

Elementary School Parents[®]

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Charles County Public Schools
Eva Turner Elementary

make the difference!



Encourage your family to meet new goals in four simple ways

January is a time for taking stock and setting goals. Most people make some type of New Year's resolution. Then two weeks later, they realize they haven't followed through.

Kids are no different. Why not try to make this the January that everyone in the family takes action to meet some new goal? Here are four ways to encourage that change:

- 1. Pay attention.** Suppose your child has decided she wants to do her homework without nagging. The first time she sits down without being reminded, pay attention. A short, "Grace, you're meeting your goal for the day. Good work!" is all it will take.
- 2. Don't wait.** We all get caught up in what we're doing. But there is nothing that works as well as immediate feedback. "Kylie, thanks so much for taking the dog

for a walk," you'll say. Kylie will be much more likely to take the dog for a walk tomorrow.

- 3. Reinforce the small steps.** She wants to pull her spelling grade up to an A. This week she's not quite there—but she made some improvement. Remind her of the fable of the tortoise and the hare. Slow but steady really does win the race.
- 4. Be specific.** Your child is trying to bring up her math grade. So after she does her homework, she takes time to check her answers. Don't just say, "Good job." Tell her, "You checked your work. That's a good way to catch little mistakes that can lower your grade."

Source: Susan B. Wilson & Michael S. Dobson, *Goal Setting: How to Create an Action Plan and Achieve Your Goals*, ISBN: 10-8144-0169-4 (American Management Association, 1-877-566-9441, www.amacombooks.org).

Teach respect by listening to your child



Sometimes the best way to get your child to behave respectfully is by doing something very simple. Just listen to him.

Suppose your child is arguing about having to do chores. It's an argument you've had before. So far, saying, "Just do the chores" hasn't worked.

So set aside time to talk and listen to your child. Your goal is to come away with an understanding of what the argument is really about.

Suppose your child says, "I really need time right after school to relax before I start doing homework or chores." That's probably something you can live with. You can give your child a chance to decide *when* to do things, but not *whether* to do them.

When you take the time to understand your child, he'll be more likely to cooperate. You remain in control, but you have demonstrated respect—and are more likely to receive it as well.

Source: Michael P. Nichols, *Stop Arguing with Your Kids: How to Win the Battle of Wills by Making Your Children Feel Heard*, ISBN: 1-5938-5003-4 (The Guilford Press, 1-800-365-7006, www.guilford.com).

Look for lines of symmetry in nature to build math skills



Look at a picture of a butterfly. Fold it in half. The two sides match up. That means the butterfly, like many other things in nature, is symmetrical.

Helping your child learn to look for lines of symmetry is a good way for her to recognize patterns. It is also a fun family activity that can give your child a new way of looking at nature.

Here's how to get started:

- **Look for natural objects** that are symmetrical. Flowers, leaves, shells and butterflies may all have these lines.
- **Have your child predict** where the line of symmetry will be. Then fold along that line to see if the two sides match up exactly.
- **Look for lines of symmetry** in other places. You can have your

child look through the pages of a magazine or book. Remember that lines of symmetry can be vertical (as in the letter A) or horizontal (as in the letter B). They can even be diagonal. Sometimes, a figure may have more than one line of symmetry.

Source: Michael Naylor, "The Nature of Math," *Teaching preK-8 Magazine*, November/December 2005 (1-800-678-8793, www.teachingk-8.com).

"Just as we must read to young children to foster their cognitive development, we must also address behavioral issues early, to ensure their academic and personal success."

—Laura Bush

You can build your child's reading habit with children's magazines



Studies show that kids who read regularly are better readers. So how can you encourage your child to read? Try looking at children's magazines.

Even reluctant readers who avoid reading books may pick up a magazine. The pictures are great. The stories are short. There's a magazine for any interest.

The options range from *American Girl* to *Your Big Back Yard*. To get your child started, have him check out the list put together by the public library in Monroe County, Indiana (www.monroe.lib.in.us/childrens/booklists/kidsmags.html).

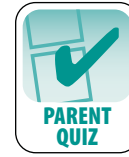
Public libraries are wonderful places to look for magazines that will interest your child. Most have a great selection of kids' magazines. Let your child browse through the magazines. See which ones catch his interest. He may be able to check out back issues of some titles.

Later, you might give your child a gift subscription. Or tell an older relative or grandparent who is looking for a gift idea.

Remember, reading age-appropriate magazines can help your child build a lifetime habit of reading.

Source: Monroe County, Indiana, Public Library, "Magazines for Children," www.monroe.lib.in.us/childrens/booklists/kidsmags.html.

Are you teaching your child how to handle failure?



Some parents want to wrap their children in a protective bubble so they never experience failure.

Others know the positive lessons that can be learned from overcoming disappointments. Are you helping your child learn from failure? Answer *yes* or *no* to each question below:

- ___ **1. I don't jump in** right away if my child has a problem. I give him a chance to solve it on his own.
- ___ **2. I try to be a good role model.** If I have failed at something, I talk about it and about how I plan to fix it.
- ___ **3. I try to help my child keep things in perspective.** "You didn't win the game. But you got a hit."
- ___ **4. I know that my child will learn from failure.**
- ___ **5. I encourage good sportsmanship.** Whether we are playing a board game or a sport, I help my child be a gracious winner and a good loser.

How well are you doing?

Each *yes* means you're helping your child learn to bounce back from defeat and disappointment. For each *no*, try that idea in the quiz.

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Help your elementary schooler make better choices in four steps



She rolled her eyes and slammed down her books when you told her it was time for homework. Then she lost her temper and yelled at her brother—again. She was sorry later. But what if she hadn't made those poor choices in the first place?

Your elementary schooler can learn to make smarter choices in four easy steps. Have your child:

- 1. Stop.** To be sure she doesn't do something she'll regret, she should first *stop*. Don't do anything. Don't say anything.
- 2. Think.** She should then ask herself some questions. "What's the problem here? What will happen if I

make this choice? Will it make things better or worse? Will I be proud of myself later?"

- 3. Choose.** Once she's figured out how she *might* act, she then must make a choice. The correct choice is usually the one that has the best chance of having good things happen—and the fewest chances of getting in trouble.
- 4. Think again.** Later, your child can think again. Did the situation turn out the way she'd hoped? If not, what can she learn from it and change for another time?

Source: Tom McIntyre, *The Behavior Survival Guide for Kids: How to Make Good Choices and Stay Out of Trouble*, ISBN: 1-57542-132-1 (Free Spirit Publishing, 1-866-922-2068, www.freespirit.com).

Make sure you know the ways to keep in contact with school



Parents and schools must communicate about countless issues, from grades to discipline to illness. Sometimes it's hard to know when, who or *if* you should call! In fact, some staff prefer using email when possible. To get the most out of contact with your school:

- **List people** you may need to reach. For example, your child's teacher, the school secretary, the principal and PTA leaders. Phone numbers and email addresses may be on the school website or in a school directory.
- **Read paperwork** the school sends home. Memos and newsletters contain key information, such as staff changes, when the school must be contacted (if a child is sick, for instance), and how to communicate in an emergency.
- **Learn about new ways** that schools stay in touch. Many use special phone systems to receive and send out messages. Teachers, the PTA and others may use email to reach big groups. Make sure your email address is included.
- **Be patient** when problems arise. It's tempting to make a call or send an email right away when you're upset about something. If possible, take time to calm down. Then make your contact as productive as possible.
- **Consider a general rule:** Start with the person closest to a problem. If your child has trouble in math, talk with his math teacher. That may be all you need to do. If that doesn't work, however, move on to other staff.

Source: GreatSchools.net Staff, "Communicating With Your Child's School," Great Schools.net, www.greatschools.net/cgi-bin/showarticle/64.

Q: My daughter has no patience. If she wants something, she wants it now. Her teacher says her impatience is a problem at school. I know there's a problem—but I don't know how to fix it!

Questions & Answers

A: In this era of fast food and instant messaging, it's hard for kids to learn to wait. You are right to be concerned about the teacher's comment. Your daughter's "me first" attitude makes her a problem for the whole class.

Her impatience may create other school problems in the future. In one study, researchers told kids they could have one marshmallow right away or wait a few minutes and get two marshmallows. When these students graduated from high school, researchers found that the students who chose to wait were more successful students. They even had higher SAT scores.

Here's how to help your daughter develop more patience:

- **Explain to her** that everyone has to learn to wait, and that you're going to help her with this skill.
- **Give her opportunities** to be patient. When she asks for something, say, "In a minute." If you're on the phone, develop a hand signal that means, "When I'm finished." If she gets angry, say, "Stand still and don't say a word until I'm off the phone."
- **Tell her** how long she needs to wait. Give her a time and set a timer. Then compliment her on waiting.

With a little practice, she will soon learn the patience she needs to be a better student.

—Kristen Amundson,
The Parent Institute

It Matters: Motivation

Keep your child motivated when she needs help



It's good to be a "homework helper" when your child is very young or having difficulty in school. But be careful. Your child can become dependent on your help.

Always being there to intervene when your child gets stuck can keep her from developing the confidence and study skills she needs to succeed.

It's best to encourage autonomy, say education researchers. To wean your child from your constant attention:

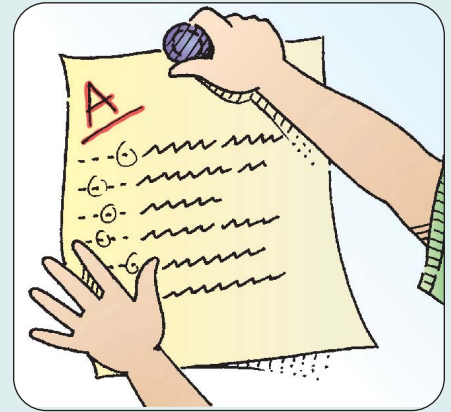
- **Tell her you enjoy helping her**—but she must learn to do her own homework.
- **Select one section** of an assignment for her to do by herself.
- **Ensure she knows what to do** before leaving her to work independently. Help her with a concept, if needed. Let her do a few examples.
- **Leave the room.** Tell your child not to come for you until she's completed the section or answered all the questions. You won't look at her work before this.
- **Have her do another section** when she brings you the finished work.
- **Gradually increase** the amount of work your child does before checking with you.
- **Reteach the concept** if her work is totally wrong. Then have her redo the section.

Source: Judi Craig, "What Happened at School Today?": *Helping Your Child Handle Everyday School Problems*, ISBN: 0-688-13195-6 (Hearst Books/HarperCollins, 212-207-7000, www.harpercollins.com).

Help your child stay motivated when it comes to homework

Your child complains, "I hate homework!" The truth is, you may not like it either. But research shows that meaningful homework helps kids do better in school—and its benefits grow as children get older. To motivate your child (and yourself) about homework:

- **Set up a study schedule.** If your child works at the same time each day, he may not resist homework as much.
- **Be available.** Supervise and support your child, but let him do the work. Do something productive, such as read nearby.
- **Show interest in assignments.** Help your child understand them. Sometimes, you both may be confused! Consult another family member or the teacher.



- **Notice success and compliment effort.** When his homework comes back from the teacher, show him how proud you are by posting it on the refrigerator.

Source: "Help Your Student Get the Most Out of Homework," National Education Association, www.nea.org/parents/homework.html.

Choose your words carefully when using praise to motivate



Have you ever complimented your child, only to have her contradict you? Your intention was to help your child feel good—but somehow the opposite happened! To prevent this:

- **Remember how it feels** to be evaluated. It isn't easy to hear over-the-top compliments: "You're the bravest person ever!" Sometimes it reminds people of what they're not. "Gee, I wasn't very brave at bedtime yesterday."
- **Describe rather than judge.** Say what your child *did* instead of what she *is*. "You gave one of your favorite candies to Janet."

She smiled a lot about having something so yummy."

- **Let your child react.** She may think, "I gave away one of my favorite things, and it made someone happy. I did something nice." It's more valuable for her to think good things about herself than to rely on others' views.
- **Be patient.** Using "descriptive" praise may feel awkward at first. But it helps your child truly feel good about herself.

Source: Joan E. LeFebvre, "Positive Parenting II: Toddler to Twelve," University of Minnesota Extension, www.extension.umn.edu/distribution/familydevelopment/components/6961_08.html.