

Elementary School Parents[®] make the difference!

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Asking questions can boost your child's thinking skills

Talking with your child is an effective way to build thinking skills—especially if you ask certain kinds of questions. Experts recognize six categories of thinking skills. Ask your child questions that help him:

1. **Recall knowledge.** Ask about facts your child knows. “Who is the president?” “What is the capital of Virginia?” Words that will help with this include *who, when, what, where* and even *list*.
2. **Understand.** When your child learns about things, check the depth of his comprehension. “Can you explain one cause of the Civil War?”
3. **Apply knowledge.** In real-life situations, how will your child use what he knows? “What has

our country learned from the Civil War? How can we apply it to life today?”

4. **Analyze.** Many things can be divided into groups, such as types of animals. Have your child compare and contrast groups of things. “How are fish and humans different? How are they alike?”
5. **Evaluate.** Ask your child what he thinks about things. “How have smartphones changed our lives?”
6. **Create.** Ask your child to design his own way to solve a problem. Use words such as *invent* and *what if*.

Source: P. Armstrong, “Bloom’s Taxonomy,” Vanderbilt University, The Center for Teaching, niswc.com/elem_bloom.

Help your child build intrinsic motivation



Most parents have used rewards to motivate their kids at one time or another. And there’s no question that reward systems work.

But when the rewards stop, the motivation sometimes stops, too. Researchers have found that students who are motivated *only* by the desire to get a good grade rarely do more than the minimum they need to get by.

However, when students are motivated by an inner reward, they are more likely to stick with a task. Students with *intrinsic motivation* learn because they’re curious. They retain what they have learned longer, and they earn higher grades.

To foster intrinsic motivation:

- **Have your child think** about what she wants to learn before she starts an assignment.
- **Help your child see progress** as she works on a big task.
- **Give your child opportunities** to share what she’s learning.
- **Offer positive feedback** and encourage her to praise herself for a job well done.

Source: K. Cherry, “Intrinsic Motivation: Why You Do Things,” Verywell Mind, niswc.com/elem_intrinsic.

When elementary students miss school, they miss out on a lot



If your child misses just one day a week of school, he'll have missed more than two and a half years of class time before he graduates! Even missing one day a month quickly adds up.

Frequent absences result in lost learning time in critical subjects like math and reading, as well as class discussions and demonstrations. Even doing extra homework will not make up for the things your child misses when he's out of school.

So what can you do to make sure your child's attendance is regular?

- **Prep the night before.** Teach your child not to leave for tomorrow what he can finish tonight! That means his backpack is loaded and waiting at the door. His clothes are laid out.

His lunch is packed. The less scrambling he has to do, the less likely he'll be to miss the bus.

- **Enforce a sensible bedtime.** Your child needs sleep to function, so be sure he gets enough. Occasionally staying up late to finish an assignment isn't a crisis, but it shouldn't become a habit.
- **Stick to a morning routine.** Have your child wake up at the same time each day, so he has enough time to get ready without rushing.

"The habits we form from childhood make no small difference, but rather they make all the difference."

—Aristotle

Teach your child to follow four steps to achieve any goal



January is a time for taking stock and setting goals. Many adults make some type of New Year's resolutions. Then two weeks later, most realize that they haven't followed through. Kids are no different.

Why not make this the year that your child learns how to achieve the goals she sets for herself? When your child sets a goal, encourage her to choose one she can reach in a short time frame. Then, help her follow four steps for achieving the goal:

1. **State the goal.** "My goal is to learn my multiplication facts." She should write it down and post it where she will see it.
2. **Plan how to meet the goal.** "I will make flash cards and study them

for 15 minutes every night. I will ask Dad to quiz me on Fridays."

3. **Talk about the goal with others.** This builds commitment to the goal. Your child should tell her teacher what she plans to do.
4. **Do each step in the plan,** one at a time. If problems come up, talk about possible solutions. Perhaps she is too tired after doing her homework each night to review her flash cards. Maybe she could study them in the mornings while she eats breakfast instead.

Don't forget to praise your child for her effort each step of the way. "I am proud of you for studying your multiplication facts this morning." And when she achieves her goal, celebrate the way her hard work paid off!

Do you encourage your child to work independently?



"Mom, I can't do it. I need help!" Every child makes that plea once in a while. But if your child says it every day, you may need to help her become more independent.

Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out if you are fostering self-reliance:

- ___ 1. **Do you tell** your child that you believe she can do it?
- ___ 2. **Do you help** your child break big projects down into smaller pieces that are easier to finish?
- ___ 3. **Do you remind** your child of the importance of persistence? "You couldn't ride a bike the first time you tried. But you kept at it. You'll learn this, too, if you keep at it."
- ___ 4. **Do you ask questions** when your child gets stuck? "What did you learn when you read the chapter?"
- ___ 5. **Do you compliment** your child when she finishes work on her own?

How well are you doing?

If most of your answers are *yes*, you are helping your child learn how to work on her own. For *no* answers, try those ideas.

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Bring geography to life with fun and educational activities



Learning about geography can make the entire world more relevant to your child. To get him thinking a little bit more

about geography, have your child:

- **Draw a map** of how to get from your house to school, the grocery store or a friend's house. Then follow the map together.
- **Walk outside** and identify *north*, *south*, *east* and *west*, as well as *northeast*, *northwest*, *southeast* and *southwest*. Challenge him to describe where things in your town are located. "My school is *northeast* of my house." "The library is *south* of the fire station."
- **Go through your house** and talk about where various items came from. Look for labels to see where things were made. A calculator may have come from Taiwan.

A box of cereal may have a Battle Creek, Michigan or Chicago, Illinois address. Locate them on a map.

- **Look for street patterns.** In some towns, streets run north and south, while avenues run east and west. Or, street names may be alphabetical. Help your child recognize the patterns.
- **Start a collection** of objects from countries around the world. Stamps, postcards and coins are all easy items to collect, categorize and store.
- **Learn more about** where his ancestors came from. Find these places on a map. If possible, help him learn about the routes his ancestors traveled when they came to this country. Where do your relatives live now? Again, check the map.

Ways you can support your child during homework time



There's no question that today's students have more homework than students did in the past. And it can be quite

a challenge to fit homework into busy family schedules.

But homework is a fact of life. To make the most of homework time:

- **Help your child** manage her time. Set a regular time for homework each day. Don't let homework be the last thing your child does before going to bed.
- **Help your child** decide which homework to complete first. Some kids prefer to start with the easier work, while others like to get the toughest work out of the way first.

Have your child experiment to see which works best for her.

- **Offer help**, but don't do the assignment for her. Doing homework helps your child learn to be independent. If you do the work, your child won't learn that lesson.
- **Have your child** read aloud to you every night. As you are reading together, stop and ask questions.
- **Stay in touch** with the teacher. Be sure to let the teacher know if your child seems to struggle with homework often. Ask what you can do at home to support your child.
- **Remain positive.** Your attitude will affect your child.

Q: My eight-year-old son has tantrums when he gets angry or frustrated. He's acting the same way in school, and his teacher has asked for my help in getting him to control himself. What can I do?

Questions & Answers

A: Elementary-age children have more stress in their lives than most parents realize. When they don't have the skills to cope with stress, they may resort to toddler-style outbursts and crying fits.

However, your child's success in school and with other children depends on his learning how to control his behavior.

To minimize temper tantrums, first try to figure out what triggers them. Keep a record of your child's behavior for one week. What happens just before a tantrum begins? Do you notice patterns? Then, help him avoid some of the situations that lead to stress.

Next, give your child tools to manage his behavior. When he has a meltdown at home, suggest that he:

- **Take time out.** Have him remove himself from the situation for a five-minute breather. Let him return when he feels composed enough to talk calmly.
- **Use calming techniques.** Teach him to breathe deeply, while slowly counting to 10. Have him dribble a ball, pet an animal, or tell himself, "I can work through this."
- **Throw it out.** Have him write or draw his angry feelings on paper. Then have him wad the paper up and toss it away.
- **Talk it out.** Help your child become more self-aware. Notice when he's having a bad day. Help him name his feelings.

It Matters: Reading

Help your child discover the joy of reading



Some kids seem to have their noses constantly in a book. But others haven't found the joy of reading yet.

To encourage your child to read:

- **Ask your librarian** to recommend high-interest books. There are books that appeal to almost every child. Kids who enjoy adventure may find that they love the *Percy Jackson and the Olympians* series. Those who like to laugh may enjoy the *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* series.
- **Make a library scavenger hunt.** The next time you're in the library, make up a list of questions that require your child to use different reference books. Make these fun—the batting average of a famous baseball player, the average temperature at Disney World.
- **Keep track** of how many books your child reads. Paste a sticker on a chart for each book he completes. Or, encourage him to make a paper chain—one link for each book. Challenge him to make a chain long enough to stretch around his room.
- **Suggest audiobooks.** There are wonderful recordings of favorite books—many may be available from your public library. Sometimes just hearing the words in a book can encourage a child to go back and read it later.
- **Read aloud.** It's one of the most traditional ways to get kids to read—and it really works! Choose a book you both enjoy, set aside 15 minutes for reading and invite your child to snuggle up with you.

Reading opens the door to information and enjoyment

It's important to help your child understand the value of reading and how it connects to so many things in her life and in the world.

Reading is essential for:

- **Obtaining information.** People learn about rules, directions, facts and more. Have your child read a recipe to you as you cook. Read a manual aloud that explains how to put something together. Challenge her to read to find answers to questions, such as "How can I get a grass stain out of your shirt?"
- **Communication.** Talk with your child about the ways reading and writing help you communicate with others—through mail, email, texts and notes. Then suggest that your child exchange letters with a friend. Or she could write an email to a local politician about an issue that's important to her.



- **Pleasure.** Help your child plan a relaxing end-of-the-day reading routine. And be sure to help her find books that will give her a good laugh or take her on an exciting adventure.

Set some family reading goals for the new calendar year



The new calendar year offers the opportunity to think about the past and set goals for the future.

This should include family reading goals!

Take time with your child to:

- **Review favorite books** or stories from the past year. If the books are nearby, look through them together. Have your child choose his three favorites. Ask, "What was the best part of this story? Why?" Or, "What is your favorite picture in this book?"
- **Discuss future reading plans.** How much time are family members spending on reading for pleasure? Are there ways you and your child can improve your reading habits? Together, write any ideas or goals you may have. Post them in a place where you will see them often.
- **Plan to read new things.** In addition to books, suggest your child read magazines, newspapers, cookbooks, catalogs—anything and everything he can get his hands on!