

Helping Children Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School



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Plymouth Educational Center

Learning from errors improves chances of future test success

What should you do when your child brings home a test with a disappointing grade? First, focus on what he did well. He probably answered many questions correctly. Then, help him figure out what went wrong.



Poor test scores are often the result of:

- **Careless errors.** Sometimes students accidentally write things down wrong. "Oops, I meant to circle A, not B." Other times they misread something, skip a question or write sloppily.
- **Lack of preparation.** Paying attention in class is a great first step. But kids also need to read textbooks, complete homework, memorize facts, connect concepts and ask questions when they are confused.
- **Poor habits.** Students who stay up late and cram don't get enough rest. Skipping breakfast can also make it hard for them to concentrate.

Explain to your child that "Everyone makes mistakes, but not everyone learns from them." Help him identify the types of mistakes he made and brainstorm solutions for them. Could he read the instructions more carefully? Study with flash cards? Start studying several days before the test and get to bed on time the night before?

Encourage your child to correct each of his incorrect answers. That way, he'll be able to use this test to review for future tests.

Source: R. Fry, "Ace" Any Test, Cengage Learning.



A 'think through' sheet shows the way

Middle schoolers must learn how to take responsibility for their own learning. A "think through" sheet can help. Before your child starts her homework, have her divide a piece of paper into three columns. Then she should:

1. **Label the columns:** *I have to;* and do it. If the answer is *no*, she should move to the third column.
 2. **Write the things** she has to do for homework in the first column. For example, "1. Multiply two-digit numbers in math. 2. Write a book report."
 3. **Fill in the second column.** If she knows how to do a task, your child can write *yes* and go ahead
 4. **Think about ways** to get help. Could she look in her textbook? Check with a friend? Ask the teacher for help? Have her write down her options in column three.
- If she gets stuck on a task, your child will have a list of steps she can take.

Source: R.F. Flippo, *Texts and Tests: Teaching Study Skills Across Content Areas*, Heinemann Publishing.

Learning is its own reward

Should you pay your child for grades? *No*, say many education experts. Paying for grades:

- **Emphasizes money** over learning.
- **Doesn't help your child** experience the satisfaction of a job well done.
- **Focuses on outcome**, not effort.

Celebrate success with time spent together.

Source: M.E. Flannery, "Cash for Grades?" National Education Association, niswc.com/cash_grades.

Retelling improves reading

Asking your child to retell a story she's read is a great way to help her be a more thoughtful reader. Share three rules with your child:

1. **Tell what's important.**
2. **Tell it in a way** that makes sense.
3. **Don't tell too much.**



Then, have her tell you the beginning, middle and end of the story. She should be able to name the main characters. If she forgets a key detail, say, "Let's read that part again." She'll learn that sometimes she has to read things more than once to comprehend them.

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

Strengthen math vocabulary

Product. Perimeter. When students learn math, they also have to learn a lot of new vocabulary. To help, have your child:

- **Play Math Concentration.** He should write a math term on one index card, and its definition on another. Deal out pairs of cards face down. Take turns turning over two cards to find matches.
- **Draw pictures** that show a word doing what it represents. For *circumference* (the distance around a circle), for example, he could write the word *circumference* around a circle.



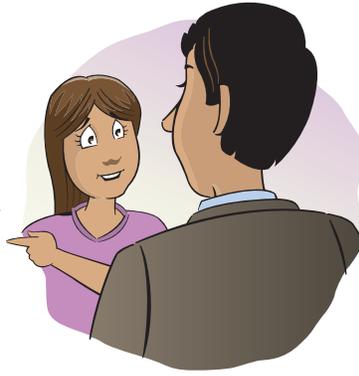
Source: J. Willis, *How Your Child Learns Best*, Sourcebooks.



What should parents say when kids witness bullying?

Q: My daughter told me that there are some mean kids in her class who are picking on another student. When I asked what she did about it, she said she did nothing. How should I handle this situation?

A: It isn't always easy to stand up to a bully. Your daughter may fear being labeled as a snitch or becoming a target herself. Or she simply may not know what steps to take. But everyone has the responsibility to take action to stop hurtful bullying behavior. To give her the power to do what she knows is right:



- **Have a casual talk about what's going on.** "You say some kids are being mean to Karen. What have you seen or heard them do?"
- **Express confidence in your child.** Say, "I know you'd like to stop this from happening, and you can."
- **Encourage her to tell a teacher** or other school staff. She could say, "Please check out the bathroom near the cafeteria after lunch. Don't tell anyone I told you."
- **Encourage her to talk to her friends.** Together, they might distract the bully, or simply say, "Cut it out. It's not cool to pick on people."
- **Suggest that your child seek out the victim** and offer her support and friendship.



Are you emphasizing priority-setting?

To be organized, students have to know how to prioritize. But determining priorities is a tall order for many kids. Are you helping your child learn how to put first things first? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

1. **Do you tell** your child to write down all his assignments every day—whether they are due tomorrow, next week or next month?
2. **Do you explain** that his top priority should be work that is due tomorrow?
3. **Do you help** your child decide what to do first if multiple things are due at the same time?
4. **Do you encourage** your child to complete a small part of a long-term project each day?
5. **Do you enforce** rules about what your child must finish before relaxing or socializing?

How well are you doing?

More *yes* answers mean you are helping your child prioritize. For each *no*, try that idea from the quiz.

"Whatever the times, one thing will never change. Fathers and mothers, if you have children, they must come first."

—Barbara Bush

Add poetry to reading time

Reading poetry with your child will give her a greater awareness of language. She's likely to hear new words (it's not just *black*, it's *ebony*), and gain ideas for her own writing. When sharing poems with your child:

- **Read a wide variety.** Look for a collection of poetry in the library. Or ask for recommendations from your child's teacher.
- **Read slowly.** Let your child listen to each word.
- **Talk about new words.** Lewis Carroll's "The Walrus and the Carpenter" takes place on a "briny beach." If your child doesn't know what *briny* means, this is a good chance to help her look it up.

Connect learning to real life

Encourage your child's desire to learn by showing him how things he learns at school can help him in real life. Math skills, for example, can help him understand sports statistics, and get the best deal for his money on a car. A science vocabulary word may show up in a spy movie or a sci-fi novel.



Develop a 'growth mindset'

When some kids hit an obstacle at school, they say things like, "I'm not good at this," and quit trying. But other kids take another view. "This is tough, but I bet I can learn it."

The children in the second group have what researchers call a "growth mindset." They believe that they can learn and get smarter. That makes them more likely to stick with a problem and solve it.

Foster this mindset in your child by encouraging her to consider different strategies when she's stuck. Praise her for trying new things and not giving up.

Source: E. Blad, "Nurturing Growth Mindsets: Six Tips from Carol Dweck," Education Week, niswc.com/mindset.

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