

# Elementary School Parents<sup>®</sup>

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West Orange Elementary  
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*make the difference!*



## Five strategies for productive parent-teacher conferences

Some parents say that their parent-teacher conference is one of the most valuable things they attend all year. These one-on-one meetings are great for learning more about your child's strengths and weaknesses, and will give you a better idea about the year ahead.

Here are five tips to help you get the most from your conference:

- 1. Talk to your child.** Ask him to tell you what he thinks are his easiest and most difficult subjects—and why. Does he have any questions he'd like you to ask the teacher?
- 2. Make a list of things** the teacher needs to know. You know your child better than anyone else. Sharing some of what you know with the teacher will make it easier to meet your child's needs.
- 3. Write down your questions.** Ask things such as:
  - **Is my child in different groups** for different subjects?
  - **Does my child participate** in class discussions and activities?
  - **Is my child working up to his ability?**
  - **How well does my child get** along with others?
- 4. Arrive on time.** Teachers usually have many conferences scheduled during a single day. Arriving on time will allow you to take full advantage of the time the teacher has available.
- 5. Create an action plan.** Ask the teacher what you can do at home to reinforce what your child is learning at school. Try to get at least one or two specific suggestions.

## Set limits to balance your child's schedule



After-school activities can help your child develop responsibility, social skills and

self-discipline. But participating in too many activities can have a negative effect on your child's health and grades.

All children need time for homework, downtime, adequate sleep and family. Look at your child's schedule. If it's too crowded, don't be afraid to blow the whistle.

Here are some tips:

- **Set the rules of the game.** Many families set a limit of one sport or activity per child. Tell your child that school is the top priority. Activities come second.
- **Focus on the fundamentals.** If your child can't do her math homework until late at night, adjust her schedule. Activities should never interfere with schoolwork.
- **Stay on the sidelines.** If your child shows signs of stress, or she doesn't seem to be enjoying an activity, it may be time to rethink how she spends her time.

## Perseverance helps your child succeed in school and in life



“These math problems are too hard,” your child says as he is doing his homework. Your response should always be the same: “Everything is hard until it gets easy.” Ask your child to think about when he learned how to tie his shoes. That was hard. But then he figured it out and now it’s easy.

School is filled with lots of hard things, from reading challenging books to learning how to do complicated math problems. Here are things to say and do when your child says something is too hard:

- **Let him know** that you believe he can do it.

- **Remind him** of other “hard” things that are now easy for him to do.
- **Break difficult tasks** into smaller pieces. If reading the whole book seems too hard, try starting with just one or two chapters.
- **Help your child see** the link between his effort and success.

**Source:** C. Heath and D. Heath, *Switch: How to Change Things When Change is Hard*, Broadway Business.

**“I’ve learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.”**

—Maya Angelou

## Establish a system to keep track of school-related papers



A new school year is a fresh start for your child—and her backpack! It may be free of crinkled homework and lost permission slips now, but it won’t stay that way without some attention.

To keep schoolwork and papers organized all year long:

- **Use a system.** For example, have your child keep one folder in her backpack that’s just for homework and take-home papers. Each day after school, look through the homework/ take-home folder together. What assignments does she have today? What papers do you need to read, sign or return?
- **File papers at home.** Some papers must be saved, such as study guides and fliers about upcoming events. The trick is to do this right away. Keep a folder at home for school-related paperwork. Look through it—and clean it out—at least weekly. Post items you use daily, such as lunch menus, on the fridge.
- **Keep a calendar.** Record test days, field trips and performance times. Each day, add new dates and check for upcoming events. Encourage your child to review the calendar with you.
- **Check online.** Some important school messages come via email. Also check the school website regularly. You may catch details that didn’t make it home—and even find missing forms, ready to print and return on time!

## Are you showing your child how to follow directions?



Classrooms—and families—function better when children know how to follow directions. Are you teaching your child this vital skill? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you avoid** giving your child directions until you have her undivided attention? Do you look her in the eye and call her by name?
- \_\_\_ **2. Are you specific** with your instructions? If a job involves several steps, do you name them? “First, pick up your clothes. Then put your books on the shelf.”
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you ask your child** to repeat what you said before she begins a task?
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you have a checklist** posted for things you do every day (getting ready for school, etc.)?
- \_\_\_ **5. Do you praise your child** when she follows directions correctly?

### How well are you doing?

Each *yes* means you are teaching your child the skill of following directions. For each *no* answer, try that idea.

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# Multitasking results in mistakes and decreased concentration



Look around your home at homework time. Is your child studying while singing to music? Are you answering his questions while checking email?

Multitasking has become a way of life, but not necessarily a good one. In fact, while multitasking the brain doesn't really concentrate on several tasks at once. It moves quickly from one to another, not giving anything its full attention.

To avoid multitasking mistakes:

- **Prevent distractions.** Choose a quiet place for your child to study—free of TV, phones and loud music. Some kids, however, may do well with quiet background music (such as classical).
- **Set a good example.** It's natural to want to accomplish as much as possible—as quickly as possible. But do what really works. When you give your child your undivided

attention (instead of answering emails while you talk), you show him how to focus—and how important he is to you.

- **Do an experiment.** If you and your child doubt that multitasking makes you less effective, test it out. Choose a task that requires concentration. Do it with, and then without, distractions.
- **Schedule tasks.** Instead of planning multiple things at once, schedule tasks consecutively. Your child can do homework at 4:00, call friends at 5:00 and clean his room at 5:30.
- **Keep multitasking to a minimum.** It is okay when the activities don't require much thinking. For example, your child can eat a snack while talking on the phone with friends.

**Source:** C. Gedzelman, "Homework and Headphones: Multitasking Myths," *Washington Parent*, Knollwood Publications, Inc.

# Your child can improve grades by reviewing returned tests



Unless your child gets a perfect score on every test, every time, she still has some learning to do. Proper review after a test is a great way to improve scores on the next one.

After a test, your child should:

- **Review the test** when she gets it back. She should make notes about which answers she got right and which she got wrong. She should correct wrong answers.
- **Know the types of errors** she tends to make. Mistakes generally result from two things: Carelessness—

your child rushed through the test. Lack of preparation—your child didn't study enough.

- **Make adjustments.** Brainstorm with your child about how she can reduce careless mistakes. She could read each question twice and check her work before turning in her paper.

For mistakes due to lack of preparation, the solution is probably more study. Experts suggest beginning to review at least five days before a test.

**Source:** W. Luckie and W. Smethurst, *Study Power*, Brookline Books.

**Q:** Getting three kids out the door in the morning is hard! One day, someone won't get up. Another day, somebody forgets a science book and has to go back for it. The result is that my kids usually miss the school bus and I end up driving them to school. What can I do?

## Questions & Answers

**A:** Mornings are tough in many households. But as long as your kids know there's an easy out—you will drive them to school—they don't have much incentive to change.

Here's how you can begin to turn things around:

- **Call a family meeting.** Announce that Mom's Taxi has a new policy. From now on, rides to school come with a cost. (You can choose the cost—perhaps it's part of their allowance, or perhaps it means some extra time spent on chores. It doesn't have to be a high cost, but it should be something your kids want to avoid.) Anyone who rides the "taxi" will have to pay the toll.
- **Help your kids get organized** at night. Have them lay out clothes. Fill book bags. Pack lunches. And set alarm clocks to go off a few minutes earlier.
- **Give everyone a five-minute warning** in the morning. Then calmly walk out the door and head for the bus stop. If a child comes racing along with one shoe on and the other in hand—well, figure you're giving the neighbors a chuckle.
- **Enforce consequences** once you set them. Odds are, you'll only have to collect your "taxi fare" once or twice before everyone gets better organized.

# It Matters: Discipline

## Research reveals discipline that actually works



Think about how your parents raised you. What discipline methods did they use?

Research shows that even when parents don't agree with how they were disciplined as children, many use the same approaches themselves.

For example, adults who were yelled at as kids were more likely to yell as parents—even if they thought yelling didn't work, according to one study.

In order to discipline effectively, consider what you believe will work. Experts say certain methods work best. For example:

- **Acknowledge good behavior.** What are the most important behaviors for your child to learn? When you see them, take notice. Say, "It's nice that you invited the new boy to sit with you at lunch. I bet that made him feel good."
- **Use consequences** that are natural or logical. When your child does something inappropriate, choose a natural or logical response, if possible. A natural consequence of forgetting homework is getting a zero. A logical consequence of losing an item is having to replace it.
- **Plan ahead.** Talk with your child about discipline. Why is it helpful? How does it work? After considering her ideas, list basic rules and consequences. Then follow through with consistency, fairness and respect.

Source: J. Warner, "Parents Flunking Discipline," WebMD, niscw.com/flunk.

## Help your child think through the consequences of decisions

Kids may understand the advice "Look before you leap," but it can be hard to follow. Thinking about consequences takes patience, practice and self-discipline. With your child:

- **Review past decisions.** When has your child made good choices? Did she tell the truth about something she did wrong?
- **Be a role model.** Think through dilemmas. Weigh the pros and cons. Decide carefully what's best. Talk about people who had the courage to do what was right.
- **Discuss new decisions.** Consider tough situations your child might face. What are her choices? What are possible consequences? How does she feel about them?



- **Praise good decisions.** Peers may encourage your child to do the wrong thing—or tease her for doing the right thing. Overpower these influences by providing a positive, supportive environment that rewards well-made choices.

Source: L. and R. Eyre, *Teaching Your Children Responsibility*, Fireside.

## Learning to work with others leads to academic success



There's a lot to be said for encouraging children to show leadership. But, let's face it—some kids are just plain bossy. They won't take turns. They won't share. They won't listen to what anyone says.

In life, your child will be expected to work with others. Whether it's a group project in social studies or a role in the school play, he'll be more successful if he knows how to be a team player.

To help your child learn how to be less of a dictator and more of a contributor:

- **Let family members** take turns making some decisions—from which movie to watch to what to have for dinner.
- **Use the "Mom Rule."** If one child cuts the cake, the other gets to choose the first piece. If one child chooses the game, the other gets the first turn.
- **Teach fair ways to decide** who goes first. Have your kids play "rock, paper, scissors" to see who gets on the computer first. Flip a coin to decide who takes the first bath.
- **Reinforce sharing behavior** when you see it.