



## Explore household math & science tools with your child

Your child's classroom is full of math and science tools like rulers, maps, calculators and magnifying glasses. When you use these tools at home together, it helps your child become familiar with them—which pays off in school.

With your child:

- **Take tools outside.** Let your child pack a "science kit" for your next walk. Together, observe pinecones and acorns under a magnifying glass. Use a tape measure to find the circumference (distance around) tree trunks. Compare temperatures in sunlight and shade using an outdoor thermometer.
- **Combine tools with playtime.** Give your child a ruler to measure block towers and a calculator to play store or restaurant. Help your

child use a stopwatch to time friendly competitions: How quickly can each person run across the yard? How many times can each person jump rope or bounce a ball in one minute?

- **Ask for your child's help** with everyday tasks that require math and science tools. When you hang pictures, show your child how to use a stud finder and a level. On your next road trip, teach your child to use a real map, and point out that the speedometer shows how fast you're traveling. In the grocery store, put your child in charge of weighing produce.

Source: M.E. Ennes and others, "Children and Parents' Perceptions of Access to Science Tools at Home and Their Role in Science Self-efficacy," *Research in Science Education*, Springer.

## Reinforce the concept of time in four steps



Time management is essential for school success. Before young students can learn it,

however, they must grasp more fundamental time concepts: How long is a *second*, *minute*, *hour* and *day*? What about a *week*, *month* and *year*? How do *past*, *present* and *future* relate?

Understanding time and how it's measured helps children be more responsible. They can "be ready in 10 minutes" or estimate how long it will take to complete an assignment.

While a real mastery of time doesn't come until later in the elementary years, this four-step process can improve your child's sense of time.

Have your elementary schooler:

1. **Select a task**, such as jumping up and down 50 times, drawing a picture or completing two math problems.
2. **Estimate** how many minutes it will take to complete the task.
3. **Use a timer** to track the time it takes to complete the task.
4. **Check** how close the estimate was to the actual time it took.

# Get the most out of your parent-teacher conferences



Some parents say that the parent-teacher conference is one of the most valuable things they participate in all year. Whether in person

or online, these one-on-one meetings are great for learning more about your child's strengths and weaknesses, and for giving both you and the teacher a better idea about the year ahead.

To get the most from your meeting:

- **Talk to your child beforehand.** Are there any questions your child would like you to ask the teacher?
- **Make a list of things to tell the teacher.** You know your child better than anyone else. Sharing information about your student and your family will make it easier for the teacher to meet your child's needs.
- **Write down your questions.** Ask things such as:
  - » *Is my child in different groups for different subjects?*

- » *Are my child's reading and math skills on target?*
- » *Does my child participate in class discussions?*
- » *Is my child meeting your expectations?*

- **Be on time.** Teachers usually schedule conferences back to back. Promptness will allow you to take full advantage of the time the teacher has available.
- **Create an action plan.** Ask the teacher what you can do to reinforce what your child is learning. Try to get at least one or two specific suggestions.

**“Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.”**

—Helen Keller

# Your child's vision plays a key role in academic success



Students with vision problems may struggle more than their classmates. When kids can't see what's on the screen—

or what's on a worksheet—they are likely to fall behind.

Unfortunately, children don't always know that they can't see well. They simply rub their eyes, squint and try their best. So it's important to get your child's eyes examined yearly.

To protect your child's eyesight:

- **Choose bright lights.** Be sure reading lamps are bright enough. If they are too dim, your child will strain to see the page.
- **Build in breaks.** If your child spends long stretches in front of a screen,

suggest taking frequent 10-minute breaks. Experts believe too much screen time leads to blurry vision and problems with focusing.

- **Encourage sunglasses.** Bright sunlight can damage children's eyes. Remind your child to put on sunglasses when outside.
- **Commit to safety.** Does your child play sports? Enforce use of proper protective eye wear, such as safety glasses or swim goggles.
- **Serve healthy foods.** From leafy greens to fortified milk, nutritious foods are proven to support strong minds, bodies and eyes.

Source: S.L.J. White and others, "Vision screening outcomes of Grade 3 children in Australia: Differences in academic achievement," *International Journal of Educational Research*.

# Are you helping your child tackle that big project?



It's a fact of school life:

The older the child, the bigger the project. Do you know how to support your child's effort on a

big school project? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you guide** your child in selecting a topic? Kids often need help narrowing down a broad topic to specifics they can manage.
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you help** your child break down the project into small steps? Your student can schedule time for each step on a calendar. As each step is finished, your child should cross it off.
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you help** your child make a list of all the supplies needed, in order to avoid last-minute trips to the store?
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you help** your child locate credible books, websites and other resources that can help?
- \_\_\_ **5. Do you review** your child's work, but avoid taking over?

**How well are you doing?**

Each *yes* means you are taking positive steps to help your child succeed on the big school project. For *no* answers, try those ideas from the quiz.

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# Working well with others is a vital skill for school and life



There's a lot to be said for encouraging children to show leadership. But, let's face it—some kids are just plain bossy.

They won't take turns. They won't share. They won't listen to what anyone says.

In school and life, your child will be expected to work with others. So, whether there is a group project in social studies or a student council meeting, your child needs to know how to cooperate.

To reinforce this skill:

- **Allow family members** to take turns making decisions for everyone—from which movie

to watch this weekend to what to have for dinner.

- **Establish basic house rules.** For example, if one child chooses the game, the other gets the first turn.
- **Teach fair ways** to make decisions. Have your children play “rock, paper, scissors” to see who gets on the computer first. Flip a coin to decide who takes the first bath.
- **Talk about the importance** of being open-minded and respectful of other people's ideas, opinions and perspectives.
- **Offer praise** when your child thinks of others. “That was nice of you to let your brother pick the cookie he wanted first.”

# Independent play enhances your child's mental health



Does your child love to build things with blocks? Swing from the monkey bars? There's more to playtime than just having

fun—in fact, new research shows that independent play can improve children's mental health.

Not only does free play bring kids joy, it also helps them solve problems and even overcome fears. In addition, play is an effective stress reliever—after all, it's hard to feel stressed when you're blowing bubbles or pretending to be a superhero!

To encourage independent play, provide your child with:

- **Time.** Allow plenty of free time each day. While structured activities like sports and music lessons have many benefits, a busy schedule can interfere with playtime.
- **Materials.** Give your child a variety of things to play with, including

building toys, art supplies and props for pretend play. “Toys” don't have to cost a lot—your child can turn cardboard boxes into castles or locomotives, and your old clothing is ideal for playing dress-up. Items from nature, like acorns, rocks and twigs, make great playthings, too.

- **Encouragement.** Support your child in taking positive “risks” like climbing a low playground rock wall, balancing on a fallen log, getting messy by playing in the mud, etc. These experiences boost confidence and promote a “can-do” attitude that can lead to greater mental well-being.
- **Independence.** Let your child be in charge during playtime. Choosing what to play with and how to play with it maximizes the mental health benefits of independent play.

Source: “All work, no independent play’ cause of children's declining mental health,” Florida Atlantic University.

**Q:** My elementary schooler studies before test time but can't always recall the facts. Are there techniques that can improve my child's memory?

## Questions & Answers

**A:** There are many memorization tricks that may help your child remember facts. Here are a few:

- **Acronyms.** Your child can make a word out of the first letter of each word in a series to represent a list, phrase or name. Many kids use the acronym ROY G. BIV to recall the colors of the rainbow: Red, Orange, Yellow, Green, Blue, Indigo, Violet.
- **Sentences.** Help your child use the first letter of each word to make a silly sentence, such as “My very educated mother just served us noodles” for the planets in order of their distance from the sun: Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune.
- **Grouping.** Have your child group things into manageable chunks. Instead of memorizing the capitals of every state, your child could divide them into geographic regions and memorize each region.
- **Rhymes.** Have your child think of rhymes about facts, such as “In 1492, Columbus sailed the ocean blue.”
- **Visualization.** Your child can draw or imagine a picture of the material. Then your child can recall that image during the test.
- **Personalization.** Have your child relate the information to everyday life. An important date in history might also be a relative's birthday.
- **Singing.** Your child can replace words in a familiar song with facts to remember.

# It Matters: Reading Skills

## Reading and writing at home boosts success



When children practice reading and writing, it benefits them academically. It may pay off later in life, too.

Studies show that children who sharpen their literacy skills at home—even with activities that are just for fun—are more successful in school than other kids. And they become adults with strong work ethics that serve them well in the workplace.

Luckily, there are some simple ways to encourage your child to spend more time reading and writing. Here are a few ideas to try:

- **Make books a priority.** Don't save stories for bedtime—read them any time of day! Keep books out where your child can get to them. Check out new titles from the library. And set a good example: When you have some downtime, reach for a book instead of the remote.
- **Start a family journal.** Each weekend, have your child jot down something special about the week. It doesn't need to be long; a couple of sentences will do. After your child's entry, add your own. By the end of the school year, you'll have a written record of memories!
- **Play word games.** Each round of Scrabble does more than entertain your child. It hones reading and writing skills.

Source: N.L. Alston-Abel and V.W. Berninger, "Relationships Between Home Literacy Practices and School Achievement: Implications for Consultation and Home-School Collaboration," *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation*, Taylor and Francis.

## Support your child's reading progress with six strategies

You're proud of your child for learning to read. But remember that reading skills must be developed and maintained. The older your child gets, the more important reading skills become for learning.

To foster reading progress:

1. **Make connections.** Have your child read about historical events that happened near your home. If your child is passionate about something, find books related to the topic.
2. **Build excitement.** Make reading irresistible. Let your child stay up 15 minutes later to read in bed. Or, have your child build a fort and read by flashlight.
3. **Role-play.** Turn favorite books into family plays or movies. Add props and costumes.
4. **Suggest your child start a book club** with friends. They can meet in person or online and have book-related discussions and activities.
5. **Set a timer.** If your child resists reading, say, "Read to me for three minutes. When the timer beeps, you can stop." Add a minute every few days.
6. **Read aloud.** Try reading more advanced books. When parents read to them, kids enjoy more challenging words and stories.



## Retelling can improve your child's reading comprehension



You've just finished reading a story with your child. One of the best ways to check for understanding is to ask your child to retell the story.

Retelling a story requires your child to think about the details and decide what's really important.

Give your child these three rules for retelling a story:

1. **Tell what's important.**
2. **Tell it in a way that makes sense.**

### 3. Don't tell too much.

Your child should be able to tell you what happens at the beginning, the middle and the end of the story. If your child doesn't remember certain details, go back and look at that part of the story again. Revisiting parts of the story demonstrates that sometimes it's necessary to read things more than once to gain a thorough understanding.

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