

# Helping Children Learn<sup>®</sup>

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School  
Prince William County Schools



October 2025

## Learning from mistakes builds skills and self-confidence

Nobody's perfect, and like all kids, your child will sometimes make mistakes on tests or assignments. But that's no reason for either of you to get discouraged!

Research shows that when children are encouraged to learn from their errors, they do better in school. When they fix their mistakes, students learn that they can improve. And when they avoid repeating the errors, they learn they can get smarter—and that boosts their confidence about their ability to learn.

Begin any discussion about your child's schoolwork by pointing out what your elementary schooler did well. Then, to help your child concentrate on learning from mistakes:

- **Ask if your child understands** why an answer is wrong. If so, have your student correct it. If your child isn't sure, offer suggestions or encourage your child to ask the teacher for help.
- **Talk about ways** your child can avoid making that kind of mistake again—by reading carefully, slowing down, double-checking work, etc.
- **Celebrate progress.** Did your child make fewer mistakes on this test than the last one? Praise the improvement and talk about how learning from past mistakes likely made a difference.

Source: H.S. Schroder and others, "Neural evidence for enhanced attention to mistakes among school-aged children with a growth mindset," *Developmental Cognitive Neuroscience*, Elsevier B.V.



## Give a responsibility lesson

Doing chores at home teaches children about responsibility—and that pays off in school. Chores can help your child:

- **Develop school skills**, such as following directions and timeliness.
- **Feel invested** in work and take pride in successful effort.
- **Learn basic life skills**, such as caring for clothes and keeping things clean.

## Ask your child to teach you

Having your child teach you can reinforce newly-learned information in your student's memory—and reveal gaps in comprehension. Try these strategies:

- **Ask your child** to explain an assignment, teach you a concept or read a passage from a school text aloud.
- **Let your child give you** a quiz about topics the class is studying. Ask questions, even if you understand everything.
- **Present a "problem"** you are having, and ask your child to help you solve it. What should you do first?



## Take your child on a virtual STEM trip

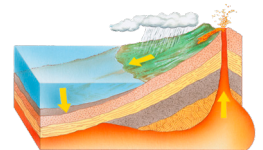
Digital media offers exciting ways to spark your child's interest in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) fields. By taking virtual field trips online together, you can help your child experience:

- **Museum exhibits.** You and your child can take a self-guided tour of the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History ([www.naturalhistory.si.edu/visit/virtual-tour](http://www.naturalhistory.si.edu/visit/virtual-tour)). See 360-degree views of exhibits about dinosaurs, oceans, gems and minerals and more. Help your child read the exhibit text to learn more about the items on display.
- **National parks.** See the natural wonders of the Grand Canyon and Yellowstone without leaving home ([www.nps.gov/subjects/npsccelebrates/find-your-virtual-park.htm](http://www.nps.gov/subjects/npsccelebrates/find-your-virtual-park.htm)).
- **Mars.** Footage from NASA's Perseverance rover lets your elementary schooler explore the Jezero Crater on the red planet's surface ([www.youtube.com/watch?v=γOplTCgnJFQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=γOplTCgnJFQ)).

## Graphics clarify meaning

Photos, maps, graphs and illustrations can give students a clearer understanding of a text's meaning. Encourage your child to study graphics before reading and ask:

- *What do the images show?*
- *What details are included?*
- *What might the material be about based on these graphics?*
- *Why might the author have included them?*





## How seriously should I take my child's negativity?

**Q:** My child keeps saying "I hate school." I'm not sure how to respond. I don't want to make a big thing out of a casual moan, but I don't want to ignore a real problem, either. What should I do?

**A:** You are right that not all children who say they hate school actually do. Sometimes, they are just looking for attention, or for a chance to delay doing schoolwork. However, since your child has said this more than once, something may be going on.

To figure out what it is:

- **Start a conversation.** At a time when you are both calm, say, "You've said you hate school a few times. What's making you feel this way?"
- **Ask follow-up questions** if your child can't identify the problem. Is your child struggling in a subject, or feeling lonely or overwhelmed?
- **Brainstorm together** about actions your child can take, such as increasing study time, joining a school activity or asking for help.
- **Point out that almost all** situations have pros as well as cons. Ask what your child likes about school.
- **Reach out to the teacher.** Explain how your child is feeling and ask for suggestions and support.



## Are you teaching decision-making?

Your child will make many decisions in school that can affect achievement: To tackle a challenge or give up, to give in to peer pressure or do what's right, etc. Are you teaching your child how to choose wisely? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you tell** your child that all choices have consequences?
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you include** your child in family decision-making discussions?
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you set** an example by thinking through decisions aloud as you make them?
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you encourage** your child to ask questions and gather relevant information before making a choice?
- \_\_\_ **5. Do you offer** plenty of chances to make decisions

and then expect your child to live with the outcomes?

### How well are you doing?

*More yes answers mean you are helping your child learn to think decisions through. For each no, try that idea.*

*"You cannot make progress without making decisions."  
—Jim Rohn*

## Optimize test outcomes

In addition to learning the subject matter before tests, your child will also benefit from learning effective test-taking strategies. Encourage your elementary schooler to:

- **Pay careful attention** to directions, and ask the teacher for clarification if they are confusing.
- **Answer all questions** and show all work. The teacher may award partial credit, and blank answers won't earn points.
- **Read all answer choices** on multiple choice questions and cross out those that can't be right before choosing an answer.
- **Use extra time to review** answers and check for careless mistakes.

## Exercise is brain-building

Getting regular exercise is vital for your child's physical and mental health. And studies show it boosts children's alertness and memory, too. To add exercise to your child's life in fun ways:

- **Start family traditions** that include physical activity, such as taking a hike every weekend.
- **Perk up chores.** Play upbeat music or race to finish the job.
- **Include your child** in your own exercise activity, such as jogging or stretching.

Source: A. McPherson and others, "Physical activity, cognition and academic performance," *BMC Public Health*.

## Help make schoolwork work

Schoolwork should be a priority for your child. If your student can't finish assignments because of other activities, adjust the schedule to allow your child enough time to focus on the schoolwork. Also remember that assignments are meant to help students practice skills. Your child's best effort, not perfect work, is the goal.



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