling upstanding values?

The principles you teach your child at home are the ones that will guide his choices and relationships in and out of school. Are you helping your child learn to behave with integrity? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

- 1. Do you discuss** why honesty matters, and thank your child when he is honest—even if you don’t like what he says?
- 2. Do you show** your child that honoring commitments is important by keeping your promises?
- 3. Do you talk** about family, school and community rules and why they are needed?
- 4. Do you expect** your child to take responsibility for his actions, and hold him accountable for his choices?

- 5. Do you model** good sportsmanship for your child when playing games together?

### How well are you doing?

*More yes answers mean you are teaching your child values and how to live up to them. For each no, try that idea.*

“Intelligence plus character—that is the goal of true education.”

—Martin Luther King, Jr.

## Thinking is part of reading

In elementary school, your child is learning to think about what she reads and draw conclusions about it. To help her practice:

- **Read together**, then ask questions: “Why do you think the character did that?” “Do things like that really happen?”
- **Keep a shared reading journal.** Take turns writing notes to each other about your reactions to the story.
- **Have a family reading dinner.** Everyone brings a book to the table. After a few minutes of reading, family members talk about what they’ve read and ask questions about what others have read.

## Set the table for math

Setting the table for meals can help your child learn to be responsible. And it can also help him learn math! Have him count up the numbers of knives, forks and spoons. Then ask him to add the utensils together.



Older children can count the number of utensils for each place setting, then multiply by the number of settings. They can keep a chart of which meals use the most utensils.

## Nurture social confidence

Swooping in and saving your child from social challenges won’t help her learn to navigate them. Instead, to help her develop social survival skills:

- **Listen when she tells you** about a problem. Ask questions like “What did you do next?” This lets her know that she can act to affect the outcome.
- **Teach her to speak up** for herself. When she wants something, ask her to make a case for it. Or, have a few family debate nights.

Source: D.F. Kris, “Helping Young Girls Find Their Voice While Developing Friendships,” *Mindshift*, [niswc.com/elem\\_navigate](http://niswc.com/elem_navigate).

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