

Elementary School Parents[®] make the difference!

Educational Service Unit #8



Turn your child's mistakes into learning opportunities

Mistakes, it is said, are the stepping stones to success. Now research on how the brain learns shows making mistakes is often one of the best ways to learn.

Scientists at the University of Exeter monitored the brains of people who were making predictions based on information they were given. Then they received new information and had to change their predictions.

The study found that people tended to remember this new information the next time they saw it. The brain sent an "early warning" that helped them remember what they had learned.

What does this mean for parents? Sometimes, it's probably best to let

your child make some mistakes. Don't keep nagging her to finish the project that's due on Friday. Instead, let her find out for herself what happens when she waits until the very last minute.

Then talk about it together. Help your child identify for herself the mistakes she made. Work with her to see how she might have made different choices.

Say, "So maybe leaving things until the last minute isn't the best way for you to work. Next time, it might be better to do things a little bit at a time so they get done on time."

Source: University of Exeter, "Why We Learn From Our Mistakes," *Science Daily*, www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2007/07/070702084247.htm.

Learning about geography can be fun for kids!



All you may remember about geography is memorizing countries and continents.

But today's kids live in a world that gets smaller each day.

Today, geography is more than maps. It's about how places shape people—and people shape places. During Geography Awareness Week (Nov. 13–19), here are some fun things to do at home:

- **Map it!** Keep an atlas or a globe nearby when you watch the news. When you hear a story about an unfamiliar place, check it out.
- **Go on a virtual trip.** It's a way anyone can travel the world. Visit your library and check out books about a country you'd like to visit. Then go online to see more pictures.
- **Learn about your community.** Why is your town located where it is? Who first settled there? How are you connected to the rest of the world?

Source: "My Wonderful World," National Geographic, www.mywonderfulworld.org/parents_welcome.html.

Parents can help their children cultivate an attitude of gratitude



“What do you say to your Grandma for the birthday gift she gave you?” Giving those simple prompts is the earliest way that parents teach their children to express gratitude.

A recent study found that developing gratitude does much more than ensure Grandma will give another gift! It also helps kids feel better about their families and their lives. It even helps them get along better with others.

So continue prompting your child to say *thank you*. But take the next step and ask your child to think about *why* she is grateful. (She has a loving family. She can spend time with her grandparents. She loves the gift her Grandma gave her.)

Set aside a regular time when everyone talks about things for which they are grateful. This practice can help everyone reflect on the positive things in their lives.

One study found that people who did this regularly were more optimistic. They also recognized kindness when it was offered. That is something to be grateful for.

Source: J. Froh, D. Miller & S. Snyder, “Gratitude in Children and Adolescents: Development, Assessment, and School-Based Intervention,” *School Psychology Forum: Research in Practice*, Fall 2007, National Association of School Psychologists.

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

—Martin Luther King, Jr.

Discuss cyberbullying with your child to promote online safety



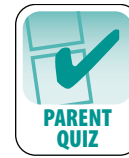
Millions of kids in all age groups are online and on cell phones every day—at home, at school, at friends’ homes and at the library. And unfortunately, studies show that 42% of kids have been bullied while online.

How can you protect your child from this new kind of bullying behavior? Here are some tips:

- **Talk about cyberbullying.** Let your child know that no one should put up with bullying.
- **Keep the computer in a place** where you can monitor your child’s online activity.
- **Remind your child to keep his passwords private** and to change them often.
- **Tell your child never to share** personal information online, such as his phone number, address or age.
- **Have your child use** the privacy tools available on social networking sites to make his profile or photos visible only to friends.
- **Tell your child never to respond** to cyberbullying—even to a text message. Responding only encourages the bully.
- **Document cyberbullying.** Save screen shots of comments made to or about your child. Share them with the school and with law enforcement.

Source: “Protect your child from cyberbullying,” *Bullying: Engaging Parents, Students and Staff in Your Anti-Bullying Program*, The Parent Institute, Stock #5K07.

Do you let your child take charge of homework?



In homes everywhere, parents and kids are arguing about homework. Even worse, some parents are simply doing the homework!

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 and do something academic 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 talk to the teacher if your child faces regular struggles with homework?**

How well are you doing?

Each *yes* answer means responsibility for homework is where it belongs. For *no* answers, try those ideas.

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Encourage reading at home to increase your child's vocabulary



Reading at home is one of the best ways to boost your child's vocabulary. Best of all, you can do it as part of your regular read-aloud time.

Here are some ways you can help increase the number of words in your child's vocabulary:

- **Read many different kinds of books.** If you usually read your child fiction, go to the library and get a book that explains how something works. Check out a book about a country you'd like to visit. Or read a biography about a person your child admires.
- **Look for words** your child might not know as you read. "It says here that President Lincoln grew up in a *cabin*. What do you think

that word might mean?" Look for pictures that can help your child figure out new words.

- **Help your child** create his own dictionary. All you need is a notebook with a page for each letter. When you discover a new word that he wants to remember, help him write it down in the notebook. Then go back to review those words from time to time.
- **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 *volcano* before? Let's look it up to see what it means."

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

Encourage your elementary schooler to think abstractly



Abstract thinking involves learning concepts and applying them to other situations. A child who counts, for example, might set the

table for her family without even thinking about numbers.

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

- **Language arts.** Before, during and after reading, encourage your child to ask and answer questions. Say, "If you're wondering about something, let me know." Try asking her 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 she 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 she learns. "The leaves are falling off that tree. That means it's a deciduous tree." "That bug is an arachnid because it has eight legs." "The flowers we bought last fall grew back. They must be perennials."

Source: "Help Your Child Think Big!" Scholastic, www.scholastic.com/resources/article/help-your-child-think-big.

Q: My son wants a cell phone. He says his friends all have them. I'm worried that he's not old enough for the responsibility. On the other hand, I would feel safer if I could call him. How young is too young? And how can I help him use technology responsibly?

Questions & Answers

A: A cell phone can provide peace of mind and help your child learn to be responsible—if you stay involved and monitor his phone use carefully. Unsupervised cell phone usage can lead to many problems, including poor school performance.

Consider these suggestions:

- **Explain that having a phone** is a privilege, not a right. With your son, review school policies involving cell phone use.
- **Start with a basic phone** without a camera, to avoid any chance of sending inappropriate photos.
- **Ask your cell phone carrier** to disable text messaging and Internet access capability until your son is ready. Review and use the parental safety controls.
- **Keep the phone charger** in your room, not his, so you can monitor his usage.
- **Talk about costs** and review the bill with your child at the end of each month.

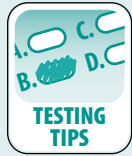
As your son proves to be responsible, add text messaging—and discuss cyberbullying. Consider having an unlimited texting plan to avoid extra charges from incoming texts. Remind your child that his text messages may be forwarded to or viewed by others.

When he reaches middle or high school, you'll know if he is ready to have phone Internet access.

—Kristin Amundson,
The Parent Institute

It Matters: Homework & Study Skills

Share strategies for studying with your child



When kids do well on tests, it shows they've learned the material, and it also makes them feel great! This confidence leads to future success.

Parents can help students with all kinds of tests, including those in:

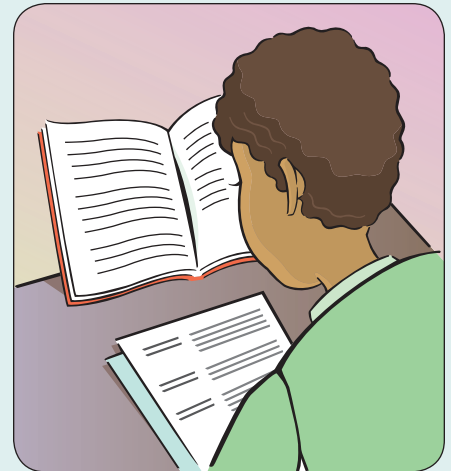
- **Math.** If your child needs extra motivation to study, try playing beat the clock. If she has to practice 20 math problems, for example, see how quickly she can do 10. Then time the next 10 and compare.
- **Spelling.** If your child is bored with traditional practice methods, get creative. She can write spelling words in different colors, make a word search or type them on the computer.
- **Science.** Acronyms, such as ROY G BIV for the seven colors in a rainbow, make it easy to memorize long lists. Take the first letter of each item on a list. Then make a word out of the letters.
- **Social studies.** Instead of quizzing your child with flash cards, let her quiz you! Also let her add drawings to flash cards. Another trick is to go through old quizzes and answer questions—while covering up the answers.
- **Other subjects.** One of the most important study tips is simple: Make a plan! Studying over several days (instead of cramming) reduces stress and boosts grades. Break the job into several parts, and put them on a calendar.

Source: A. Dolin, M.Ed., "10 Tips to Help Your Elementary School Daughter Study," Parenting Pink, <http://parentingpink.com/2011/05/tips-daughter-study>.

Teach your elementary schooler how to master book reports

In elementary school, your child will probably be assigned his first book report. Since reading in itself can be challenging—without having to write about it—your child may feel intimidated. But book reports can be divided into small, manageable (even enjoyable!) parts. The trick is to start early and:

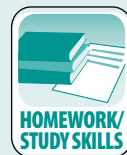
- **Choose a book your child likes.** The teacher or librarian can help with this. Finding the right book will motivate your child to read it and share what he learns.
- **Review the basics.** Talk about what the book report should cover. Common themes include main characters, plot and setting. Details are helpful, as long as there aren't too many. Telling the whole story is a common mistake to avoid. Stick with a brief description of the beginning, middle and end.
- **Ask questions.** This will help your child with the introduction



and conclusion. "What was the book about?" "What did you like about it?" "What didn't you like?" "Would you recommend the book to others?" "Are there other books by the same author?" "Do you relate to anything in the story?"

Source: "How to Write a Book Report," Fact Monster, www.factmonster.com/homework/wsbookreportelem.html.

Researchers highlight some of the benefits of homework



It's natural for families to ask themselves, "Is the time we spend on homework worthwhile?"

Researchers have wondered the same thing! There's no simple answer, but studies show homework does have benefits, including:

- **Parent involvement.** Reviewing homework with your child raises the chance it will get turned in. It also informs you about your

child's classes, teachers and abilities.

- **Reliability.** When young kids do homework, they develop responsibility, persistence and time management skills. They need these traits as they progress through school.

Source: "What research says about the value of homework: At a glance," The Center for Public Education, www.centerforpubliceducation.org/Main-Menu/Instruction/What-research-says-about-the-value-of-homework-At-a-glance/default.aspx.