

# Helping Children Learn®

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School



October 2018

Clairton City School District  
Dr. Ginny Hunt, Superintendent

## Add some variety to keep your daily reading time engaging

Reading opens the door to all kinds of learning. That's why educators say that helping your child develop his skills and interest in reading is one of the most important things you can do to help him achieve in school.

Making time to read together every day shows your child that reading is a priority in your family. But you don't always have to do it the same way!



To encourage your child to be an active reader:

- **Read in interesting places.** Outside in a hammock. Inside in a cozy corner filled with pillows. Or under a blanket draped over some chairs. Keep some books in the bathroom to read while your child is in the tub.
- **Plan reading excursions.** Visit the library often and let your child choose books to check out. Stop for a snack on the way home and read together as you munch.
- **Start a family book club.** It doesn't have to be formal. Just set aside time once a week—dinner time is perfect—to talk about something you have all read. Or let everyone bring a book to tell the others about.
- **Play with plays.** Get a short, easy-to-read script and give each family member a role. Encourage everyone to be dramatic and ham it up.



## Take the anxiety out of test-taking

Anxiety about tests is common among students, and it can prevent them from doing their best. To help your child go into tests relaxed and confident:

- **Talk about what tests do—** and what they don't. Tests show the teacher what your child has learned so far, and what she needs help with. They don't judge her value as a student or a person.
- **Space study sessions out** for several days before the test. Cramming the night before is not as effective.
- **Connect new material to** things your child already knows.
- **Help her focus** her study efforts on material she hasn't mastered yet, rather than repeatedly reviewing material she already knows.
- **Tell her to give** herself a pep talk if she feels overwhelmed during a test. She can say, "I know this. I can remember the answer."
- **Teach her to take** deep breaths to relax and improve her focus.

Source: S.D. Sparks, "Teaching Students to De-Stress Over Testing," Education Week, [niswc.com/relaxed](http://niswc.com/relaxed).

## Brainstorm to help your child improve writing

Writers know that descriptive details add interest and depth to their stories. But many kids struggle to come up with these details when they write.



Brainstorming with your child can help him flesh out his ideas. Ask him to think about the five senses. What do things in his story look/feel/smell/sound/taste like?

Source: "Five Senses Graphic Organizer," The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, [niswc.com/details](http://niswc.com/details).

## Make time for a conference

Teachers have many pupils. But at a parent-teacher conference, the focus is on just one child—yours. It is an ideal time for you and the teacher to plan ways to help your child succeed. To make the most of it:

- **Bring a list of questions** about your child's work habits, attitude, friends, behavior, strengths and weaknesses.
- **Listen carefully** and take notes.
- **Share information** about your child: her favorite school activities and subjects, her struggles and any sensitive issues.
- **Agree on a plan** to address concerns and schedule a time to follow up.

## Teach respectful behavior

Saying *please* and *thank you* shows respect and makes life with others pleasant. In school, your child should also:



- **Arrive prepared—** ready to learn and participate in class.
- **Raise his hand.** Waiting to be called on instead of blurting out answers or comments shows respect for classmates and the teacher.
- **Accept constructive feedback.** In order to help students learn, teachers must point out mistakes.

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ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

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## How can I help my child slow down and work carefully?

**Q:** My third grader is very competitive. She loves to win at sports, and her teacher says she always wants to be the first one finished in the classroom, too. She doesn't take time to write neatly or check her work, and it's hurting her grades. What can I do?

**A:** It sounds as if your daughter has a habit of turning everything into a race—and she wants to be first across the finish line. But when it comes to schoolwork, accuracy matters more than speed.

To help your child learn to take more care:

- **Talk to her teacher.** Let the teacher know you would like to work together on a plan to help your daughter focus on quality work, not speedy work.
- **Talk to your child.** Since she likes sports, you might compare schoolwork to shooting free throws in basketball. It's not her speed that matters—it's whether the ball goes in the basket.
- **Review homework** each evening. Let your child know you are going to double-check it for neatness and accuracy. If it's not up to a reasonable standard, you'll ask her to redo it, since she is responsible for the quality of her work. She'll soon figure out that by slowing down, she can get the work right the first time—and that actually takes less time in the long run.



## Parent Quiz

### Are you promoting persistence?

Things in school—and in life—won't always go your child's way. How he copes in those times will affect his future success. Are you teaching your child how to overcome frustration? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you understand** that it isn't a parent's job to rescue children from all difficulties?
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you encourage** your child to keep trying when he gets stuck on a homework problem?
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you help** your child see how his efforts affect his results?
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you point out** stories of successful people who have overcome challenges?
- \_\_\_ **5. Do you name** your child's feelings? "You're frustrated

that learning this is taking longer than you expected. You'll get there."

#### How well are you doing?

*More yes answers mean you are helping your child learn to survive and thrive in tough times. For each no, try that idea.*

"Great works are performed not by strength but by perseverance."

—Samuel Johnson

## Use money to teach the value of responsibility

A healthy sense of responsibility helps kids make better decisions, in school and in life. To help your child learn how acting responsibly can pay off, teach her how to manage money. Here are two ways to begin:

- 1. Consider giving her an allowance.** Discuss her options. If your child spends her money now, she can get something small. If she saves it up, she can get something better later.
- 2. Talk about your budget.** Say things like, "We have to pay the dentist this week, so getting pizza will have to wait."

## Progress checks keep goals in sight

Helping your child set goals is a great first step toward achievement. But don't stop there! Check on his progress regularly. If problems arise, talk with him about possible solutions. For example, if he wants to finish a book by a certain date but has fallen behind, he could read for 10 extra minutes each afternoon. Praise your child for his progress so far, and for continuing to work toward his goal.



## Get ready for restful sleep

When your child sleeps well at night, she is better able to pay attention in school and remember material with greater accuracy. To help her get the restful sleep she needs:

- **Get active outdoors.** Exercise and fresh air help kids sleep better.
- **Turn off screen devices** at least one hour before bedtime.
- **Make your child feel safe.** Put a night light in her room, if necessary. Tell her you will check on her periodically.

Source: S. Gardner, "Why Healthy Sleep Is Vital For School Success," *Studiosity*, [niswc.com/sleepmore](http://niswc.com/sleepmore).

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