

Helping Children Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School



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Cushing Elementary School
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Beat the winter doldrums with a fun and local family field trip

Teachers know that a lot of real learning takes place outside the classroom. That's why they take students on field trips. But you don't have to wait for a school trip. Why not take your family out for an "inside view" of the workings of a local newspaper or other business? Your entire family will learn something—and usually for a bargain. Most tours are free.

To plan your tour, check your phone book, tourist bureau or chamber of commerce. Some places have tour guides, just waiting to explain what they do, why and how. Or ask a friend who might be willing to guide you through a place your child is curious about.

Wherever you visit, ask your child to follow these rules:

- **Do some research before you go.** Knowing a little in advance can foster good questions and help you get the most out of a visit.
- **Be polite and quiet.** Remember that in a place of business, business must go on.
- **Raise your hand** to get the guide's attention if you have a question.
- **Stay together.** Don't go anywhere that's off limits. Areas of a building are often restricted for safety reasons.

Send a thank-you note when you get home. Writing and drawing pictures of what he's seen helps your child give back and show what he has learned. Tour guides and businesses enjoy knowing what children liked best.



Rhyme in special valentines

When sending Valentine cards this year, Help your child bring special cheer. Take a small amount of time To make a list of words that rhyme. Form the words to make a line, And send them to your Valentine!

Your child can 'meet a president'—through books

Reading historical fiction or a biography is a great way to make the past come alive for your child. Together, celebrate Presidents Day on February 20 by reading about a president. Keep these tips in mind:

- **Ask** your librarian for recommendations. You may want to read about a president from your state.
- **Look** for a book with illustrations. A picture really is worth a thousand words.
- **Read** aloud if the book is challenging for your child.
- **Discuss.** Would your child want to have been this president?



Source: E.R. Codell, *How to Get Your Child to Love Reading*, Algonquin Books.



'Discipline' is another word for 'teach'

Some parents think that the word *discipline* means punishing a child. But actually, the word discipline comes from the Latin word for teaching. Experts say parents are more effective when they think about discipline as a way of teaching kids to behave in appropriate ways.

And one of the best ways to "teach" is to reward your child for doing something right. Suppose you're working at your computer.

You see your child is working quietly on her math homework. Take a short break. Say, "I am so happy you are letting me do my work. And I see you're working hard on your math. When we're finished, let's do something together." Then spend five or 10 minutes playing together doing something your child enjoys.

Source: T. Parker-Pope, "It's Not Discipline, It's a Teachable Moment," *The New York Times*, www.nytimes.com/2008/09/15/health/healthspecial2/15discipline.html.

Soften needed criticism

When you have to criticize your child's schoolwork, do it with love. The goal is to help her learn—not to make her feel bad. Include praise with the criticism. For example, "Your story's plot is so creative! More details would make it even better."





How can parents help their children cope with change?

Q: I am divorced and remarried. My older daughter seems to be coping just fine, but my 10-year-old worries me. She gets mad about everything. She doesn't want to follow the rules of our home. She says her stepfather and I are picking on her. I think she needs professional counseling, but we can't afford it. What can we do?

A: You are right to be concerned about your daughter. First, make an appointment with the school counselor. If appropriate, have your ex-husband attend the meeting, too. The counselor can discuss your concerns and may be able to recommend books or a support group. He may also connect you with free community resources for families coping with divorce.



Encourage your daughter to join an activity such as a sports team or a drama group—anything that can give her a new focus and friends. Allow her to invite a friend to join your family for an outing or a game night.

Schedule one-on-one time with your daughter. Talk about your love for her. Even if she doesn't reply, she will listen. Remember, she is only 10 and doesn't have the tools to sort all this out by herself. Time, structure, encouragement and steadfast support will help her through.



Are you promoting school attendance?

Kids can't learn if they aren't in school. Yet every day children are tardy or absent from school for reasons that could be avoided. Answer the following questions *yes* or *no* to see if you're doing everything you can to be sure your child is in school every day:

1. **Does your child know** you think it is important to go to school every day?
2. **Do you take** time at night to get ready for the next day so your child can get out the door on time in the morning?
3. **Do you know** the attendance policy and call the school to report if your child is too sick to come to school?
4. **Do you and your child** practice good hand-washing techniques? It can reduce absences by as much as 50 percent.

5. **Do you try** not to schedule routine appointments during school time?

How did you do? Each yes answer means you are helping your child get to school regularly. For each no answer, try that idea from the quiz.

“Those who get lost on the way to school will never find their way through life.”

—German proverb

Parents' upbeat attitudes encourage kids' studying

Begging and threatening children to study doesn't work well. Instead, talk about the many benefits of education and try these ideas to motivate your child to learn:

- **Be a learner yourself.** Let your child see you read and tackle new projects.
- **Share what you learn.** Show excitement about things that fascinate you.
- **Ask about school.** Express genuine curiosity about your child's learning.
- **Never lose faith.** If your child has learning problems, resolve them together.
- **Give compliments.** When your child tries hard—even if he struggles—admire his efforts.

Source: R.J. Wlodkowski, *Motivation for Learning*, National Education Association.

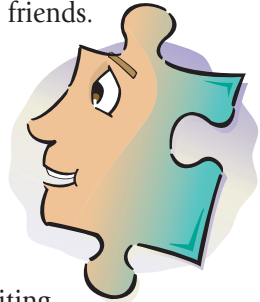
Make all the world a stage

Here's a fun activity for a wintry day: Check out a children's play at the library. Read it aloud as a family. Let each person pick a part. (Adults can also sit in the audience.) Have fun watching each other perform.

Don't forget about playtime

Children need to work hard, but they need to play hard, too. Elementary schoolers still use toys to play, but they also love to play games with friends. You might suggest:

- **Ball games** such as kickball.
- **Table games** including jacks and puzzles.
- **Word games** that involve talking or writing.
- **Art activities** with paint, clay, etc.



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