

Helping Children Learn[®]

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School



February 2019

North Miami Elementary School

Simple activities help your child explore the world of science

Like many parents, you may be unsure how to help your child learn science. You don't have to have a science background or expensive equipment to do it. Just encourage your child to observe the science that is going on all around him.

Try these activities together:

- **Begin a collection** of items from nature, such as rocks or shells. Each time your child adds something new, help him record where it came from and describe its features.
- **Keep a weather chart.** Help your child keep track of the temperature and other conditions every day for a month.
- **Take a walk on a warm night** and look at the stars. Can your child identify constellations? If not, look for a book or an app that can help.
- **Figure out how the spin cycle** of the washing machine gets the water out of the clothes.
- **Visit a park or nature preserve** at different times of the year. Have your child record and classify the animals he sees—as mammals, reptiles, insects, etc. Does he see different animals in different seasons?
- **Use a magnifying glass to look closely** at leaves on a house plant, a bug or a hair from your child's head.



Practice analytical thinking

Comparing and contrasting are important ways students learn to think analytically.

Encourage your child to sort things into groups, then talk about their similarities and differences. Ask questions like, "How are fish and humans the same? How are they different?"



Stop clowning around

It's great to have a sense of humor. But constantly disrupting class with jokes and body sounds is no laughing matter. Being the class clown can negatively affect your child's learning and his relationships with classmates. If your child is acting up in class:

- **Talk to the teacher** about what may be triggering his behavior.
- **Talk to your child** about when it's OK to be silly and when it's not. Let him know what behavior you and the teacher expect. Set consequences for misbehavior.

Source: L.A. Barnett, "The Education of Playful Boys: Class Clowns in the Classroom," *Frontiers in Psychology*, niswc.com/clown.

Serve foods that feed your child's brain

The food your child eats can have a big effect on his performance in school. Students who skip breakfast don't do as well in school as kids who start their day with a healthy meal. And when children eat meals that are high in fat and sugar, their bodies tend to crash, and they become very tired—making it hard to concentrate.

To help your child learn to make healthy food choices, buy only the food you want him to eat—such as lean proteins, fruit, vegetables and whole grains. He can't eat unhealthy food if it isn't around.



Source: Childhood Nutrition Facts, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, niswc.com/nutrition.



Help your child polish writing skills

To express her thoughts effectively in writing, your child must combine a variety of skills. Here are five ways you can help her tackle the challenge:

1. **Ask your child** to think out loud before starting. Clear writing starts with clear thinking. Talking through her ideas with you can help her clarify them.
2. **Encourage your child** to take notes and make an outline before she starts to write. This will help her organize her thoughts.
3. **Have her focus** on what she wants to say in a rough draft. After she gets her ideas down, she can edit for spelling and grammar and create a final draft.
4. **Give more praise** than criticism. Be specific: "Your description really told me how Ali felt when she was lost." It's OK to point out some errors, but don't let your child think you look only for what's wrong.
5. **Be patient.** Learning to write well takes time. With your support, your child's skills will improve.



My child wants everything now. What should I do?

Q: My daughter has no patience. She can't seem to wait for anything. Her teacher says her impatience is becoming a problem at school. What can I do to fix this?

A: In this era of on-demand entertainment, it can be challenging for kids to learn to wait. But patience is necessary for school success. It takes patience to wait one's turn and to keep from interrupting others. It takes patience to read all the way to the end of a long book and to continue trying to understand something that isn't immediately clear.

To help your child develop more patience:

- **Explain that everyone** has to learn to wait, and you are going to help her with this skill.
- **Give her opportunities** to be patient. When she asks for something, say something like, "In a minute." If she wants your attention when you are busy, come up with a hand signal that means, "When I'm finished."
- **Recognize the challenge**, and praise her success. "It's hard to listen to your brother talk when you have something to say. But you waited patiently. Now I am going to listen carefully to you."
- **Demonstrate patience yourself.** Stay calm when you are stuck in traffic, for example. You might say, "It looks like we're going to be in the car for a while. Let's play a game."



Do you use report cards as learning tools?

Report cards come at the end of grading periods. But they are a great tool for new beginnings. Are you using your child's report cards to talk about school, study habits and how to move forward? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

- ___ **1. Do you set aside** time to talk with your child about each report card?
- ___ **2. Do you discuss** whether your child agrees with the grades he earned, and why or why not?
- ___ **3. Do you speak** calmly, and treat your child's report card as something to learn from?
- ___ **4. Do you help** your child recognize positive habits that led to his success, and suggest ways he can improve grades if necessary?
- ___ **5. Do you contact** the teacher if you have concerns?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are helping your child use his report card as a guide for the future. For each no, try that idea.

*"You don't get results by focusing on results. You get results by focusing on the actions that produce results."
—Mike Hawkins*

Add interest to reading

When you make reading engaging for your child, she's more likely to do it often. Together, use reading as a chance to:

- **Explore.** Help your child find an appealing book series. She may not be able to resist picking up book after book.
- **Investigate.** If she doesn't know what a word means, ask your child to guess. Look it up together and see if she's right.
- **Play.** Take something you read and turn it into a fun challenge: Can your child summarize a story in three sentences?
- **Experiment.** Read new kinds of books. If your child usually reads fiction, try a biography or how-to book.

Homework helps skills grow

Homework helps reinforce the lessons your child is learning at school. But that's not all! When he completes assignments on his own, your child also learns key skills like responsibility, initiative, perseverance and time management.



Discover remarkable people

Many famous people were born in February. This month, help your child learn about:

- **Charles Dickens (February 7).** Many of this celebrated English writer's works are semi-autobiographical. Ask your child to write a fictional story using details from her own life.
- **Thomas Edison (February 11).** Edison had little formal education, but went on to earn more than 1,000 U.S. patents for his inventions. What would your child like to invent?
- **Susan B. Anthony (February 15).** Anthony led the campaign for voting rights for women. Talk with your child about why the ability to vote is important.

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