

Helping Children Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School



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Title 1 Cooperative

Educational Service Unit #10

Provide practice to help your child master math fundamentals

As students progress through the grades, the math they learn builds on the math that came before. That's why mastering basic math skills in elementary school is so important.

Regular practice is essential. It reinforces your child's knowledge and establishes positive math habits that will help her learn more.

To help your child build a solid math foundation:

- **Review math facts often.** Help your child make a set of flash cards with the facts she needs to know (6×7 , $12 - 5$ etc.). Pull them out frequently for short practice sessions. She has mastered a fact when she can give the correct answer in less than three seconds.
- **Show her how to find answers**, rather than just giving them to her. For example, if she doesn't know what 3×5 equals, she can draw three parallel horizontal lines, and cross them with five vertical lines. Then she can count the intersections to get the answer.
- **Emphasize neatness.** Messy writing is the cause of many math errors. Using graph paper can help your child line numbers up neatly.
- **Encourage her to do a little extra.** If the teacher assigns ten problems, tackling 12 will give her more practice.
- **Have fun with "mental math."** See if your child can figure out a problem without writing anything down. Practice mental estimating, too.



Boost your child's motivation to learn

Motivation to learn is like the engine in a car. Without it, your child won't get very far. To fuel your elementary schooler's motivation:

- **Let him see** that you always want to learn. Look up answers to questions. Try new things. Show curiosity.
- **Discuss interesting things** you learn with him. Talk about exciting new ideas or scientific discoveries.
- **Show interest** in his school-work. Ask questions to learn and share—not just to quiz him.
- **Demonstrate a positive** attitude about challenges. Help your child see that problems can be solved. If he is struggling in school, ask the teacher what you and your child can do at home to improve things.
- **Tell him that you know** he has the ability to learn. Your confidence in him can help him have more confidence in himself.

Stop food-allergy bullying

In a recent survey of children with food allergies, 31 percent reported being teased or bullied about their allergies by peers. But only 12 percent of their parents said they knew about the bullying. If your child has a food allergy, ask about her experiences. Alert the school to bullying so it can be stopped.

Source: F. Cooke and others, "Food Allergy-Related Bullying Among Children and Adolescents," *Journal of Pediatric Psychology*, Society of Pediatric Psychology.

Build research skills with an online scavenger hunt

For fun improving research skills, give your child a list of questions that have only one correct answer. For example:

How many people have walked on the moon?

What is the current temperature in the capital of Iowa?

See how quickly he can find the answers online

(without asking Siri or Alexa).

Show him how he can use multiple key words to make his searches more effective.



Foster wise decision-making

Giving your child opportunities to make decisions and helping her think them through is the best way to ensure that she will make wise choices when it counts. When offering choices:

- **Set boundaries.** All of the options you offer should be acceptable.
- **Discuss possible outcomes.** Talk about what could happen as a result of each of your child's options.
- **Help your child think** about what she's learned from past decisions.
- **Gradually increase** the number of decisions you let your child make.





How can I make the move up to middle school easier?

Q: My fifth grader is getting anxious about going to middle school next year. Most of his friends will be going to another school. What can I do in the coming months to help?

A: The move to middle school involves lots of change—from one teacher to many, from being in the highest grade in the school to the lowest, and sometimes, from having an established group of friends to not knowing many people. It's not surprising your child is nervous!



To build his confidence in his ability to navigate the changes:

- **Make your child feel competent.** Discuss the things that make him a good friend. Help him practice his organizational skills. If the middle school has lockers, get him a combination lock and let him practice unlocking and locking it.
- **Ask if you and your child can tour** the school this spring while classes are in session. Just walking around will give him a better idea of what to expect. Pick up a map of the hallways if one is available.
- **Point out that everyone** in his grade will be starting fresh and looking for new friends. And he'll still have chances to see old friends, too.
- **Find out about school activities** that start in the summer, such as orientation days or sports or band practice. If your child participates, he can make some new friends before the school year starts.



Are you helping your child read fluently?

Students who read aloud with *fluency* are more likely to have a strong understanding of the text. Fluent reading is smooth, accurate and expressive. Are you helping your child develop reading fluency? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

1. **Do you make** time for your child to read to you, on top of the time you read to her?
2. **Do you allow** your child to choose what to read aloud, even if she's read it before?
3. **Do you wait** until your child has finished reading to correct misread words, rather than interrupting?
4. **Do you tell** your child how to pronounce a word if she asks, then encourage her to keep reading?

5. **Do you talk** with your child about the book when she has finished reading?

How well are you doing?

More *yes* answers mean you are fostering fluency. For each *no*, try that idea.

"Fluency is a wonderful bridge to comprehension and to a life-long love of reading."

—Maryanne Wolf

Offer encouragement that supports self-reliance

You want your child to recognize and feel good about his strengths and accomplishments, without needing praise from someone else. To offer positive encouragement:

- **Focus on** your child's effort and progress. "You have really gotten the hang of subtraction. It must be really satisfying to see your effort pay off."
- **Describe** rather than giving your opinions. "Look at how *organized* and *detailed* your science report is!" not "This is great!"
- **Don't wait** for your child to do well. "That didn't work out the way you planned, did it? I know you'll try again. What could you do differently next time?"

Be an attentive listener

To help your child feel comfortable talking to you about challenges or situations she may be facing at school, show her that you are a caring listener. Make it a point to:

- **Tell your child** that you want to hear what she has to say.
- **Set a time** when your child can have your full attention if you can't listen in the moment.
- **Listen without interrupting** and restate what your child says to confirm your understanding.

Promote problem-solving and writing with a letter

Does your child have a regular task that never gets done—at least, not without a lot of nagging? Ask him to write you a letter explaining why ... and what he thinks would solve the problem. This will force him to think logically about what he's doing—and give him a chance to write persuasively.



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