

Elementary School Parents

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Kern County Supt. of Schools Office
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make the difference!



Keep your child's schedule in balance for school success

Some kids rush from school to soccer practice to karate. Sure, each of these activities can be a good thing on its own. But together, they may be too much of a good thing.

The American Academy of Pediatrics says that kids need "down time." They suggest that play should remain a central part of childhood.

There's no question that kids benefit from organized activities. But it is just as important for kids to have time to organize themselves.

Does your family's schedule strike the right balance? Here are some things to think about:

- **Recognize how important** free play is to children. Build in time for your child to hang out with her friends, develop hobbies, read or just daydream. This unstructured time is when she exercises her body and her imagination.

- **Take cues from your child.** Does she love soccer? Or is she only on the team because the sport is important to you? Many families allow each child to choose one activity per season.
- **Make family time a priority.** If you feel like you only see your child while you're in the car, rethink your schedule. The most important parenting jobs—listening, caring, guiding—need time to develop.
- **Remember that school comes first.** If your child never starts homework until after practice at 8:00, she is overscheduled.

Source: Kenneth R. Ginsburg and the Committee on Communications and the Committee on Psychosocial Aspects of Child and Family Health, "The Importance of Play in Promoting Healthy Child Development and Maintaining Strong Parent-Child Bonds," *Pediatrics*, January 2007 (American Academy of Pediatrics, www.pediatrics.org).

A vocabulary journal builds reading skills



Your child has to learn the vocabulary words his teacher chooses for him. But what if your child could create a list of the words *he* wants to know?

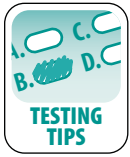
A personal vocabulary journal is a great way for your child to learn new words.

To get the most out of this type of free-choice journal, have your child:

1. **Get a three-ring binder** and some lined paper. Create a page for every letter of the alphabet.
2. **Write down interesting** words he finds when he is reading. Enter each word on the appropriate page.
3. **Look the words up** in the dictionary and add their meanings.
4. **Review the journal weekly.** Challenge your child to use these words when he is speaking or writing. As he practices them, they will become a regular part of his vocabulary.

Source: Janis M. Harmon and others, *Instructional Strategies for Teaching Content Vocabulary, Grades 4-12*, ISBN: 1-560-90192-6 (International Reading Association, www.reading.org).

Improve test success by building your child's reading muscles



You can't win a race if you quit before getting to the finish line. Sometimes, that's what happens when kids are taking important tests that involve a lot of reading.

There are children who simply don't have the stamina to stick with the reading passages on tests. They do fine when they are reading a short passage. But by the end of a longer test, they are simply too tired to read the information and answer the questions.

Just as athletes can increase their stamina, so can readers. You can help your child do better on tests by building his "reading muscles."

Here are some ideas:

- **Schedule a regular time** for your child to read. Start with a short time—perhaps only five or 10

minutes. But gradually increase the time so he can read independently for 30 minutes.

- **Help your child get motivated.** Have him color in a chart for every 10 minutes he spends reading. Or start a paper chain, adding a link for each 10 minutes.
- **Teach your child other ways** to build his stamina. Have him look up occasionally to rest his eyes. Or encourage him to take a short break, grab a snack and then go back to reading.

Source: Michelle Hornof, "Reading Tests as a Genre Study," *The Reading Teacher*, September 2008 (International Reading Association, www.reading.org).

"A pint of example is worth a gallon of advice."

—Unknown

Get your elementary schooler to open up, talk about feelings



From the minute the door opens, you know something is wrong. But when you ask your child what happened at school, she says, "Oh, nothing" and heads to her room.

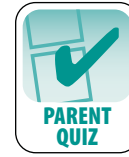
What can you do to get your child to open up and talk about what is bothering her? Here are a few techniques to try:

- **Reflect what you see.** "You seem sad today. Anything happen at school?"
- **Try to avoid being judgmental.** Don't say things like, "You can't really feel bad about a silly thing like that."

- **Help label your child's feelings.** "That must have made you pretty disappointed."
- **Let your child know** you understand her feelings. "I can imagine how crummy you felt when Madison said that."
- **Share an experience** of your own. It can be good for your child to know that you have had similar experiences. "Did I ever tell you about the time my best friend in school stopped speaking to me for a week?"

Source: Deborah Stipek and Kathy Seal, *Motivated Minds: Raising Children to Love Learning*, ISBN: 0-805-06395-1 (Owl Books, a division of Henry Holt and Company, www.henryholt.com).

Are you helping your child learn to follow directions?



Classrooms—and families—function better when children know how to follow directions. Are you teaching your child this vital skill? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

___ **1. Do you avoid giving directions** until you have your child's undivided attention? Do you look her in the eye and call her by name?

___ **2. Are you specific** with instructions? If a job involves several steps, do you name them? "First, pick up your dance clothes. Then put your books on the shelf."

___ **3. Do you ask your child** to repeat what you said before she begins a task?

___ **4. Do you have a checklist** posted for things you do every day (getting ready for school, etc.)?

___ **5. Do you praise your child** when she follows directions correctly?

How well are you doing?

Each *yes* means you are teaching your child the skill of following directions. For each *no* answer, try that idea from the quiz.

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Does multitasking help you, your child accomplish tasks?



Look around your home at homework time. Is your child studying while singing to music? Are you answering his questions while checking email?

Multitasking has become a way of life, but that isn't necessarily good. In fact, while multitasking, the brain doesn't really concentrate on several tasks at once. It moves quickly from one to another, not giving anything its full attention.

To avoid multitasking mistakes:

- **Prevent distractions.** Choose a quiet place for your child to study—free of TV, phones and loud music. Some kids, however, may do well with background music (such as classical).
- **Set a good example.** It's natural to want to accomplish as much as possible—as quickly as possible. But do what *really* works. When you give your child undivided

attention (instead of answering emails while you talk), you show him how to focus—and how important he is to you.

- **Do an experiment.** If you and your child doubt that multitasking makes you less effective, test it out. Choose a task that requires concentration. Then do it *with* and then *without* distractions.
- **Schedule tasks.** Instead of planning multiple things at once, schedule tasks consecutively. Your child can do homework at 4:00, call friends at 5:00 and clean his room at 5:30.
- **Multitask mindlessly.** Multitasking is okay when the activities don't require much thinking. For example, your child can eat a snack while talking on the phone with friends.

Source: Cheryl Feuer Gedzelman, "Homework and Headphones: Multitasking Myths," *Washington Parent*, March 2009 (Knollwood Publications, Inc., <http://WashingtonParent.com>).

Avoid empty praise to raise a responsible, confident child



We all know that kids need to feel confident about themselves so they can take on challenges. But sometimes, efforts to

boost kids' self-esteem can go too far. That's what college professors and bosses are saying these days.

Many bosses say that their young workers don't have the skills to be successful on the job. After a few weeks, they expect to be promoted. When they're asked to do the tasks for which they were hired, they balk.

In college, some students fall apart when professors criticize their work.

There's no question that kids need self-esteem to grow into healthy adults. But self-esteem that *matters* grows out of doing this well. Empty praise does more harm than good.

In fact, Sam Goldstein, a researcher at the University of Utah, says that too many kids are like bubbles. "They seem happy. But if they face even a little trouble, they burst."

It is important for you to praise your child. But save it for times when you can deliver it sincerely.

Source: Sharon Jayson, "Yep, Life'll Burst That Self-Esteem Bubble," *USA Today*, <http://students.sfu.ca/residences/pdf/articles/Overpraised%20'80s%20kids.pdf>.

Q: Getting three kids out the door in the morning is hard! One day, someone won't get up. Another day, somebody forgets a science book and has to go back for it. The result is that my kids usually miss the school bus and I end up driving them to school. What can I do?

Questions & Answers

A: Mornings are tough in many households. But as long as your kids know there's an easy out—that you will drive them to school—they don't have much incentive to change. Here's how to turn things around:

- **Call a family meeting.** Announce that Mom's Taxi has a new policy. From now on, rides to school come with a cost. (You can choose the cost—perhaps it's part of their allowance, or perhaps it means some extra time spent on chores. It doesn't have to be a high cost, but it should be something your kids want to avoid.) Anyone who rides the "taxi" will have to pay the toll.
- **Help your kids get organized at night.** Have them lay out clothes. Fill book bags. Pack lunches. And set alarm clocks to go off a few minutes earlier.
- **Give everyone a five-minute warning in the morning.** Then calmly walk out the door and head for the bus stop. If one child comes racing along with one shoe on and the other in hand—well, figure you're giving the neighbors a chuckle.
- **Enforce consequences once you set them.** Odds are, you'll only have to collect your "taxi fare" once or twice before everyone gets better organized.

—Kristen Amundson,
The Parent Institute

It Matters: Discipline

Research reveals discipline that really works



Think about how your parents raised you. What discipline methods did they use? In a study, even if parents

didn't agree with how they were disciplined as children, many used these same approaches themselves.

For example, adults who were yelled at as kids were more likely to yell as parents—even if they thought yelling didn't work, according to the research.

In order to discipline well, consider what you believe will work. Experts say certain methods are most effective. For example:

- **Acknowledge good behavior.** What are the most important behaviors for your child to learn? When you see them, take notice. Say, "It's nice that you invited the new girl to sit with you at lunch. I bet that made her feel good."
- **Use natural and logical consequences.** When your child does something inappropriate, choose a natural or logical response, if possible. A natural consequence of forgetting homework is getting a zero. A logical consequence of losing an item is having your child replace it.
- **Plan ahead.** Talk with your child about discipline. Why is it helpful? How does it work? After considering her ideas, list basic rules and consequences. Then follow through with consistency, fairness and respect.

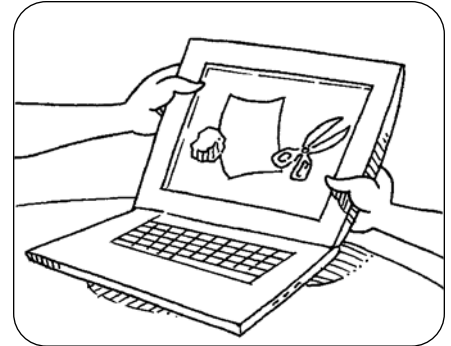
Source: Jennifer Warner, "Parents Flunking Discipline," WebMD, www.webmd.com/parenting/news/20070110/parents-flunking-discipline.

Encourage your child to be less of a boss, more of a team player

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.

If you have a child who has appointed himself the Boss of the World, here are some ways to help him learn how to be a team player:

- **Make taking turns** the way you run your house.
- **Use the "Mom Rule."** If one child cuts the cake, the other gets to choose the first piece. If one child chooses the game, the other gets the first turn.
- **Teach fair ways to decide.** Have your kids play "rock, paper,



scissors" to see who gets on the computer first. Flip a coin to decide who takes the first bath.

- **Reinforce sharing behavior** when you see it.

Source: Michele Borba, *Don't Give Me That Attitude! 24 Rude, Selfish, Insensitive Things Kids Do and How to Stop Them*, ISBN: 0-78797-333-5 (Jossey-Bass, www.josseybass.com).

Help your child become more disciplined about screen time



Children today spend a full work week—actually, more than 44 hours weekly—with media. They watch TV nearly four hours a day. They play video games. They text message friends. They spend an hour a day (beyond homework time) on the computer.

That is more time than children spend in school, with parents or in physical activity. It's also more viewing time than most experts recommend. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that children spend no more than two hours a day in front of the TV.

To limit your child's screen time:

- **Don't use the TV** as background noise. In one study, two-thirds of kids said the television was on nearly *all* the time in their homes.
- **Set limits.** Give your child a TV budget. At the beginning of the week, look through the TV listings. Help your child plan the shows to watch during the week.
- **Keep the TV out** of the bedroom. Children with a television in their bedroom tend to watch more TV than those without.

Source: Kaiser Family Foundation, "Generation M: Media in the Lives of 8–18 Year Olds," www.kff.org/entmedia/upload/Executive-Summary-Generation-M-Media-in-the-Lives-of-8-18-Year-olds.pdf.