

Elementary School Parents[®]

February 2012
Vol. 23, No. 6

Educational Service Unit #8
Linda Miller, Service Representative

make the difference!



Help kids take responsibility by predicting & preventing

Often, the behaviors that drive parents crazy are also the things they can see coming. Your child walks in from school and switches on the TV before he starts homework. Or your child goes to bed without packing his backpack and leaves something behind in the morning.

In both these cases, you probably knew what was coming. So one of the best ways to help your child take responsibility is by predicting and then preventing.

First, make sure your child understands the rule. "We aren't going to turn on the TV before your homework is complete and I have looked it over." Second, agree on a consequence. "If you turn the TV on before your homework is done, I will turn it off and we'll keep it off after dinner that day."

The next day, meet your child as he comes in the door. "Remember our rule about TV. We aren't going to turn it on until after homework. Should you switch it on, we'll have to keep it turned off after dinner."

He may test your limits at least once. In that case, stay calm, but enforce the consequence you have agreed on.

In this case, when your child follows the rules, you both win. He does what you've expected him to. If he doesn't follow the rules and you keep the TV turned off after dinner, you have still both won. He has learned that you mean what you say. The next time you lay out a rule, he will be much more likely to pay attention.

Source: L.R. Griffin, *Negotiation Generation: Take Back Your Parental Authority Without Punishment*, Penguin Books.

Second-hand smoke may lead to absences



The first nationwide study of smoking finds that children who live with smokers are more likely to miss school than those who don't.

Researchers studied more than 3,000 children. They found that kids who live in a family where someone smokes get sick more frequently than kids who come from nonsmoking homes. If both parents smoke, children miss more school than if only one parent smokes.

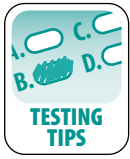
Kids who are exposed to smoke at home get more respiratory infections. They are also more likely to come down with ear infections. Other studies have found a link between smoking and asthma.

You can reduce your child's exposure to smoke if you:

- **Avoid smoking** in your home.
- **Do not smoke in cars** that your child rides in.
- **Ask others** to avoid smoking in your home or car.

Source: "Life with smoker increases school absenteeism, study says," Education Week, <http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/inside-school-research/?intc=thed>.

Follow seven steps to help your child prepare for math tests



Studying for a math test can be challenging for students. But there are ways to help your child do her best. Here seven

steps to take before your child's next math test:

1. **Review what will be covered** on the test with your child.
2. **Look through homework** and quizzes and make sure your child can work the problems.
3. **Have your child work** the problems at the end of the chapter.
4. **Have your child tell** you the steps she is following to solve a problem. Often, this will help her see a step she may have missed.
5. **Suggest she use different colors** when working a problem with many steps.

6. **Play "Beat the Clock"** once your child understands how to work the problems. Working quickly and accurately is important in math.
7. **Help your child get in the habit** of checking her work before she hands it in.

Source: "Helping Your Child Learn Math: A Parent's Guide," Ontario Ministry of Education, www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/brochure/earlymath/.

"I like a teacher who gives you something to take home to think about besides homework."

—Actress Lily Tomlin
as character Edith Ann

When parents talk less, their children actually listen more!



When your child was younger, he needed you to talk a lot. It's the way he learned the language that describes the world around him.

But now that your child is older, he needs a lot less narration. Yet many parents of elementary schoolers find themselves talking on and on ... even while their children are listening less and less.

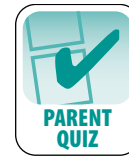
Of course you still want to talk with your child about his day. You want to have conversations about what he's reading and thinking. But if you're like most parents, you'd like to spend less time talking about whether it's time to feed the pets or why his clothes are still scattered all over his bedroom floor.

Here are some tips on how you can make the most of the words you say to your child:

- **Make infrequent requests.** As much as possible, help your child develop a routine for things like homework and daily chores.
- **Keep the volume down.** Your child doesn't actually hear you any more clearly if you yell.
- **Keep it short.** When you do have to give your child directions, see if you can say it in five words or fewer. So instead of saying, "Jack, I need you to get to the car. Don't forget your backpack. Do you have your homework?" try saying, "Jack. Homework. Backpack. Car."

Source: L. Ticknor, "When I Stopped Yelling," *Washington Parent*, February 2009.

Are you teaching your child how to solve problems?



Children need to know how to solve problems for themselves. Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out if you

are helping your child develop problem-solving skills:

- ___ 1. **Do you try to teach** your child that problems always offer opportunities for solutions?
- ___ 2. **Do you look** for low-tech toys for your child to play with? The best toys let children invent how to use them.
- ___ 3. **Do you encourage** your child to learn more about topics she is interested in? Kids often ask the best questions—and then try to find their answers—in subjects they like.
- ___ 4. **Do you encourage** your child to brainstorm her own solutions. "How could you fix that problem?"
- ___ 5. **Do you let** your child try the solution she selects if it is reasonable? Even if it doesn't work, she'll still learn something.

How well are you doing?

Each *yes* means you are helping your child solve problems on her own. For *no* answers, try those ideas.

Elementary School
Parents
make the difference!

Practical Ideas for Parents to Help Their Children. ISSN: 1523-1275

For subscription information call or write:
The Parent Institute®, 1-800-756-5525,
P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474.
Fax: 1-800-216-3667.

Or visit our website: www.parent-institute.com.

Published monthly September through May by The Parent Institute®, a division of NIS, Inc., an independent, private agency. Equal opportunity employer. Copyright © 2012 NIS, Inc.

Publisher: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.

Editor: Rebecca Miyares.

Writers: Kristen Amundson & Susan O'Brien.

Illustrator: Joe Mignella.

Let your child take charge of a community service project



Many family community service projects rely mostly on parents to do the work. But here are three activities that your child can do (mostly) by herself:

1. **Change for a change.** Ask family members to drop in a few pennies, nickels or dimes in a glass jar each day. When the jar is full, let your child count the money and use it to make a donation to a cause she would like to help.
2. **Create greeting cards.** Save old holiday or birthday cards. Let your child cut them up and design new

cards. Together, you can deliver the cards to a senior citizen's center or a children's hospital.

3. **Deliver supplies** to an animal shelter. Call and find out what items they need. Many animal shelters are in need of blankets. Let your child sort through any old linens, make sure they are clean, and then deliver them to the shelter. Your child can even ask neighbors if they have items they would like to donate.

Source: C. Tomlin, "10 Ways to Involve Children in Their Community," *Early Childhood News*, www.earlychildhoodnews.com/earlychildhood/article_view.aspx?ArticleID=504.

Help your child learn about presidents, values and more



February 20 is Presidents Day in the United States. Try these fun activities to help your child learn more about U.S. presi-

dents, money and values. They'll also hone his fine motor, writing and thinking skills. You can:

- **Study who's on money.** Find a book with pictures of U.S. presidents. Have your child match those pictures to the faces on coins and bills. Give him pennies, nickels, dimes, quarters and a half-dollar. He can also match pictures to one-, five- and twenty-dollar bills.
- **Build a log cabin** with your child. Use Popsicle sticks, a glue stick and crayons. (Find directions at www.enchantedlearning.com/crafts/lincolnlogcabin/.) Talk about how Abraham Lincoln grew up very poor, but became one of our greatest presidents.
- **Ask your child to imagine** he's president for a day. Then help him write a short essay, answering several questions. What is his day like? What would he do if he were president? What powers should a president have?
- **Tell the story** about George Washington cutting down the cherry tree. Share how Lincoln was known as "Honest Abe." Discuss the value of honesty. Ask your child what other qualities a president needs.
- **Take a virtual tour** with your child of Washington's or Lincoln's homes. Visit www.mountvernon.org/virtual/index.cfm/ssl/2 and <http://showcase.netins.net/web/creative/lincoln/gallery/pict.htm>.
- **Explore the White House site** at www.whitehouse.gov/kids/presidentsday/ for presidential biographies, downloadable coloring books, quizzes and games.

Q: My son is quite overweight. I have talked with his doctor, and we are working on improving our diet at home. But meanwhile, his grades are dropping and he has almost no one to play with. What can I do to help my child?

Questions & Answers

A: Your son is not alone. Recent studies show that one-third of kids under the age of 18 are overweight.

Studies show that overweight kids often do poorly in school. Many overweight children don't speak up in class because they are afraid the other kids will make fun of them. They may also lack confidence in their abilities.

Kids who are overweight are more likely to spend time by themselves. And when they're alone, they're often watching TV, eating ... or doing both at the same time.

Help your son focus on the right goal. It's not the number on the scale that he should worry about. It's how healthy he feels. You might say, "You get one body in this life, and I want yours to be as healthy as possible."

Next, encourage him to get active. Start planning a family walk each day. Look for things you can do on the weekends—go to a park and kick a ball around.

You are already working with your doctor on a food plan. Although you need to follow that plan, don't turn yourself into the "food police." Try to make healthy changes for the whole family.

Finally, talk with your child's teacher. Ask her to support your son in school. She may also have ideas about students your son could spend time with.

—Kris Amundson,
The Parent Institute

It Matters: Motivation

Motivation is key to your child's school success



You don't just want your child to learn. You want your child to *want* to learn! Motivation is part of being a successful student. Thankfully, studies show that parents can help if they:

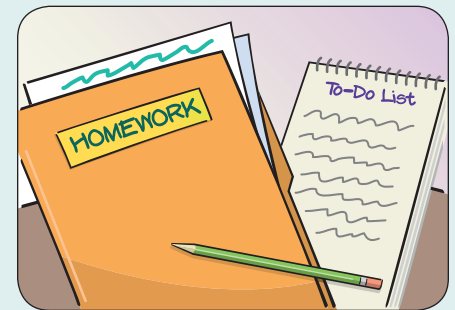
- **Stay involved.** When parents are involved in education, kids do better in school. Make sure you monitor study time and communicate with the teacher regularly.
- **Remember** that kids are adaptable. If your child struggles in school, stay positive. Work with his teacher to find solutions.
- **Promote independence.** Give your child age-appropriate freedoms. You might let him choose between two places to study.
- **Limit criticism.** School is challenging. Instead of criticizing, use positive words to boost your child's self-confidence.
- **Correct mistakes** in an encouraging way. Don't say, "You have poor spelling." Try, "You spelled everything right except these two words! I bet you can fix them!"
- **Give specific compliments.** It's better to say, "Your report is so neat. I can read the whole thing," than, "I like your handwriting."
- **Get more out of learning.** Let classroom lessons spark *your* imagination. You might visit the state capital, do a science experiment or figure out a waiter's tip together. The key is to have fun!

Sources: E. Pomerantz, "Research: Motivating Children to do Well in School," <http://i-parents.illinois.edu/research/pomerantz.html>; K. Seal, "Raising Self-Motivated Children," HighScope, www.highscope.org/file/NewsandInformation/ReSourceReprints/Motivated.pdf.

Make homework time easier for your child with motivation!

Sometimes getting kids to do homework is tougher than the homework itself! To increase your child's motivation:

- **Develop organization skills.** Help your child devise a system that works for her. She might use a homework folder and make daily to-do lists.
- **Replace "homework time" with "study time."** If your child doesn't have assignments, she can read or review.
- **Stick to a routine.** Kids resist less when they're used to studying at the same time every day. Let your child choose a quiet, comfortable place to work.
- **Help without taking over.** Encourage and guide your child through tough problems. But don't ever do the work.



- **Be a role model.** While your child studies, finish important tasks yourself, such as paying bills or straightening up.
- **Offer praise, not prizes.** This helps your child become self-motivated—not motivated by things. You might say, "Wow! You kept trying and it paid off!"

Source: C. Moorman and T. Haller, "How to Motivate Your Kids to Do Homework," NewsforParents.org, www.newsforparents.org/expert_motivate_kids_homework.html.

Studies show expectations are powerful motivators



Research links high expectations to high accomplishment. In addition to setting high (yet reasonable) expectations, it's important to:

- **Look for progress, not perfection.** Keep in mind that goal-setting encourages kids to work hard. Even if your child doesn't reach his final objective, consider his efforts a big success!
- **Celebrate often.** There are many steps along the way to reaching a goal. Whenever your child passes a milestone, take note. "You're halfway done!"

- **Communicate clearly.** You might say, "I want you to do well in math. I believe you can raise your grade above a C."
- **Learn from mistakes.** Help your child see that mistakes are opportunities to learn, persevere and improve. Good can always come from them. Discuss how to stay positive.
- **Be flexible.** What if an expectation was too high or too low? If necessary, adjust the expectation, but keep it challenging.

Source: W. Parker, "Setting Appropriately High Expectations for Children," About.com, http://fatherhood.about.com/od/succeedingasafather/a/high_expectations.htm.