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Elementary School Parents[®]

Desert Star School

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A new calendar year is a time to review, make adjustments

It's the beginning of a new calendar year—and nearly the halfway point in the school year. So it's a good time to take stock of your child's habits and make needed adjustments.

Spend some time talking with your child about how the school year is going. If the two of you set learning goals at the start of the year, review those goals now. Is he making progress? How can he make the rest of the school year even better?

Then make some learning resolutions. Here are three to consider:

1. Restore beginning-of-school routines. Has your child's bedtime begun to slip? Are mornings more rushed? Is his regular study time now not quite so regular? Sleep and study routines make life easier—and help kids do better in school.

2. Spend time reading. There is no skill that will help your child more in school. And reading ability, like other skills, gets better with practice. Encourage your child to read. Let him read about anything, from sports to his favorite movie character.

3. Reduce screen time. Talk about the amount of time your child spends in front of a screen. How much time does he spend watching TV? Playing video games? Browsing the Internet? A new study found that 45% of eight-year-olds exceed the recommended two hours or less of screen time per day—and 80% of 16-year-olds exceed that limit. It's time to set and enforce limits.

Source: S. Houghton and others, "Virtually impossible: limiting Australian children and adolescents daily screen based media use," *BMC Public Health*, nswc.com/elem_screenstudy.

How breakfast can help your child learn!



It takes a lot of energy for students to concentrate in school. So it's no surprise that

kids who go to school without breakfast often lack focus.

Studies consistently show that breakfast affects how well children do in school. One Harvard Medical School study looked at how breakfast affected attendance and school performance. They found that children who eat breakfast have:

- **Better attendance.**
- **Fewer episodes of tardiness.**
- **Higher math scores.**
- **A stronger ability to concentrate in class.**

With today's hectic schedules, there isn't always time to sit down for a long breakfast. So be prepared by keeping a few healthy grab-and-go options. A granola bar and a piece of fruit will get your child off to a good start. So will a bagel and cream cheese. In a pinch, even a piece of last night's pizza will do!

Source: M. Levin, MPH, "FRAC: Breakfast for Learning," Food Research and Action Center, nswc.com/elem_breakfast.

Seven strategies can make your family read-aloud time a success



Some parents stop reading aloud as soon as their child learns to read. But reading aloud can continue to be fun, and it builds reading skills, too.

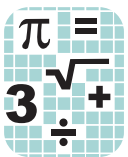
To make your read-aloud time successful:

- 1. Do it every day.** When you read aloud every day, you demonstrate that reading time is much too important to miss.
- 2. Pick a regular time.** Making reading part of your routine also makes it easier to fit into a hectic day. Again, your child will see by your example that you consider reading to be important.
- 3. Read the book first**—before you read it aloud. Reading aloud is performing. You'll do a better job if you're familiar with what you're going to read. Previewing a book may also keep you from getting bogged down in a book that neither you nor your child enjoys.
- 4. Read books you like.** If you like a book, odds are your child will, too. A great place to start is by reading books you enjoyed as a child.
- 5. Accentuate the first line.** The first line of any good story will grab the reader's attention. Your reading should make your child want to sit up and listen.
- 6. Use facial expressions.** Widen your eyes to show surprise. Squint a bit to show you're thinking.
- 7. Leave your child wanting more.** Stop your day's reading at a point where she is eager to hear what happens next.

"You're never too old, too wacky, too wild, to pick up a book and read to a child."

—Dr. Seuss

Help your elementary schooler strengthen 'mental math' skills



In an era when calculators are never far away, do children still need to learn basic math skills? *Absolutely*, say experts.

Knowing how to do calculations in your head is a good way to stimulate thinking. It makes it easier to tackle higher math. It's hard to think about an algebra problem if you can't quickly add $7 + 15$.

Here's how to use a calculator to strengthen your child's mental math:

Call out a three-digit number. Have your child do the same. Now

give him five seconds to estimate what the two numbers will add up to. Then check with a calculator.

Or use this same trick as a subtraction challenge. Have him estimate the answer. Then check it with the calculator.

As he gets faster, you can make the challenge greater. While he does the math in his head, you use the calculator. Is he faster than the machine?

Source: D. Adams and M. Hamm, *Helping Students Who Struggle with Math and Science: A Collaborative Approach for Elementary and Middle Schools*, R&L Education.

Are you teaching and practicing listening skills?



The most important part of communication isn't talking—it's *listening*. And listening skills are crucial for your child's success in school.

Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to see if you are helping your child become a good listener:

___ **1. Do you try to give** your child your undivided attention when he's talking? If you're busy, say, "I'd love to talk about this after I cook dinner."

___ **2. Are you patient** when you listen? Sometimes, it takes a while for your child to actually say what he wants to say.

___ **3. Do you avoid interrupting** your child when he is talking and ask him 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 chiming in** with the "right" answer? Instead, let your child try to sort out what to do.

How well are you doing?

Mostly *yes* answers mean you're raising a good listener. For each *no* answer, try that idea.

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Practice tests may lead to higher test scores for students



What is the best way to study for tests? According to researchers, taking practice tests is the ideal way to study.

The act of recalling information over and over is a learning activity. By studying this way, kids may remember double what they would have otherwise. This can occur in several ways, including:

- **Taking quizzes in class.** Help your child understand that quizzes are opportunities to practice recalling information. Simply taking a quiz can improve learning and future grades. When class quizzes are returned, have your child correct any wrong answers and use the quizzes for further studying.

- **Working with others.** Consider allowing your child to invite classmates over to study and have them quiz each other. You can also help your child study by calling out questions.
- **Studying independently.** Your child can use flash cards and make his own practice tests. Discuss how to create questions by looking over textbooks and handouts. He should notice the section headings, vocabulary words and review questions.

And don't stop at one quiz. Research shows that quizzing five to seven times reinforces learning even more!

Source: H.L. Roediger and others, "Test-Enhanced Learning in the Classroom," Department of Psychology, Washington University, niswc.com/elem_test.

You can support your child's teachers by doing six things



Parents often wish they knew what teachers were thinking. What do they want parents to do? One expert asked

his son, who was also a teacher, about this, and the answers were fascinating.

Teachers hope parents will:

1. **Take responsibility** for study time. Teachers can't follow kids home and make sure studying takes place. They rely on parents to enforce rules about this.
2. **Have high expectations.** Sometimes parents let kids off the hook by saying things like, "I don't like reading either." Instead, expect that your child will succeed.
3. **Avoid absences.** Missing too much school hurts learning.
4. **Attend parent conferences.** You should always attend parent-teacher conferences, even if your child is doing well.
5. **Communicate via email,** when possible. Questions about grades or assignments may need to be researched. An email allows teachers an opportunity to find the answer *before* getting back to you.
6. **Understand teachers' schedules.** They aren't as cushy as you may think. On average, teachers work at least three hours a day beyond the school day itself. And many spend four or more hours over the weekends getting ready for the week ahead.

Source: R. Taibbi, "What Teachers Wish Parents Knew," Psychology Today, niswc.com/elem_teachers.

Q: My older daughter is in middle school. She is a good student and talented athlete—learning and sports have always come easily to her. My younger daughter is in third grade and is quite different from her sister. She has some learning challenges and is not athletic at all. She has begun to compare herself to her older sister and always says, "I'm the failure in this family." How can I help her realize that she isn't a failure and that we love her just the way she is?

Questions & Answers

A: Younger siblings often feel like they're running to catch up. But with your love and support, your younger daughter can find ways to grow into her own special self—and improve her grades at the same time!

Research consistently shows that positive self-esteem is linked to higher school achievement. And the best way to give your child's self-esteem a boost is to discover some areas where she can be successful. Success in one area truly does lead to success in another.

What are her interests? If her sister is a star soccer player, maybe she should try a different sport. Or maybe she'd be happier playing an instrument or acting in a school play. Help her find activities that are different from her sister's and where she won't always be seen as the "little sister."

Point out the things she does well. Whether it's her sense of style or her kindness to others, remind her that these are important. And that you are just as proud of those achievements as you are of her sister's soccer goals.

It Matters: Discipline

Use positive discipline for positive results



The discipline strategies you use at home can increase your child's likelihood of succeeding in school.

And experts agree that the best discipline methods are positive, not harsh. According to the research, harsh physical punishments may actually increase your child's risk for mental health problems.

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that parents:

- **Develop loving**, supportive relationships with their kids. This gives children a strong foundation and motivates them to behave well. A child who is respected by his parents is more likely to cooperate at home and at school.
- **Focus on the positive.** Compliment what your child does right. Be specific. "You started your homework without my reminding you. Great job!"
- **Use time-outs** and other non-physical consequences when needed. A child who speaks disrespectfully may need some time alone in his room. A child who puts off homework may miss other fun activities.
- **Let natural consequences** do the work. If your child forgets to bring his homework to school *again*, don't bring it to school for him. Instead, allow him to get a zero. He will be more likely to remember his homework tomorrow!

Source: R. Jaslow, "Spanking, physical punishment may raise risk for mental health woes in adult years," CBS News, nswc.com/elem_harsh.

Respect is an important ingredient for school success

When students have respect for teachers and classmates, they help create the positive academic environment all children need in order to be successful. To encourage respectful behavior in your child:

- **Be a role model.** Do what you want your child to do. If you want her to say *please* when asking for something, remember to say *please* yourself.
- **Discuss respect.** What is it? Why is it important? How does it feel to be treated with respect or disrespect?
- **Criticize constructively.** When you need to correct your child, do it helpfully and respectfully. "Next time, please hold the door for Grandpa. That will make life easier for him."



- **Praise success.** Notice times when your child is respectful. "You listened to the coach even when other kids were joking around. I was impressed."

Source: R.J.A. Silverman, Ph.D., "10 Tips on Teaching Respect to Children: You can't get it if you don't give it!" nswc.com/elem_giverespect.

Self-control can improve your child's academic achievement



Research shows that self-control is twice as important as intelligence in predicting your child's academic achievement. According to experts, kids who struggle with self-control are more likely to face criminal, financial and other problems later in life.

What can parents do? Focus on promoting self-control skills, such as working hard, behaving well and thinking before acting. Give your child opportunities to:

- **Take responsibility.** Think about what jobs your child

can master, such as putting clothes in the hamper at night or setting the table for family meals. To help your child take responsibility for a routine, such as getting ready for school in the morning, post a reminder chart to help her through the steps.

- **Practice patience.** Make and enforce simple rules that encourage self-control. "Finish your homework before watching TV." "Save dessert for after dinner."

Source: T.E. Moffitt and others, "A gradient of childhood self-control predicts health, wealth, and public safety," *PNAS*, National Academy of Sciences.