

# Helping Children Learn<sup>®</sup>

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



September 2023

## Add to your child's vocabulary while reading together

Reading together at home every day is one of the best ways to help your child learn. Reading exposes your child to new ideas and concepts—and especially to new words. And that word power will make it easier for your child to read and understand other reading material in the future!

When you read together, use these four strategies to build your child's working vocabulary:



- 1. Share a wide variety of books.** In addition to stories, read books about nature or that explain how things work. At the library, check out a book about a sport or activity your child enjoys. Or, read a biography about a person your elementary schooler admires.
- 2. Stop and discuss words** your child might not be familiar with as you read. "It says here that peacocks are known for their *plumage*. Do you know what that means? Let's look it up."
- 3. Look at a thesaurus.** Help your child find synonyms for words that appear often in reading material and conversation. "That *beautiful* peacock is also *stunning*, *gorgeous* and *exquisite*."
- 4. Help your child create** a personal dictionary. Give your elementary schooler a notebook with a page for each letter of the alphabet. After discovering a new word in a book, have your child write the word and its definition in the notebook. Review a few pages from time to time.



## School success starts with attendance

Chronic absence is a widespread problem that affects almost one in three children in the United States. It negatively affects the learning of the absent students *and* their classmates. Poor attendance makes a young child less likely

to read well by third grade, and an older one less likely to graduate.

Your child's most fundamental school responsibility is to be in class on time every day. To instill strong attendance habits:

- **Maintain a schedule.** Establish evening habits that make mornings easier. Select outfits and pack up needed school items at night.

- **Plan ahead.** Make medical and other appointments during non-school hours whenever possible.
- **Seek help if needed.** Many factors contribute to missing school. If your family struggles with health, transportation or other issues, ask school staff for help connecting with resources.

Source: "Chronic Absence: 10 Facts About School Attendance," Attendance Works.

## Make a learning difference

Being involved with your child's education is important—in any language! Even if English is not your first language, there are many things you can do. Here are just a few:

- **Attend conferences** and events for families. Request interpreting help or translated documents.
- **Support your student** at home. Ask your child about school. Talk about why it matters. Encourage your child to read.
- **Connect with other families.** Share information. Discuss ways to help the school meet the needs of all students.



## Give study skills a boost

To support effective learning from day one:

- **Set** a regular study time when your child is most alert. Create a study spot with few distractions.
- **Teach** your child to make daily to-do lists and cross off completed items.
- **Ask your child** to explain concepts. Putting material into their own words helps students reinforce it in their minds.



## Set the tone for respect

When students have respect for teachers and classmates, they help create the positive academic environment children need to learn well. To promote respectful behavior:

- **Talk about why it matters.** How does your child think it feels to be treated with respect or disrespect?
- **Notice when your child** is respectful. "You listened when the other kids were joking around. I was impressed."
- **Correct disrespectful behavior** privately. Explain what to do instead.



## My child's gaming is out of control. What can I do?

**Q:** My elementary schooler started playing more digital games during the pandemic. But now that's all my child wants to do! Schoolwork gets rushed, and I'm worried about the effects. What can I do?

**A:** Your child is not the only one! Research shows that children's recreational screen time rose during the pandemic and hasn't come back down. Some educational screen activities can be beneficial, but too much time on the wrong activities can have a negative impact on health and learning.



Game designers know how to create games that keep players hooked. So you must help your child find some balance and make time for learning, exercising and spending time with family. Here's how:

- **Make it clear** that improving in school is more important than leveling up in a game. Say that you will be setting limits on game time to allow plenty of time for learning activities.
- **Establish screen-free times**, such as during schoolwork time, meal time and family time.
- **Provide alternative fun.** Plan daily activities such as reading aloud, playing outdoors and playing board games.

Source: M.M. Hedderson and others, "Trends in Screen Time Use Among Children During the COVID-19 Pandemic, July 2019 Through August 2021," JAMA Network Open.



## Are you building resilience skills?

Few children get through school without facing obstacles. Resilient students react to them in positive ways. Are you helping your child develop the ability to handle challenges with resilience? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you point out** your child's strengths and ways to apply them to challenges?
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you discuss** ways your child has successfully handled tough situations in the past?
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you encourage** your child to talk through problems? Do you ask questions rather than provide solutions?
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you tell** your child about the strategies you use to solve problems? "I'm going to look online for directions on how to fix this."

- \_\_\_ **5. Do you offer** chances for your child to practice making decisions?

### How well are you doing?

More *yes* answers mean you are preparing your child to be resilient. For each *no*, try that idea.

"Every strike brings me closer to the next home run."

—Babe Ruth

## Teach three Ps for learning

Students who take active responsibility for their learning get more out of it. Help your child remember to practice three Ps:

- 1. Prepare** for learning. That means getting enough sleep, eating a healthy breakfast and arriving in class with pencils, paper and a positive attitude.
- 2. Participate** in class. Asking questions and exchanging ideas with others strengthens your child's understanding of the material.
- 3. Persist.** Let your child know that effort pays off!



## Effective communication encourages cooperation

No parent likes to keep repeating directions to a child who isn't listening. Instead, to help your child focus and comply:

- **Replace requests with routines.** Routines help your child know what to do when.
- **Move close** to your child and speak at a normal volume.
- **Stick to essential words.** "Jack, backpack in the car now, please."

## Let your child lend a hand

It's easy to get caught up in meeting your child's needs. But it's also important to ask your child to do something for you sometimes. Just pick an age-appropriate task and explain the steps. Kids develop traits like self-reliance when they do things for others. They feel competent. These feelings are motivating, at home and at school.

So whether you need a hand unpacking groceries or measuring for a new shelf, ask your elementary schooler to help!

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