ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Helping Children Learn®

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

January 2023

Rowan County Schools

Encourage excellence by setting high, achievable expectations

There are two important things to consider when setting expectations for your elementary schooler:



1. **Research shows that students** tend to live up to parent and teacher expectations, whether they are high or low. So it's important to set the bar high for your child.
2. **Expectations should be realistic.** If only near-perfection satisfies you, your child may think, "What's the point?" and stop trying altogether.

To set expectations that are high, realistic and effective, keep these guidelines in mind:

- **Expect your child's best efforts** in all activities.
- **Gear your expectations to your individual child.** Avoid comparisons to siblings, classmates and others.
- **Praise effort and progress.** Express pride in your child, and remind your child to take pride in working hard.
- **Show interest in what interests your child.** Parents' support for their children's passions can motivate kids to try their best in all pursuits.
- **Be a role model.** Set high expectations for yourself and talk about how you plan to meet them. Let your child see you give your best effort.

Source: J.A. Fredericks and others, *Handbook of Student Engagement Interventions*, Academic Press.

Show support when your student does schoolwork at home

Being involved when your child does assignments shows that you think schoolwork is important. The best way to be involved is to set your student up for success. Here's how:

- **Give schoolwork top priority.** If your child can't finish assignments because of other activities, a schedule adjustment is needed to make it possible.
- **Remember that schoolwork** helps students practice what they are learning. Your child's work doesn't have to be perfect.
- **Take complaints in stride.** Your child shouldn't melt down over every assignment, but a little whining is normal.
- **Show enthusiasm.** "You sure know a lot about Ancient Greece. Tell me something else!"
- **Suggest ways to find help** if your child has questions—call a classmate, reread the directions, etc. This shifts the responsibility away from you and onto your child—where it belongs.

Have math fun with words

Try this fun family math puzzle: Give each letter of the alphabet a monetary value. *A* is one cent, *B* is two cents, etc. Next, ask:

- **Whose name** is worth the most?
- **Who can think** of a jewel that's worth the most? Is gold worth more than rust?
- **How many words** can you think of that are worth exactly $1?
- **What is the shortest word** you can find that is worth the most?

Retelling enhances reading

Research shows that retelling stories they've read helps students become more thoughtful readers. As your child retells a story, offer open-ended prompts, such as "What happened next?" If your child doesn't remember, just say, "Let's go back and read that part again." Your child will learn that it is often necessary to read things more than once to fully grasp them.



Source: B.M. Taylor and J.E. Ysseldyke, *Effective Instruction for Struggling Readers: K-6*, Teachers College Press.

Share test-taking strategies

Knowing a few basic strategies can boost test performance. Encourage your child to:

- **Read everything carefully—**directions, questions and answer choices.
- **Use time wisely.** If your child is stuck on a hard question, it's better to move on and come back to that question after answering everything else.



- **Reduce multiple choice options.** Your child should cross out answers that *can't* be right, then consider the remaining choices.

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Q&A My children aren't very good sports. What can I do?



Q: Competition is taking the fun out of games. One of my children runs out of the room in tears after losing, and the other cheats when my back is turned. How can I help my children learn to be good sports?

A: Elementary schoolers can be competitive. But in school and life as well as in games, they need to learn to compete fairly and accept the results.

To instill a sense of fair play:

- **Discuss the importance** of being a good sport. Explain that you expect your kids to be humble when they win and gracious when they lose.
- **Limit game time.** Establish a time to end the game in advance, then set an alarm before you start. When it goes off, the game is over.
- **Downplay mistakes.** Be gentle when correcting your children for a wrong move or mistake. If necessary, explain what to do instead.
- **Discourage cheating.** Start each game by reviewing the rules. The first time a child tries to cheat, simply repeat the rules. The second time, calmly say "When you don't play by the rules, people get upset and don't enjoy playing. If it happens again, the game is over." If it does happen again, put the game away without saying more.
- **Call fouls.** Every put-down, poke or unkind comment results in a foul for that player. Five fouls and the player is out.

Parent Quiz Are you helping your child learn to follow instructions?

Children who know how to follow directions achieve better results—in the classroom, on schoolwork and at home. Are you helping your child practice this elementary skill? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

___**1. Do you get** your child's full attention before giving directions? Call your child's name and make eye contact.

___**2. Do you break** instructions down into specific steps?

___**3. Do you ask** your child to reread or repeat instructions before beginning a task?

___**4. Do you post** checklists of your child's daily tasks?

___**5. Do you praise** your child for following directions?

How well are you doing?

More yes *answers mean you are helping your child learn to follow directions successfully. For each* no, *try that idea.*

"Children have never been very good at listening to their elders, but they have never failed to imitate them."
—James Baldwin

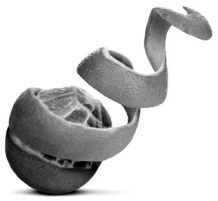
Responsible behavior at home carries over to school

Chores offer a hands-on way for your child to practice being responsible. To encourage willing participation, brainstorm a list together of what needs to be done. Then:

1. **Let your child choose** a few tasks off the list to do this week.
2. **Rotate chores each week,** so no one feels stuck with a particular chore.
3. **Use a chore chart.** Let your child place a star next to tasks after completing them.
4. **Set an example.** Dive into chores without complaining. Talk about how good it feels to see a responsibility through.

Sink an orange for science

Here's a safe, kid-friendly science experiment your child can conduct in your kitchen sink:



1. **Fill the sink** with water and have your child drop in a whole orange. Does it float or sink? (It should float.)
2. **Peel the orange** and drop it in the water again. What does it do? (It sinks.)

What's going on? An orange peel is full of tiny air pockets that make the unpeeled fruit less dense than the water, so it floats. Without its peel, the fruit is more dense, so it sinks.

Preview nonfiction graphics

The photos, maps, graphs and illustrations in history, science and other nonfiction reading can give students a clearer understanding of the text. Before starting to read, have your child look at the graphics and:

- **Explain what each** image shows.
- **Think about why** the authors might have included it.

Then when reading, your child is likely to understand and remember more.

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