

# Elementary School Parents

March 2021  
Vol. 32, No. 7

Black Mountain School  
Golden Valley, AZ

*make the difference!*



## Give your child the time and space to think critically

Critical thinking—the ability to go beyond basic knowledge and consider “the bigger picture”—is a crucial skill for school success. The better students are able to think critically, the more deeply they will grasp new concepts and ideas.

To promote these skills:

- **Let your child figure things out.** Resist the urge to solve every problem. Instead, give her time to work through problems herself. If she’s forgotten how to do an assignment, don’t offer to email the teacher. Instead, ask, “How could you find out?” Can she call a classmate? Look over at a previous assignment for clues? Give her space to come up with a plan.
- **Discuss current events.** Is there a news story that might interest her? Print out an article and chat about it over dinner. Find out what she thinks about the issue, but don’t stop there. Once she’s shared her opinion, press her a bit. “I can see how you feel about this. But why do you think other people might feel differently?”
- **Encourage reflection.** Once your child completes a big project for school, talk about it. Ask her, “How difficult was it to finish? What did you learn about how to do projects? Regardless of how the project went, reflecting on the process will help her hone her critical-thinking skills.

## Teach your child how to be conscientious



*Conscientiousness* is a student’s ability to set and meet goals, make informed choices, and understand his responsibility to others.

While this trait should naturally develop as your child grows, studies show there’s an easy activity that can hone it. And believe it or not, it’s schoolwork!

Here’s how to help your child strengthen conscientiousness with his assignments:

- **Remind him not to rush.** He should take his time and complete tasks carefully.
- **Ask him to check his work.** Once your child finishes an assignment, have him spend a few minutes going back over it to confirm that his answers are correct.
- **Cheer him on.** Is that art project challenging your child? Has he had enough of that book report? Encourage him to keep at it and not give up! Conscientious students meet their obligations and deadlines even when the going gets tough.

**Source:** R. Göllner and others, “Is doing your homework associated with becoming more conscientious?” *Journal of Research in Personality*, Elsevier Inc.

# Historical fiction can bring the past alive for your child



History is fascinating. But reading about it in textbooks can often seem a bit dull and dry to students.

That's where historical fiction can help. The best historical fiction brings a past time to life. It shares the details about what people wore, what they ate and how they really lived. It gives the reader a vivid glimpse of history.

To provide the most enjoyable experience with historical fiction:

- **Ask a children's librarian** to suggest a book that presents history accurately and avoids myths or stereotypes.
- **Look for a book** with some illustrations. This is when

a picture really can be worth a thousand words.

- **Try reading the book** aloud if it's above your child's reading level.
- **Have your child read** more than one book about the same period. Talk about how people see the same event or period of history differently.

**Source:** E. Codell, *How to Get Your Child to Love Reading*, Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill.

**“We are not makers of history. We are made by history.”**

—Martin Luther King, Jr.

# Six ways chores can help your child become more responsible



It's a fact: Responsible children do better in school. And they grow up to become productive, responsible adults.

One of the most effective ways to help children develop responsibility is through family chores.

Chores help your child:

1. **Build school skills.** Learning how to follow directions and complete chores correctly gives your child practice for following directions when taking tests.
2. **Feel like she is needed.** Let's face it—this is something *everyone* needs. So be sure to recognize your child's contribution. “Elena unloaded the dishwasher this afternoon, so cleaning up after dinner tonight will be much faster!”
3. **Develop planning** and time management skills. Figuring out when to complete chores helps your child learn how to prioritize tasks and plan her time.
4. **Feel a sense of investment.** A child who has swept the floor is less likely to track in mud from outdoors.
5. **Take pride in her work.** This feeling of satisfaction can carry over to times when she faces a daunting task for school, like finishing a long-term project.
6. **Learn basic life skills.** Before your child leaves home, she should know things like how to prepare simple meals, care for her clothes and take out the garbage. The sooner she learns these lessons, the more prepared she will be for the future.

# Are you setting an example of respect?



Children learn about respect from watching their parents. Are you modeling the behavior you want your child to

have—so that he will respect you, himself, his teachers and others?

Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you treat** your child and others with kindness and honesty?
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you admit** mistakes when you make them, apologize for them and try to fix them?
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you listen** attentively to your child when he is speaking to you? If you aren't able to listen right then, do you schedule a time to talk later?
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you maintain** self-control and find healthy ways to vent your anger—rather than taking your frustrations out on your child?
- \_\_\_ **5. Do you enforce** household rules and the consequences for breaking them fairly and consistently?

## How well are you doing?

If most of your answers are *yes*, you are modeling a respectful life for your child. For *no* answers, try those suggestions.

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Practical Ideas for Parents to Help Their Children. ISSN: 1046-0446

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P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474.  
Fax: 1-800-216-3667.

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Published monthly September through May.  
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Publisher: Doris McLaughlin.  
Publisher Emeritus: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.  
Editor: Rebecca Hasty Miyares.

# Regular exercise boosts your child's health and academics



Physical fitness provides many benefits for kids. Studies show that regular physical activity is linked to higher self-esteem and

attentiveness in classes. It also lowers the chance of health problems such as type 2 diabetes.

To increase your child's activity level:

- **Add movement to screen time.** Encourage your child to take breaks that involve activity when he watches TV or plays video games.
- **Plan family outings.** Pick activities your family enjoys and create some new healthy traditions. You might go for a short walk before dinner every night, or take a hike every Sunday afternoon.

- **Make suggestions.** Suggest your child play games that involve movement, such as tag, soccer and jumping rope. Indoors, try games such as Simon Says and Red Light, Green Light.
- **Be creative.** During chore time, play music or race to finish a job. While doing errands, park a few blocks away from a store and walk. Or, make a quick stop at a playground on the way home.
- **Set an example.** If your child sees you staying fit (stretching, biking, walking with a friend, etc.), he is more likely to be active himself.

Source: A. McPherson and others, "Physical activity, cognition and academic performance: an analysis of mediating and confounding relationships in primary school children," BMC Public Health, BioMed Central.

## Teach your child to follow four steps to achieve any goal



Children feel good about themselves when they set goals and succeed in reaching them. Having goals also helps children

overcome difficulties. When they're frustrated or upset, they can keep a "picture" in mind of what they're aiming for.

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 making that happen:

1. **State the goal.** Make sure your child's goal is specific: "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. Encourage your child to 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 school 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!

**Q:** My daughter hates to write. When she has a writing assignment, she just stares at the blank piece of paper. Is there anything I can do to help?

### Questions & Answers

**A:** Elementary schoolers are often reluctant writers. Many simply freeze with fear at the thought of writing. They worry that what they write won't be any good, or that they'll be made fun of.

To help your child overcome writer's block:

- **Remind her** that professional writers have difficulty writing sometimes, too.
- **Talk through ideas** with her. Encourage your child to brainstorm and make a list of as many ideas as she can.
- **Suggest she write down** her ideas just as they come. Later she can edit for flow, grammar and spelling.
- **Encourage her** to use a computer to write if possible. This makes it easier to make revisions.
- **Have her try free writing.** She should write anything that comes to mind, no matter how silly. Or, ask your child to write about something she enjoys.
- **Don't over-criticize.** If she asks you to review her writing, note what you like first. Focus on what your child is trying to say, not just the mechanics of writing.
- **Don't fix her mistakes** for her. This won't boost her self-confidence. Instead, it will send the message that you don't think your child is capable of fixing them herself.
- **Be patient.** Allow her to express her frustration. It takes time to become a good writer.

# It Matters: Test Success

## Test-taking strategies boost test success



While there are specific ways to approach specific kinds of tests (true-false tests, essay tests and standardized tests, for example) there are some general strategies that will help your elementary schooler do her best on any test.

Remind your child to:

- **Read the instructions carefully.** Then she should read them again to make sure she knows exactly what she is supposed to do.
- **Look for direction words** that tell her what she is supposed to do. Direction words are words like *compare*, *list*, *describe*, *define* and *summarize*.
- **Read through all the questions** quickly before she starts. She should think about how much time she has and decide how much time she can spend on each question.
- **Read each question carefully** as she begins the test. She should understand exactly what the statement or question says. Then she should determine what she thinks the answer is before she reads any choices provided.
- **Skip a question** if she isn't sure of the answer. She should answer all the questions she knows first. Then she can come back to the others.
- **Allow time to go back** and check her answers. Do they make sense? Are sentences complete? Did she leave out any key words, such as *not*, that might change her intended meaning?

## Show your child how to become a more confident test-taker

**T**est anxiety often comes from self-doubt. And it can affect test outcomes. If your child doesn't think he will succeed, he probably won't.

To build your child's confidence:

- **Remove the pressure.** Tell your child that tests simply show the teacher what he's learned so far, and what he may need help with.
- **Avoid last-minute panic.** Your child should begin to review and study days before the test.
- **Teach efficient studying.** Help your child focus on the material he hasn't yet mastered.
- **Encourage positive self-talk.** He should tell himself that he is prepared to be successful.



- **Help your child visualize success.** Have him close his eyes and picture himself knowing the answers.

## A focus on fitness helps your child perform better on tests



Studies of elementary-age children have shown that the more fit they are, the better they do in school. Fit children have more brain power than their less active classmates. They tend to have greater attention and memory skills. They also tend to complete tasks faster and make fewer errors.

While physical fitness should be a year-round concern, he can do some things to boost his fitness for taking tests. Encourage him to:

- **Get a good night's sleep** before the test. Staying up all night studying increases anxiety, which interferes with clear thinking.
- **Eat for success.** A breakfast that is high in fiber and low in added

sugar can give your child just the right start to his day. A hard-boiled egg and a banana is a fast and easy breakfast option.

- **Relax.** If your child is too nervous, he'll forget what he knows. He can breathe deeply to focus his mind.
- **Wear comfortable clothes.** Pants shouldn't be so tight they keep your child distract your child or impede breathing. His brain needs oxygen.
- **Drink plenty of water.** This is another way to keep his brain alert. Don't forget to give your child a big hug on test day. This will increase his sense of well-being and energy.

**Source:** L. Chaddock-Heyman and others, "The Role of Aerobic Fitness in Cortical Thickness and Mathematics Achievement in Preadolescent Children," PLoS ONE.