

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

Gadsden City Schools

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## A peaceful home environment makes learning in school easier

**T**oday's students are facing high levels of stress and anxiety. When students struggle with their well-being, it can hinder their ability to focus, learn and perform at their best.

Here are some simple things you can do at home to support your child's mental and emotional well-being:

- **Remember the big three:** good nutrition, adequate sleep and exercise. These are the keys to overall wellness.
- **Encourage laughter.** Laughter should be a part of each day. Have everyone share favorite funny shows, movies, jokes and stories.
- **Share good things.** Every day, have each family member report one good thing that happened. Try to do this during a family meal and

write down the responses in a family gratitude journal.

- **Share stress-relief strategies.** Teach your child to take deep breaths, go for a walk or turn on some relaxing music when feeling anxious or stressed.
- **Stay organized.** An organized, clutter-free home creates a more peaceful environment for everyone. It also teaches your child how to take care of belongings.
- **Stay connected.** Listen when your child shares concerns, and offer reassurance. If you become worried about your child, make an appointment with the pediatrician.

Source: R. Chatterjee, "Kids are back in school—and struggling with mental health issues," National Public Radio.

## Use a four-step process to end procrastination



At one time or another, most students put off completing their schoolwork. But

when procrastination becomes a habit, it can negatively affect school performance.

To break the procrastination habit, have your child:

1. **Select just one thing to do.** Sometimes kids put things off when they feel overwhelmed. Help your child focus on one task at a time.
2. **Be prepared.** Before starting, have your child gather materials and get water or a snack. This minimizes interruptions and helps maintain focus.
3. **Set a timer for 30 minutes** and begin working. While the timer is ticking, your child should focus only on that assignment.
4. **Celebrate.** Once the timer goes off, encourage your child to take a break and do something fun for a few minutes.

Your child can repeat this process until schoolwork is complete!

Source: R. Emmett, *The Procrastinating Child: A Handbook for Adults to Help Children Stop Putting Things Off*, Walker & Company.

# Promote skills that will prepare your child for middle school



Long before students enter middle school, teachers start preparing them for its challenges.

You can do the same thing at home by encouraging your elementary schooler to:

- **Manage time.** Demonstrate how to use short periods of time in productive ways. Your child could study flash cards on the way to basketball practice, or review math problems on the bus.
- **Get organized.** Make sure your child is using a planner to keep track of school assignments. Suggest ways to organize school papers and recommend cleaning out school bags and study spaces once a week.

- **Take notes.** Encourage your child to practice this skill while reading at home. Ask your student to identify and write down key words and information, then summarize the essential points.
- **Plan ahead.** Show your child how to make a study schedule and stick to it. Explain that several short study sessions are more effective than cramming.

**“The best preparation for good work tomorrow is to do good work today.”**

—Elbert Hubbard

# Share test-taking strategies to boost your child’s test scores



There is an important test tomorrow, and your child wants to do well. In addition to studying, there are several things students

can do during the test to increase the likelihood of success.

Share these test-taking strategies with your child:

- **Focus on directions.** Your child should always read the directions very carefully before starting the test. If something doesn’t make sense, your child should ask the teacher.
- **Write down memorized formulas and facts right away.** If your child writes down key material from memory as soon as the test starts, it will be there to refer to later.
- **Read through all the questions quickly before starting.** Your child

can then calculate how much time there is to spend on each question.

- **Skip a question if unsure** of the answer. Tell your child to answer all of the easy questions first, then come back to the others.
- **Remember the true/false rule:** If any part of an answer is false, the whole answer is false.
- **Use multiple-choice strategies.** Your child should try to answer the question before looking at the choices, then eliminate wrong answers and choose among what’s left.
- **Outline essays.** Encourage your child to make a plan and stick to main points and key details. Even a brief outline is better than no answer.
- **Allow time to go back** and check answers. Do they make sense? Are sentences complete?

# Are you teaching your child to bounce back?



Some families want to shield their children so they never have to experience failure. Others know that overcoming

disappointments can teach children valuable lessons.

Are you helping your child learn from setbacks? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

\_\_\_ **1. Do you give your child a chance** to solve problems rather than jumping in to help right away?

\_\_\_ **2. Do you encourage your child** to think about what to do differently the next time?

\_\_\_ **3. Do you lead by example?** When you fail at something or make a mistake, do you talk about it and about how to fix it?

\_\_\_ **4. Do you help your child keep** disappointments in perspective? “You didn’t ace your test, but you earned a higher grade than last time!”

\_\_\_ **5. Do you remind your child** that setbacks are usually temporary?

## How well are you doing?

If most of your answers are *yes*, you are helping your child learn resilience. For each *no*, try that idea in the quiz.

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# Routine family dinners can improve outcomes for children



Families have varying schedules, and many wonder whether gathering for a family meal is worth the effort involved. In fact, research suggests that family meals can make a real difference.

Studies have found that kids who eat dinner with their families four or more nights a week are less likely to try cigarettes, alcohol and marijuana. They also perform better in school.

To make family meals work for you:

- **Let your child help** with meal planning, grocery shopping or even simple cooking tasks. When kids are involved with preparing the meal, they're often more invested in eating it and joining the conversation.

- **Include your child** in mealtime conversations. Ask a few specific questions, such as, "Did anything surprise you today at school?"
- **Keep it pleasant.** Avoid using mealtime as an opportunity to argue or interrogate your child.
- **Be flexible.** If evening meals are hard to schedule, share breakfast with your child. You'll have the same chance to connect.
- **Go low-tech.** Turn off the TV and digital devices. Keep phones and tablets away from the table.
- **Don't worry** if you can't eat together every night. Try to have dinner together a few times each week.

Source: "Benefits of Family Dinners," The Family Dinner Project.

# Promote regular exercise for academic and physical health



Physical fitness provides many benefits for elementary school children.

Studies show that regular physical activity is linked to higher self-control and attentiveness in school. It also significantly reduces the risk of health issues, such as type 2 diabetes.

To increase your child's activity level:

- **Plan family outings.** Pick activities your family enjoys and create some new healthy traditions. You might bundle up and go for a short walk after dinner or head to a park every Sunday afternoon.
- **Make suggestions.** When your child has a friend over, suggest they play games that involve movement, such as tag and soccer. Indoors, try games such as Simon Says.
- **Add movement to screen time.** Have your child take breaks that involve activity when watching TV or playing video games. For example, see how many sit-ups your child can do during commercial breaks.
- **Combine learning and exercise.** Toss a ball back and forth while quizzing each other on vocabulary words.
- **Be creative.** During chore time, play music or race to finish a job. While doing errands, park a few blocks away from a store and walk. Or, make a quick stop at a playground on the way home.
- **Set an example.** Children are more likely to be active when they see family members staying fit. Let your child see you stretching, running, walking with a friend, etc.

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

**Q:** My child has absolutely no patience and the teacher says it is becoming a problem at school. How can I help my child develop more patience?

## Questions & Answers

**A:** In this era of on-demand entertainment, online shopping and instant communication, it can be challenging for children to learn to wait. However, patience is vital for learning and interacting in school.

Here's how to help your child develop more patience:

- **Explain that everyone** has to learn to wait, and that you're going to help your child with this skill.
- **Let your child know** you understand how hard it can be to wait for something.
- **Offer opportunities** to be patient. When your child asks for something, say, "In a minute." If you're on the phone, develop a hand signal that means, "When I'm finished."
- **Help your child save money** for something instead of buying it right away.
- **Enjoy activities together** that require patience, such as playing board games, putting together jigsaw puzzles, baking and planting.
- **Help your child develop** strategies for waiting—like singing songs quietly, playing "I Spy" or reading a book to pass the time.
- **Model patience.** Stay calm when you're stuck in traffic, for example. Say something like, "It looks like we're going to be in the car for a while. Let's use the time to play a word game."

With practice, your child will learn the patience needed for success in school—and in life.

## Studying should be a daily habit for students



Whose name would you remember more easily—someone you spent a little time with once, or someone you see regularly?

Of course, it's the person you see often. Studying works the same way. It's better to study something repeatedly over time than to cram before a test. The keys to studying effectively are:

- **Organization.** Teach your child to use assignment notebooks and calendars to schedule study time and keep track of test dates. Making daily to-do lists works well for studying, too.
- **Participation.** Expect your child to listen in class and take notes. Your child should not be afraid to ask the teacher questions. Most likely, there are other students in the class with the same questions.
- **Dedication.** Designate a quiet, comfortable spot for working and make sure studying is part of your child's daily routine. If there are no assignments, encourage your child to read ahead or tackle some sample problems.
- **Review.** Your child should spend a short time reviewing lessons each day. Encourage your child to fill in missing information in notes while it is still fresh in mind.
- **Alternation.** Have your elementary schooler review one subject for a short time, then switch to another one before returning to the first.

## Help your child review graded tests and make adjustments

Most students are used to studying before a test, but what about afterward? Unless your elementary schooler consistently gets perfect scores, there's always more to learn! Post-test review reinforces understanding and improves future performance. After a test, encourage your child to:

- **Review the graded test** and make notes about which answers were correct and which were incorrect.
- **Identify error patterns.** Was your child careless—rushing through questions or misreading instructions? Or, was your child unprepared or confused about a topic?
- **Make adjustments.** Brainstorm together about how to reduce careless errors. For example, your child could read questions twice



and check work before turning it in.

For mistakes based on lack of preparation, the solution is more studying. Your child should start to review several days before the test. The last day should be spent going over everything one final time, not learning new material.

## Reduce your child's test anxiety with four proven strategies



It's completely normal to feel a little nervous before a big test, but for many students, this nervousness turns into excessive test anxiety. They worry so much about taking the test that their performance suffers.

To help your child relieve those pre-test jitters:

1. **Focus on preparation.** Encourage your child to regularly practice recalling the information and applying that knowledge. A strong grasp of the material builds confidence and eases stress.
2. **Discourage cramming,** which can increase anxiety and interfere with clear thinking. The most important things your child can do the day before a test are to review and then get a good night's sleep.
3. **Encourage a positive outlook.** Build confidence by reminding your child of strengths. Have your child imagine what it will feel like to do well on the test.
4. **Maintain perspective.** Remind your child that learning matters more than test scores. Make sure your child knows that your support and love are unconditional.