

Helping Children Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

Sierra Charter School



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Provide lessons in responsibility to improve academic success

Responsibility is essential for so many aspects of learning and achievement—from timeliness to effort to cooperation. Luckily, there are at least as many ways for you to bolster your child's sense of responsibility at home.

To raise a responsible student:

- **Trust your child** with meaningful tasks. School-age children are capable of handling tasks such as getting up with an alarm, tidying their rooms and study areas, caring for plants and pets, and clearing the table.
- **Enforce a few** age-appropriate rules and consequences. Explain them clearly so your child knows exactly how you want her to behave—and what will happen if she doesn't.
- **Discuss what it means** to be a responsible member of a community. Look for ways your family can help others, such as by collecting food or donations to help a local food bank meet the increased demand.
- **Teach financial responsibility.** Help your child learn about budgeting and saving as well as spending.
- **Adjust rules** and responsibilities. As your child matures, her abilities will change. Perhaps she can make new decisions or take on more grown-up chores. Talk about how great it feels to be trusted to be responsible!



Add an active dimension to reading

You may think of reading as a calm activity to be done while sitting still. But that's not the only way to read! Research suggests that kids can improve their comprehension and memory by physically acting out what they've read.

Acting out a phrase or passage can help kids connect abstract concepts—for example, *turning a blind eye*—with concrete actions. To encourage this kind of activity:

- **Do a dramatic reading.** Act out the story as you read it aloud. Take turns with your child or let him perform the whole thing.
- **Dress up** as favorite characters. Reenact exciting scenes, using new

words from the story. "The rats are following the sound of my piping. I'm luring them."

- **Put on a puppet show** based on the reading. Help your child write a short script and make puppets from old socks or paper lunch bags.

Source: M.P. Kaschak and others, "Enacted Reading Comprehension: Using Bodily Movement to Aid the Comprehension of Abstract Text Content," *PLOS ONE*, Public Library of Science.

Rely on supportive basics

It's easy to get frustrated with your child when you're trying to help with schoolwork, especially if the assignment is tough. To avoid meltdowns and misunderstandings:

- **Accept your child** for who she is.
- **Believe in her.**
- **Communicate clearly** with her.



Source: J.S. Schumm, Ph.D., *How to Help Your Child with Homework*, Free Spirit Publishing.

Turn poor results around

You know your child has the ability to do well. But he doesn't work up to his potential. What can you do? Stay positive. Then:

- **Ask your child** how he thinks he could improve his performance.
- **Consult the teacher.** Ask how much time your child should be spending on assignments and studying. Discuss strategies for supporting him.
- **Enforce a regular study time.** Set a timer for 20 minutes. After your child works hard for that time, let him take a short break, and then get back to work.
- **Let your child know** he is responsible for completing his assignments.

Make praise meaningful

The right kind of praise from you encourages your child to try and keep trying. Offer her praise that:

- **Highlights behaviors** you want her to repeat.
- **Reflects reality.** Rather than saying "That was the best oral report ever," say "You kept practicing until your delivery was really smooth!"
- **Focuses on effort,** persistence and willingness to try new things, rather than on talent or intelligence.





How much help should I be giving my third grader?

Q: I supervise when my child does schoolwork. But he asks so many questions! I worry that I am helping too much. Where should I draw the line?

A: Whether he's studying ancient Greece or times tables, your child is learning facts, but he's also learning *how* to learn. To help while fostering his independence:



- **Make a rule** that your child has to *try* every assignment question by himself, starting with the easiest ones first to boost his confidence.
- **Let your child ask for help** after he's tried all the questions. Keep this goal in mind: He doesn't simply need correct answers. He needs to learn how to figure out what the answers should be.
- **Offer guidance instead of solutions** whenever possible. For example, if your child asks how to spell *Mississippi*, suggest that he get out a map or dictionary.
- **Review your child's work with him.** Don't just let him hand it to you and walk away. Compliment his progress, then address trouble spots by asking questions. Can he see anything that needs to be fixed?
- **Contact his teacher** and ask about the best ways you can support your child's learning.



Are you encouraging resilience?

When resilient students hit an obstacle, they don't give up. Instead, they approach the problem in positive ways. In this challenging year for learning, are you helping your child develop resilience? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

- ___ **1. Do you help** your child see her strengths and how she can apply them to challenges?
- ___ **2. Do you remind** your child of ways she has handled tough situations in the past?
- ___ **3. Do you provide** chances for your child to make decisions for herself? This skill takes practice.
- ___ **4. Do you encourage** your child to talk through problems she is trying to solve? Listen without jumping in to solve them for her.
- ___ **5. Do you talk** about strategies you use to solve problems?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are boosting your child's ability to handle setbacks. For each no, try that idea.

"All things are difficult before they are easy."
—Thomas Fuller

Instill respect for others

It's normal for your child to spot differences among people. It's also essential—in class and in society—that he be respectful of people who are different from him. To nurture respect for diversity:

- **Set an example.** Show respect for others through actions and words.
- **Learn about the challenges** and contributions of people from other backgrounds and cultures. Read books with your child about other ways of life. Talk about what you have in common.
- **Discuss stereotyping** and why it's unfair. Correct it when you hear it.

Source: M. Crouch, "Teaching Diversity to Your Kids," Parents.niswc.com/diversity2.

Use small chunks of time

You've got a big project to do—but can't make the time. Your child has a science report due, but his schedule is full. The solution in both cases is the same. Don't wait until you have enough time to finish the job. Instead, look for just five minutes. In that time, you can get a start on any job. Your child can look for a source or take a few notes. Then look for the next five!

Prepare for the next step

Will your child be moving up to middle school in the fall? To help him get ready:



- **Learn** about the school. Look at its website and social media together. Sign up to receive updates about operating plans, summer programs and other matters.
- **Emphasize** opportunities. Help your child learn about middle school classes that mesh with his interests.
- **Reinforce** effective study habits, such as organization, time management and regular review.

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