ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Helping Children Learn®

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

November 2022

Rowan County Schools

Teach your child that multitasking and schoolwork don't mix

When your child is doing schoolwork at home, stop and consider: How many things are you both trying to do at once? Is your child studying while singing to music? Are you helping while also checking your email?



Multitasking has become a way of life, but not a good one. Research shows that the brain doesn't really focus on several tasks at once. Instead, it moves quickly from one thing to another—not giving anything its full attention.

To help your child concentrate on the assignment at hand:

- **Set a good example.** When your child is talking to you about schoolwork, give it your complete focus. This shows that it is important to pay attention to learning.
- **Schedule enough time** for your child to do tasks consecutively, instead of all at once: read at 4:00, math at 4:30, listen to music at 5:00.
- **Remove distractions.** Multitasking with technology (texting, having TV on in the background, etc.) has a negative impact on studying, learning and grades. Turn off all devices your child doesn't need to do the work.
- **Limit multitasking** to activities that don't require concentration. Your child can listen to music while setting the table or tidying up.

Source: C. Kubu, Ph.D. and A. Machado, MD, "The Science Is Clear: Why Multitasking Doesn't Work," Cleveland Clinic.

Talk with your elementary schooler about honesty and why it matters

Honesty is a core school value. Most elementary students know the difference between being truthful and lying. But deciding when and how to tell the truth isn't always easy for them. To encourage honesty:

- **Ask what your child thinks.** "Do you want others to tell you the truth?" "Is it ever OK to lie?" Discuss why honesty is important.
- **Talk about what lying does.** "Lying destroys trust. If you lie often, people won't believe you, even when you tell the truth."
- **Create opportunities** for truth-telling. Instead of asking your child, "Did you do this?" say, "Why did you do this?" Praise honesty. If you hear a lie, express confidence that your child will make a better choice next time.
- **Be a model.** Children notice when adults tell the truth—and when they don't.

Source: V. Talwar and others, "Children's Evaluations of Tattles, Confessions, Prosocial and Antisocial Lies," *International Review of Pragmatics*, Brill.

Get the facts about math



Why should your child memorize math facts when the world is full of calculators? Because math facts are the basis for higher math. When students have to stop and do basic calculations, they lose their focus on the larger concepts. Knowing the facts also gives students the confidence to try more advanced math.

Review respectful behavior

Respectful behavior toward others creates the positive academic environment students need to learn. Encourage your child to:

- **Address** teachers and classmates by name.
- **Be courteous.** Words like *please* and *thank you* make a difference.
- **Avoid interrupting.** Instead, your child can raise a hand to be called on.

Have siblings show the way



Studies show that children who see an older brother or sister reading for fun are more likely to seek out books themselves. Siblings are also great for suggesting and sharing books, and having conversations about reading material. To make the most of this relationship:

- **Plan weekly family reading time.**
- **Take your children** to the library together. Let your younger child watch the big kids browsing and reading.
- **Ask other older kids**—cousins, babysitters, etc. to bring along a book when spending time with your child.

Source: M. Knoester and M. Plikuhn, "Influence of siblings on out-of-school reading practices," *Journal of Research in Reading*, John Wiley & Sons.

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Q&A How can I prevent my child from being excluded?

Q: My fourth-grader has never had many friends. One child who used to spend time with mine seems to have moved on to other friends. That group is teasing my child—who now doesn't want to go to school. Should I call the former friend's parents? What else can I do?

A: Social problems at school can have a negative effect on children's emotional and academic wellbeing. When teasing affects your child's willingness to go to school, you must get involved. But calling other parents isn't the answer. It hardly ever works, and could result in more heartache for your child. Instead:



- **Alert your child's teacher.** Explain the problem and ask for support in making your child feel welcome and safe in the classroom.
- **Ask about after-school activities** and clubs at school. Spending time with other students who also enjoy making robots or singing in a special chorus can help your child find a "friend group" at school.
- **Look for organized activities** outside school that might interest your child. Sometimes, a structured setting makes it easier for kids to get along.

If your child continues to struggle with friendships, ask for an appointment with a school psychologist or counselor. They are trained to help students and families with social issues that affect school success.

Parent Quiz Are you teaching decision-making?

Children make lots of choices that affect their school success: to say *no* to peer pressure or go with the flow, to tackle challenges or give up, etc. Are you helping your child learn how to make wise choices? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

___**1. Do you teach** your child that every choice comes with consequences?

___**2. Do you explain** your thinking to your child sometimes as you make decisions?

___**3. Do you involve** your child in discussions about family decisions?

___**4. Do you encourage** your child to ask questions before deciding? "What do student patrol members do?" "Can I change my mind later?"

___**5. Do you let** your child make lots of choices and live with their outcomes?

How well are you doing?

More yes *answers mean you're offering important lessons in decision-making. For each* no, *try that idea.*

"It takes courage not only to make decisions, but to live with those decisions afterwards."
—Mike Krzyzewski

Connect new information to things your child knows

When your child is learning, connecting new information to something familiar leads to better long-term recall ability than just repeating it over and over. To help your child make meaningful connections:

- **Create a story together.** Weave new information into situations and locations your child knows well.
- **Get the big picture.** Rather than repeating "Jupiter is the largest planet," your child can tie that fact to a broader idea. "Everything about our solar system's biggest planet is big. Jupiter's big red spot is bigger than the Earth."



Source: J.A. Meltzer and others, "Electrophysiological signatures of phonological and semantic maintenance in sentence repetition," *NeuroImage*, Elsevier.

What's the real problem?

Your child is upset about performing poorly on a quiz. It's important not to ignore these feelings. But was that quiz really "unfair" as your child claims? Ask a few questions. "Why wasn't it fair?" "How did you prepare?" If the real story is that your child didn't study, point that out. Your student was irresponsible, not mistreated. Together, brainstorm about what your child could do differently next time.

Reach out to teachers

It's natural for you to have questions for your child's teachers, and teachers want to help. When you communicate:

- **Be patient.** Busy teachers may need a day or two to respond.
- **Be open-minded.** Expect to hear about your child's strengths *and* weaknesses.
- **Be positive.** You and the teacher both want your child to do well.

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