

Motivate your child to learn by sending three messages



As a parent, you are a mirror for your child. The way you treat your child is the way she will believe she deserves

to be treated.

So when you treat your child respectfully, she will grow up developing self-respect. If you treat her with love, she will believe she is lovable.

Here are three messages you can send your child that will give her the tools she needs to develop the motivation to learn:

1. "You are unique."

Of the five billion people who live on Earth, no two have the same fingerprint. Your child is different from everyone else alive today. One of the greatest motivators for a child is the knowledge that she alone has something to offer to the world. So help your child discover her unique gifts and find ways to nurture them. If she loves to create art, buy her a box of paints and art supplies. If she enjoys animals, encourage her to start a dog-walking or pet-sitting business. Whatever her interests, remind her that she has a lot to offer.



2. "You are capable." One of the great gifts you can give your child is the knowledge that she can tackle something tough. The next time she's struggling with an assignment, remind her of a time when she pulled through. "It took a while before you could ride a bike, but now you've mastered it." Let your child know that she can do just about anything she puts her mind to.

3. "You have the power." Your child needs to know that her own effort can affect her life and the lives of those around her. Giving your child responsibility is one way to teach this.

Setting the table or taking out the trash is a visible sign that she makes a difference in your family.

Teaching compassion is another way to show your child her power. Helping an elderly neighbor with her groceries shows her how her kind actions can affect the happiness of others. Your child has the power to make great changes in the world around her.

Source: Stephanie Marston, "The Best Gift You Can Give Your Children," *Our Children*, November/December 2004 (National PTA, 1-800-307-4782, www.pta.org).

Get involved to show your child you value school



If you're actively involved in your child's school, he'll probably do better. According to recent research, your child will be a better reader—and less

likely to be held back.

Volunteering in the classroom is a great way to get involved. Your child's teacher will appreciate the help. And if you want to spend more time with your child, here's your chance.

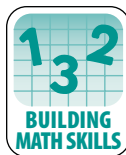
In addition, your child will see how highly you value education. That will motivate him to value it, too.

Here are some tips:

- **Talk with your child.** Make sure he's comfortable with the idea of your spending time in his classroom.
- **Contact your child's teacher.** Ask her about the class schedule and any special events she has planned.
- **Tell the teacher** about your interests. Note areas in which you're knowledgeable, and any special abilities you may have. Figure out with her how you can best help.
- **Check in with the parent-teacher organization.** It can suggest volunteer activities for the school that would benefit your child's class.
- **Contact other parents** in your child's class. See if they're willing to help out with larger projects.

Source: "How To Volunteer at Your Child's School," Ehow.com, www.ehow.com/how_18313_volunteer-childs-school.html.

Help your child practice math skills with a scale & a yardstick



A bathroom scale and a yardstick can give you an easy way to practice subtraction with your child.

Try these activities:

- **Have your child step on the scale.** How much does she weigh? Can you remember when she weighed ten pounds less? When was that?
- **Have your child step on the scale** and weigh herself. Then have her pick up something heavy—a book, a plant, the family dog. What does she weigh now? To determine the weight of the object, have her subtract her original weight from her weight holding the object.

- **Do the same thing** with a yardstick. Have your child stand next to a wall. Use a yardstick to measure her height. If you have a wall chart where you record your child's height, have her look for a mark that is close to six inches shorter. How long ago was that?
- **Measure other members** of the family. Then do some comparing. How much taller is her older sister? How much shorter is her younger brother?

Source: Scott Flansburg, *Math Magic for Your Kids*, ISBN: 0-688-13548-X (William Morrow & Company, 1-800-843-9389, www.harpercollins.com/imprints/index.aspx?imprintid=518003).

How do you respond when your child wants to quit something?



"I hate baseball," he says as he slams the car door. "I want to quit."

This, of course, is the same child who begged you to sign him up. It's also the child who had to have special shoes and a glove before the first practice.

What's a parent to do when a child wants to quit? First, take your child seriously—without taking quick action. Next:

- **Ask your child to tell you** what's going on. Why does he want to quit? Give him time to vent.
- **Talk with other parents.** What are their kids saying? Studies show that 70 percent of the kids who drop out of sports do so because their coach is abusive, there's too much emphasis on winning or they don't get enough playing time.
- **Go to a practice.** But instead of watching, close your eyes. What do you hear? If you hear kids laughing,

that's a good sign. If all you hear is the coach yelling at players, that tells you something else.

Kids learn responsibility by sticking with a team. But in a truly awful situation, you may need to allow your child to quit so he doesn't lose his love of the game altogether.

Source: Stacy M. DeBroff, *Sign Me Up*, ISBN: 0-743-23541-X (Free Press, an imprint of Simon & Schuster, 1-800-223-2336, www.simonsays.com).

Is homework still the number one priority at home?



By this time in the school year, some children begin to forget their priorities. "The main thing," someone once said, "is to keep the main thing the main thing."

Are you making sure that your child is keeping homework the main thing? Answer *yes* or *no* to each of the questions below to find out:

____ **1. Have you kept** your family's study schedule? Do you still have a daily time when everyone in the family does some type of "homework"?

____ **2. Does your child still study** in a quiet, well-lit place? By the spring, some children seem to do most of their "studying" in front of the TV set.

____ **3. Do you stay in touch** with your child's teacher so you know what's expected of him?

____ **4. Do you help your child** stay organized with calendars and to-do lists?

____ **5. Have you reviewed** your child's schedule? Some kids are so busy with extra-curricular activities that they don't have time for school.

How well are you doing?

Each *yes* answer means you are keeping school work the "main thing" at your house. For any *no* answers, try those ideas in the quiz.



Practical Ideas for Parents to Help Their Children. ISSN: 1523-1275

For subscription information call or write:
The Parent Institute®, 1-800-756-5525,
P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474.
Fax: 1-800-216-3667.

Or visit our website: www.parent-institute.com.

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Publisher: John H. Wherry, Ed.D. *Managing Editor:* Pat Hodgdon. *Editor:* Rebecca Miyares. *Writers:* Kris Amundson & Maria Koklanaris. *Illustrator:* Joe Mignella.

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Teach your child the important lesson that 'Life isn't always fair'



"It's not fair!" your child whines. Why can her sister stay up later? Why does her brother get new sneakers?

Parents can bend over backwards trying to be exactly fair to their children. That can set kids up to believe that they deserve the exact same privileges that everyone else has.

Sadly, the world doesn't work that way. The sooner your child learns that lesson, the easier it will be for her to deal with the world as it really is.

The bedtime issue? Older kids can stay up later without getting crabby.

The new sneakers? Her brother has outgrown his. Sometimes, being fair means making sure kids have their needs met.

The truth is that your kids are not equal. One may be better in math, while one excels in reading. You will build your child's character if you teach her that being "fair" means letting her become the best person she can be—not giving her something because someone else needs it.

Source: Maggie Mamen, The Pampered Child Syndrome: How to Recognize It, How to Manage It, and How to Avoid It: A Guide for Parents and Professionals, ISBN: 1-843-10407-5 (Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 1-866-416-1078, www.jkp.com).

My third-grader is struggling. There's a lot more reading this year, and that's a problem because she doesn't like to read. She can sound out words, but she doesn't always understand what she's read. How can I help a struggling reader improve her reading skills?

Questions & Answers

You are right to be concerned about your daughter's reading skills. She is at the point in elementary school where kids stop *learning to read* and start *reading to learn*. If your child is struggling this year, she will have even more trouble in fourth and fifth grade. So as a parent, you need to take steps to boost her reading skills now.

Reading is a skill just like riding a bike. The more she does it, the better she'll be. So your first job is to make reading easy and here's how:

- **Make a trip to the library** part of your regular weekly routine. If your daughter doesn't have her own library card, get her one.
- **Talk with the librarian.** What are books she might like? See if there's a series that might hook her interest. Kids often get attached to the characters in series books and want to read the next book—and then the next.
- **Keep stacks of books** and magazines around the house. They should be on subjects that interest your daughter. Whether it's sports or animals, there are fun books and magazines out there.
- **Talk with her teacher.** Tell her what you're doing and ask for her help. With practice, your struggling third-grade reader can become a fourth-grade reading whiz in no time!

—Kristen Amundson
The Parent Institute

Be proactive if you suspect your child is having school problems



Now that your child is well into the second half of the school year, he may be having some difficulty. The workload is greater.

Teachers have more material to teach and the pace at school is much faster.

If your child had any problems with schoolwork in the first part of the year, they may increase now.

A veteran child psychologist advises parents to be proactive. Don't wait for the problem to get worse or for the school to call you. If you suspect your child is having trouble, follow your intuition.

Take these steps to intervene:

- **Be your child's advocate.** No one can do this but you. Contact the teacher to get information about where your child is having problems.
- **Help build communication** and a good relationship between your child and his teacher. Discuss learning styles to see if there are

options for how your child tackles the material.

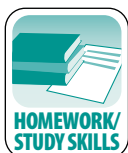
- **Let your child know** you support his efforts. But don't do your child's work for him.
- **Find a tutor** for an older elementary child. Don't try to tutor him yourself. You could add to his stress. Check with the school to find out about tutoring services.
- **Don't give up.** It may take more than a week or two to turn things around. But remember, solving the problem now may prevent it from returning next year.

Source: Robert A. Gruenberg, "Winter Time (School) Blues," parentStrategy.com, www.parentstrategy.com/cgi-bin/ps/update.cgi?file=WinterTime(School)Blues.tip.

"No teacher will ever have enough time to talk with children to compensate for homes where parents are too busy and the TV is always on."

—Penelope Leach,
Child Psychologist

'Coach' your child to be successful with homework



Homework helps your child learn. Research shows that doing homework can help children get higher grades. It also reminds children that learning happens outside the classroom, too.

As your child grows, her teachers will give homework assignments that let her learn on her own. Many of these will require her to gather and re-package information. She may need your help.

It's good to assume the role of "coach"—asking her questions and guiding her. Your child is the main "thinker" and "doer."

Help your child follow these steps:

1. **Define the assignment.** Ask her to describe it in her own words. What are the key questions? If she's unclear, suggest calling a classmate.
2. **Brainstorm possible information sources**—books, TV, videos, Internet, materials from organizations, local "experts."
3. **Figure out** how to get the information. Go to the library. Search the Internet. Contact organizations.
4. **Review the information.** After she reads the material, ask how well the information she found answers the questions posed in the assignment.
5. **Put the information together.** Ask your child to summarize what she's learned before she writes the paper or presentation.
6. **Evaluate the completed assignment.** Go over it together. Will it satisfy the teacher's expectations? Is the content good, with reliable information? Is it presented clearly? Once she turns in the assignment, ask your child, "How could you have done it better?" For instance, spent less time reading unrelated information?

Source: Bob Berkowitz, "Helping With Homework: A Parent's Guide to Big6 Information Problem-Solving," (ERIC Digest), Big6, www.big6.com/showarticle.php?id=308.

Hold the caffeine to make sure your child succeeds in school



If your child is having a hard time at school, caffeine could be the culprit. Children ages six to 11 drink an average of eight ounces of caffeinated cola drinks a day. According to recent research, that much caffeine causes hyperactivity and inattention. These lead to behavior and learning problems in school.

The first step in changing your child's caffeine habit is to be a good role model. Children whose parents drink caffeinated drinks are three times more likely to drink five or more cans of soda a week.

To can your child's soda habit:

- **Help your child** make good choices when you go out to eat. Suggest your child choose milk, juice or water instead of soda.



- **Talk with your child** about why you no longer want him to drink soda. Discuss how soda affects learning and behavior. Explain health problems related to high consumption, too—like weight gain and tooth decay.
- **Toss out any soda** you have in the pantry or fridge. Tell your child he can have a soda on special occasions.
- **Offer your child** healthier options. Keep a chilled pitcher of water in the fridge. Get 100 percent fruit juice from the store in several flavors that he likes. Make lemonade or decaf iced tea.
- **Pack healthy drinks** your child can enjoy while at school. A bottle of ice water or frozen 100 percent juice boxes will thaw out by lunchtime.

Source: Lisa Ryckman, "Families Give Their Health a Boost by Canning the Soda Habit," Kane County Chronicle, www.kcchronicle.com/StyleSection/295721959715402.php.

Show your child how to speak respectfully to adults, teachers



Children are not adults. Yet some children speak to their parents in a bossy and sarcastic way. They use a rude tone of voice.

They *tell* instead of *ask*.

Here are tips to help your child learn to speak to adults in a respectful way:

- **Teach your child.** How do you want your child to talk to adults? Use role playing to show good and bad examples.
- **Model.** If you yell at people, then your child will yell, too.

- **Use reminders.** If your child uses a harsh tone of voice, or forgets to say "please," wait for a minute. Then ask your child, "I beg your pardon?" or "Would you like to try that more respectfully?"
- **Teach your child** to use "I" messages. Instead of saying, "You forgot my lunch," your child could say, "I'm worried because I don't have my lunch."

Source: Sarah Radcliffe, "Instilling Humility in Children," Aish.com, www.aish.com/family/mensch/Instilling_Humility_in_Children.asp.