

Elementary School Parents

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Improving focus boosts your child's ability to learn

Everybody's mind wanders now and then. But if your child regularly "zones out" during class, it can impact his ability to learn and retain new information.

Studies show that younger students who can't focus tend to become older students who can't focus. And that can mean big trouble for your child's education.

To help your elementary schooler strengthen his attention skills:

- **Remove distractions.** Keep the TV and other screens off while your child works. Keep noise to a minimum.
- **Break down large assignments.** If he has a social studies report to write, show him how to divide it into smaller steps. "First, think about

what you want to say. Next, make an outline of your thoughts. Then, start writing."

- **Encourage breathers** during study time. Don't force your child to work for long periods of time. Instead, set a timer for 20 minutes and have him take a five-minute break when it goes off. Frequent short breaks help your child clear his head.

Remind your child to do this during class, too. Even a 30-second break (maybe by closing his eyes and breathing deeply) could help him buckle back down and refocus.

Source: A.J. Lundervold and others, "Parent Rated Symptoms of Inattention in Childhood Predict High School Academic Achievement Across Two Culturally and Diagnostically Diverse Samples," *Frontiers in Psychology*, Frontiers Communications.

Word games strengthen writing skills



If your child has trouble forming and punctuating sentences, encourage practice by

turning writing into a game.

Here are two games to play to exercise writing skills:

1. **Fill-in-the-Blanks.** Review the different parts of speech and write a story with missing words. For example: "The girl stepped on a ___ (noun)." Take turns filling in the blanks. You can help by saying things like, "A noun is a person, place or thing. I'll choose the word *pie*!" Make the words as silly as you'd like. Then read the story aloud.
2. **Punctuation Point.** Write a short story without punctuation. Then read it together. It's challenging! This illustrates how important punctuation is for a sentence's clarity.

Now edit the story, adding punctuation that makes it easy (or funny) to read. Suggest that your child write a story for you to punctuate. Discuss why you chose—or didn't choose—certain punctuation marks.

Put an end to procrastination by doing the crummy job first



Your child has a math worksheet, a chapter to read and a spelling assignment. If she hates spelling, tell her to do that assignment first. Here's why:

- **Crummy jobs are a part of life.** We all have to do some things we don't like. Talk to your child about some of the jobs you don't enjoy doing, but have to do anyway. Doing the laundry and cleaning the bathrooms every week isn't fun, but it is necessary hygiene.
- **Putting off a difficult task** just makes it—well, more difficult. Until she gets that spelling finished, it's going to occupy her mind and hang over her head.
- **Finishing a dreaded task** feels wonderful. Help your child learn to focus on how great she'll feel when the job is finished—not

how she feels while she's doing it. But let her know that it's also OK to build in a small reward for finishing an unpleasant task, such as spending 10 minutes shooting hoops.

Sometimes, all it takes is a little push. Set a timer for 15 minutes and say, "Work on your spelling for 15 minutes. Then you can stop." Once your child gets started, it probably won't be as painful as she thought.

Source: R. Emmett, *The Procrastinating Child: A Handbook for Adults to Help Children Stop Putting Things Off*, Walker & Company.

"Procrastination makes easy things hard; hard things harder."

—Mason Cooley

Mild hearing loss can impact your child's ability to read



Does your child struggle with reading? The issue could be his hearing. According to research, up to 25 percent of

younger school-aged children may have mild to moderate hearing loss. Unfortunately, it often goes undetected by parents and teachers.

The degree of impairment need not be dramatic, either. Simply having multiple ear infections can be enough to damage your child's hearing.

Have your child screened by his doctor and be aware of these signs of hearing impairment:

- **Favoring one ear.** When you talk to your child, does he turn one ear

toward you? If so, it may mean that's his "good" ear, even if he doesn't realize it.

- **Making things louder.** Does your child gradually turn up the volume when everyone else thinks the sound is fine?
- **A loud speaking voice.** If your child speaks more loudly than necessary (assuming he's not angry), it might be because his voice sounds muffled to him.
- **An uneasy feeling.** If you have a hunch that something is wrong with your child's ears, trust your gut. Ask his doctor how to proceed.

Source: Coventry University, "Screen children with reading difficulties for hearing problems," ScienceDaily.

Do you help your child deal with disappointment?



All children face disappointments. Are you helping your child learn to deal with them? Answer *yes* or *no* to each question

below to find out:

___ **1. Do you help** your child understand what can't be changed and what can? For example, "You can't change the fact that it is raining, but you can change your plans."

___ **2. Do you encourage** your child to choose a positive response when the unexpected happens?

___ **3. Do you point out** what your child can learn from mistakes? "Next time, you'll start studying a few days in advance and earn a better grade."

___ **4. Do you have this rule:** You can feel disappointed, but you can't sulk? Your child is entitled to her feelings, but she can also control her actions.

___ **5. Do you help your child** figure out solutions on her own—instead of trying to fix problems for her?

How well are you doing?

If you answered mostly *yes*, you're teaching your child how to cope when things don't go her way. For *no* answers, try those ideas.

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The Parent Institute, 1-800-756-5525,
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It's not too late to beef up your engagement with school



This school year has been challenging, to say the least. However, when parents and schools work together, the results can be incredible—including increased academic achievement and better student attitudes and behavior.

Your involvement doesn't need to be complicated or time consuming. And even though the end of the school year is right around the corner, it isn't too late to get involved.

Starting right now, you can:

- **Attend school events**—even if they are virtual. Participate and make an effort to connect with staff and other families.
- **Pay attention** to school information sent home and posted online. Keep

track of important dates, such as end-of-year tests and celebrations.

- **Volunteer.** Ask your child's teacher if there is anything you can do to help out. Perhaps you could read to students or help in another way.
- **Join the parent-teacher group.** If you can't attend meetings, take time to read the minutes from each meeting.
- **Ask the teacher questions.** "How can I help my child succeed?" "What are the most important school tasks for us to accomplish each day at home?"
- **Keep talking to your child** about school. Ask about what he is learning. Let him know his education is important to you.

Building your child's social skills can give learning a big boost



Students learn much more in school than academics. In every class, whether it's in person or remote, kids practice an important

skill—getting along with others.

Research shows that problems with social skills can interfere with learning and make it difficult for kids to succeed in school and in life.

To reinforce social skills:

- **Be a role model.** Children notice how parents interact with others. Do you introduce yourself to new people? Stay connected with friends? Support people you care about? Let your child see you being a good friend.
- **Read stories.** There are many books about friendship. After reading, talk about the story.
- **Role-play.** Kids need help practicing manners. With your child, pretend you're meeting new people. "Hi, I'm Jane. Nice to meet you!" Also focus on sharing and kindness.
- **Socialize.** Give your child plenty of opportunities to spend time with other children. This may be challenging for the next several months. Look for safe or virtual opportunities that will allow your child to interact with others.
- **Relax.** Children don't need lots of friends. Just one good buddy is fine, as long as your child cooperates well with others. If you have any concerns, talk with her teacher and work together on solutions.

Source: K. Steedly, Ph.D. and others, "Social Skills and Academic Achievement," *Evidence of Education*, National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities.

Q: My son has struggled with math this year and now he says he hates it. I can't really blame him, because I'm not good at math either. How can I help him develop a better attitude?

Questions & Answers

A: Parents' attitudes about math have a lot to do with how well their children do in math. Kids whose parents tell them they didn't like math when they were in school often struggle with math as well. Likewise, children whose parents instill a sense of enjoyment about math tend to perform better.

To help your child develop a positive attitude about math:

- **Set the tone.** Let your child know you believe *everyone* can be successful in math. If you say this often to your child, he'll start to believe it!
- **Avoid stereotypes.** Boys and girls can be engineers. Children of all races can be successful in school. In fact, students who are successful in math can go a long way toward breaking the baseless stereotypes that others may hold.
- **Talk about careers.** Young children may decide that being a Ninja Turtle or an Avenger is a great career choice. Expand their horizons. Talk about people who use math in their jobs—an airline pilot, a weather forecaster, an architect, an astronaut, a researcher, an accountant, etc.
- **Connect math** to the real world. When you and your child go to the store, bank, restaurant, etc., point out all of the ways people use math. At dinner, challenge family members to tell one way they used math that day.

It Matters: Building Respect

Encourage your child to develop self-respect



Children who are disrespectful often lack something they desperately need: self-respect. If they

don't value themselves, they will find it hard to value and respect other people. They will also have trouble following rules.

But how does self-respect develop and how can you encourage it?

Self-respect comes from:

- **Competence.** It feels great to be good at things. Give your child opportunities to learn and practice new skills—everything from reading to playing sports to doing chores.
- **Accomplishments.** Notice and compliment your child's progress. "You've read three books this week. I'm impressed!"
- **Confidence.** It helps to have parents who stay positive through challenges. Display a "You can do it" attitude. Help your child see mistakes as great opportunities to learn.
- **Freedom.** Give your child some independence. Let him make age-appropriate choices. For example, "Would you like to organize your closet today or tomorrow?"
- **Support.** Show that you accept, appreciate and love your child for who he is and what he believes. Ask about his day. Listen to his answers. Help him solve problems.
- **Imitation.** If you have self-respect, your child is more likely to have it as well. Be kind to yourself and believe in your worth.

Help your child understand why it's important to follow rules

One of the ways kids show respect is by following rules. This is easier for children to do if they understand why rules are important.

In addition to explaining the reasons for specific rules, you can:

- **Play a game without rules.** After a while, stop and talk about how things are going. Then play with rules and see which way is better.
- **Imagine a world without rules.** Talk about what would happen if people could steal ... if kids didn't have to go to school ... if people didn't wear seat belts. What would that be like?
- **Encourage your child to be a leader.** Being a student council member, for example, will give her experience making and enforcing rules.



- **Praise your child** for obeying rules. You might say, "Thanks for getting up on time. Now we can eat breakfast together." This encourages her to keep respecting rules.

Six strategies parents can use to demonstrate respect



When it comes to teaching kids about respect, the idea isn't to teach them at all. It's to show them. When you demonstrate what respect looks like, you'll go a long way toward helping your child become respectful himself.

To demonstrate respect:

1. **Be polite.** Say *please*, *thank you* and *excuse me* when talking to your child. Don't barge into his room, either. Instead, knock.
2. **Be kind.** Don't insult or belittle your child when he messes up. Making a mistake doesn't mean he's "worthless" or "no good."
3. **Be compassionate.** Try not to embarrass your child, and never tell jokes at his expense.
4. **Be fair.** Don't pass judgment on your child or punish him for something before learning all the facts.
5. **Be dependable.** If you tell your child you'll do something, do it. And when you can't do something, be up front about it.
6. **Be honest.** Every "little white lie" you tell chips away at the respect your child feels—or doesn't feel—for you. He's watching what you say and do, so always try to do the right thing.