



Share the wonders of science with your elementary schooler

You don't have to be a rocket scientist to teach your child about science. Just do some simple things like these:

- **Encourage your child** to collect and organize objects, such as leaves, rocks, shells or bottle caps.
- **Encourage investigation.** Give your child a magnifying glass. Ask, "What things do you see?" "What's similar and what's different with and without the glass?"
- **Talk about the science** that happens at home. Which cereals get soggy in milk? Why do foods in the refrigerator get moldy? Why do some plants need more water than others?
- **Show an interest** in science. Look at the moon and the stars with your child. Weigh snow. Mix paint colors.
- **Include your child**—as an observer or, better yet, a helper—when you make household repairs or work on the family car.
- **Nurture curiosity.** Ask your child questions. "Why do you think ... ?" "What might happen if ... ?" and "How can we find out ... ?"
- **Go to the library.** Check out books on different scientific topics.
- **Give your child something** to take apart—a ball point pen, a candle, an old toy. Encourage your child to figure out how it works.
- **Talk about the weather.** Have your child record the temperature each day for a month. Note whether the day was sunny, cloudy, rainy or snowy. Which was the coldest day? How many snowy days were there?

Get more out of conversations with your child



Are you tired of asking your child questions about school and getting little response?

Then try this strategy:

Instead of asking lots of questions when your child gets home from school, share a few things about your day first. For example: "I've had such a busy day. I had a meeting with my boss in the morning. I took Grandma to her doctor's appointment this afternoon. Then we stopped by the store to pick up groceries. It was good to get home."

After you've finished, ask your child to tell you a little bit about the school day. Prompt with open-ended questions if necessary: "What was the best part of your day?" "Tell me about what you learned today."

You can also use this strategy to start discussions about schoolwork. If your child brings home artwork from school, look at it and make some observations about what you see. Comment on the colors. Say what you like about it. Tell what it reminds you of, etc. Then ask your child, "What does it mean to you?"

Teach your child to achieve any goal by following four steps



January is a time for taking stock and setting goals. Many adults make some type of New Year's resolutions. Then two weeks later, most realize that they haven't followed through. Kids are no different.

This year, show your child how to achieve a goal. First, encourage your child to choose a goal that can be reached in a short time frame. Then, help your child follow four steps for achieving the goal:

- 1. State the goal.** "My goal is to learn my multiplication facts." Ask your child to write it down and hang it in a prominent spot.
- 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 to the goal. Your child should tell the teacher about the goal, too.
- 4. Do each step in the plan,** one at a time. If problems come up, talk about possible solutions. Perhaps your child is too tired to review flash cards after a long day of school. It might work better to study them in the mornings while eating breakfast instead.

Notice effort and progress each step of the way—and celebrate together when the hard work pays off!

"Set your goals high, and don't stop till you get there."

—Bo Jackson

Responsibility helps students have success in the classroom



Children who learn to be responsible do better in school. They get along better with teachers and peers. They make better decisions. They're more apt to try, follow through and succeed.

To strengthen your child's sense of responsibility:

- Match chores to abilities.** Are you still packing your child's lunch? How about making the bed? If so, pass the torch. Most elementary schoolers are capable of handling such tasks. Don't overload your child with too many chores, but work toward giving meaningful responsibilities.
- Teach lessons about money.** Consider giving your child a small allowance. When children manage their own money, they tend to develop more respect for it. Include your child when you're working on your budget. You don't have to share specific financial details, but demonstrate what budgeting looks like. Say things like, "I'd love to order pizza tonight, too, but it'll have to wait. Payday isn't until Friday."
- Use consequences to teach.** When children experience the consequences of their actions, they are more likely to learn not to make the same mistake again. If you're always running to the rescue, your child won't learn how to take responsibility for anything.

Are you making read-aloud time the best it can be?



Time spent reading aloud is critical to helping children become better readers. It's also fun!

Are you making the most of your read-aloud time? Answer *yes* or *no* to each of the questions below to find out:

- ___ **1. Do you have** a regular read-aloud time with your child that lasts at least 20 minutes each day?
- ___ **2. Do you make** read-aloud time fun by letting family members take turns picking the books you read together?
- ___ **2. Do you encourage** your child to read a few pages aloud to you?
- ___ **4. Do you stop reading** at an exciting place so your child will want to read again the next day?
- ___ **5. Do you sometimes pause** to talk about what you've just read or to make predictions about what's about to happen?

How well are you doing?

More *yes* answers mean you're making the most of the time you spend reading aloud with your child and other family members. For each *no* answer, try that idea in the quiz.

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Share test-taking strategies to boost your child's test scores



There is an important test tomorrow, and your child wants to do well. In addition to studying, there are several things students

can do during the test to increase the likelihood of success.

Share these test-taking strategies with your child:

- **Focus on directions.** Your child should always read the directions very carefully before starting the test. If something doesn't make sense, your child should ask the teacher.
- **Write down information.** Some students struggle with memorization. If your child writes down key material from memory as soon as the test starts, it will be there to refer to later.
- **Read through all the questions** quickly before starting. Your child can then calculate how much time there is to spend on each question.
- **Skip a question if unsure** of the answer. Tell your child to answer all of the easy questions first, then come back to the others.
- **Remember the true/false rule:** If any part of an answer is false, the whole answer is false.
- **Use multiple-choice strategies.** Your child should try to answer the question before looking at the choices. Or, eliminate wrong answers and choose among what's left.
- **Outline essays.** Encourage your child to make a plan and stick to main points and key details. Even a brief outline is better than no answer.
- **Allow time to go back** and check answers. Do they make sense? Are sentences complete?

Here's why teachers give different types of assignments



While doing a math assignment, your child says, "Why do I have to do the same kinds of problems over and over? I'm so tired of them!"

It's true that teachers sometimes assign repetitive work, and it's helpful for students and families to understand why.

Here are four kinds of assignments—and the reasons teachers use them:

1. **Practice assignments.** Doing the same kind of work repeatedly helps students remember a skill. This is especially true when it comes to learning math, word definitions and spelling.
2. **Preparation assignments.** This is a way to introduce students to new topics. For instance,

students might read a book about animals before studying animal families.

3. **Extension assignments.** Students need to be able to connect separate topics. For example, they might be asked to compare and contrast two historic events.
4. **Creative assignments.** These assignments challenge students to use different skills to show what they have learned. For instance, your child might be asked to build a model for science class.

Of course, all schoolwork builds self-discipline. So remember, even if your child doesn't see a reason for an assignment, completing it will still teach valuable lessons.

Source: M. Martin and C. Waltman-Greenwood, *Solve Your Child's School-Related Problems*, HarperCollins.

Q: My child has absolutely no patience and the teacher says it is becoming a problem at school. How can I help my child develop more patience?

Questions & Answers

A: In this era of on-demand entertainment, online shopping and instant communication, it can be challenging for children to learn to wait. However, patience is vital for learning and interacting in school.

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

- **Explain that everyone** has to learn to wait, and that you're going to help your child with this skill.
- **Be empathetic.** Let your child know you understand how hard it can be to wait for something.
- **Offer opportunities** to be patient. When your child asks for something, say, "In a minute." If you're on the phone, develop a hand signal that means, "When I'm finished."
- **Help your child save money** for something instead of buying it right away.
- **Enjoy activities together** that require patience, such as playing board games, putting together jigsaw puzzles, baking and planting.
- **Help your child develop** strategies for waiting—like singing songs quietly, playing "I Spy" or reading a book to pass the time.
- **Model patience.** Stay calm when you're stuck in traffic, for example. Say something like, "It looks like we're going to be in the car for a while. Let's use the time to play a word game."

With practice, your child will learn the patience needed for success in school—and in life.

It Matters: Motivation

Encouragement is more effective than praise



Most adults praise children with phrases like “Great job!” and “That looks amazing!”

But experts agree that *encouragement* has a more significant effect than *praise* on a child’s motivation. So what is the difference between the two?

Praise:

- **Focuses on results.** “You did a great job on your science project! You got an A!”
- **Uses opinion words** such as *good*, *great*, *terrific* and *wonderful*.
- **Is typically given** when children do what is expected of them.

Encouragement:

- **Recognizes effort and progress.** “Look at that project! I can tell you’ve spent a lot of time on it! It must feel good to know you worked so hard!”
- **Uses descriptive words.** “You picked up your room without being asked. Look at that *clean* floor and *organized* desk!”
- **Can be given** regardless of a child’s performance. “That didn’t work out the way you planned, did it? I can tell you’re disappointed, but I know you’ll try again next week. What do you think you might do differently next time?”

The big difference is that words of praise lead children to rely on *your* assessment of their accomplishments. It promotes a dependency on affirmations. Words of encouragement, on the other hand, lead children to form their *own* positive assessment of themselves—which makes them feel capable.

High expectations motivate students to succeed in school

When adults expect elementary schoolers to succeed, students’ chances of doing so improve greatly. Expect them to come up short, and the odds are that they will.

Children are usually keenly aware of how their families view them, and they often tailor their actions to those views. So it’s very important to have high expectations—and to express them to your child.

To set effective expectations:

- **Make sure what you expect** is within your child’s abilities. If you set expectations that are either too high or too low, your child may do poorly.
- **Post a list of expectations.** Include your expectations for behavior in places and situations such as home, school, study time, etc.
- **Be consistent.** Don’t lower your expectations to make your child



happy. Don’t raise them because you’ve had a rough day.

- **Set your child up for success.** Offer support to help your child meet expectations. For example, provide a well-lit study space and keep distractions to a minimum.

Boost your child’s desire to read with thee five strategies



When children *like* to read, they do it more often—which boosts reading skills and overall school success. To ignite your child’s love of reading:

1. **Celebrate.** Instead of simply checking out books at the library, make an event of it. Select interesting books, then choose a special place to enjoy reading together.
2. **Explore.** Help your child discover an appealing book series. Kids often can’t resist picking up the next book in a series.
3. **Investigate.** Ask a question and encourage your child to find the answer by doing some research online.
4. **Play.** Turn something you just read together into a fun challenge: Ask your child to summarize the story using only three sentences. Can your child use the characters from the story in a new story?
5. **Experiment.** Read a variety of books together. If your child is used to reading fiction, try reading a biography or how-to book, for example.