

# Helping Children Learn<sup>®</sup>

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School



January 2018

Clairton City School District  
Dr. Hunt, Superintendent

## Encourage mental math to strengthen problem-solving skills

Your child may be learning math in different ways than you did. The strategies taught today are designed to help students better understand the concepts behind the computations. Doing *mental math*—working out problems in their heads—helps kids practice using these strategies to solve problems.



To help your child with mental math in the early grades:

- **Start with the basics.**

Give your child a number and ask, "What do you get when you add 1 to this number?" Then have him add 2 to his answer, then add 3 to that answer, and so on. Later you can ask him to take away 1, then 2, etc.

- **Practice "skip counting"**—counting by twos, threes, fives and tens. This helps your child add faster and lays a foundation for multiplication.

Later, as your child progresses:

- **Work with money.** Teach your child the values of coins. Understanding that there are 100 cents in a dollar, and that a quarter is worth 25 cents (or 25 percent, or one-fourth of a dollar) helps him get comfortable with easy combinations ( $75+25=100$ ), fractions and percentages.
- **Challenge your child** to do quick calculations. "I have to figure out a tip. What is 20 percent of this bill? Can you divide the total by 10 and then double your answer?"



## Amplify the power of read-aloud time

Don't stop reading to your child just because she has learned to read to herself. Reading aloud together can continue to improve her literacy skills and be fun for both of you. To provide the best experience:

- **Do it every day.** This shows your child that reading is too important to miss.
- **Preview the book** beforehand. Reading aloud is performing. You will do better if you're familiar with the material.
- **Choose books you like.** If you are excited about a book, odds are your child will be, too. Consider books you enjoyed as a child.
- **Emphasize the first line.** Strive to grab your child's attention and make her want to listen.
- **Add plenty of expression.** Widen your eyes to show surprise. Use different voices for different characters.
- **Leave your child wanting more.** Stop each day's reading at a point where she is eager to hear what will happen next.

## It's time to restore routines

Has your child's bedtime begun to slip? Are mornings more rushed? Is her regular study time not quite so regular? January is a great time to get back into helpful habits. Sleep and study routines make life easier—and help kids do better in school.



## Teachers need your help

Teachers know that parents are key partners in helping children learn. Here are three things teachers wish parents would do:

1. **Be role models.** Show your child what a positive attitude and enthusiasm for learning look like.
2. **Stay in touch.** Respond to notes or voicemails from the teacher. Ask how your child is doing in class. Ask questions if you don't understand something your child is learning.
3. **Have fun.** Enjoy good times together.

Source: R. Gillett, "19 things teachers say parents should do at home to help their kids succeed," Business Insider, [nswc.com/ideas](http://nswc.com/ideas).

## Serve your child a better day

For years, studies have shown that eating a nutritious breakfast helps children concentrate and perform better in class. Recently, researchers studying school children in Kansas found that kids who ate breakfast scored higher on standardized tests. They also found that eating a low-sugar meal including whole grains positively affected scores, while drinking fruit juice had a negative effect.



Get your child off to a good start. Make sure she eats a healthy breakfast each day.

Source: L.T. Ptomey, Ph.D. and others, "Breakfast Intake and Composition is Associated with Superior Academic Achievement in Elementary School Children," *Journal of the American College of Nutrition*, Taylor & Francis.



## Comparisons are deflating my child. How can I help?

**Q:** My third grader struggles a lot more in school than her older sister does. Now, my sweet little girl has started to call herself “the family loser.” How can I help her stop making comparisons and see herself as someone who can achieve?

**A:** Your child has grown up watching her older sister. It’s understandable that she might use her sister’s performance as a benchmark for her own. But with your help, she can find ways to develop her own talents and see herself as the capable individual she is.



Self-esteem can have a direct impact on school performance. The best way to give your child’s self-esteem a boost is to discover some areas where she can be successful. Success in one area often leads to success in another.

Help your daughter:

- **Choose activities** that are different from her sister’s. If her sister plays soccer, perhaps your child would like to try scouting, or act in a play.
- **Focus on the things** she does well. Whether it is her knack for making friends or for organizing, remind her that her talents are important. Be clear that you are just as proud of her as you are of her sister.



## Are you showing your child how to listen?

The most important part of communication isn’t talking—it’s listening. The way you listen to your child teaches him how to listen to others. Are you helping your child develop listening skills? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you focus** on your child when he’s talking to you?  
If you can’t, do you say, for example, “I’m driving now, but I’d like to hear about this when we get home”?
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you listen** patiently? It can take kids a while to get across what they want to say.
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you avoid** interrupting your child, and ask him not to interrupt you or others?
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you “listen”** to your child’s behavior? It is a way he communicates his needs.

- \_\_\_ **5. Do you avoid** jumping in with the right answer when your child is thinking?

### How well are you doing?

*More yes answers mean you are teaching listening by example. For each no, try that idea.*

*“If speaking is silver,  
then listening is gold.”*  
—Anonymous

## Three keys unlock discipline

Are your discipline strategies teaching your child the right lessons? The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends a three-pronged approach to discipline:

- 1. Develop a loving** supportive relationship with your child. A child who feels respected by his parents is more likely to cooperate at home and at school.
- 2. Use positive reinforcement.** Praise your child for what he does right.
- 3. Never use physical punishment.** Instead, use time outs (for a younger child) or take away a privilege temporarily.

Source: “Discipline,” American Academy of Pediatrics, [nswc.com/3Dsteps](http://nswc.com/3Dsteps).

## Steer through tough times

Stressful events—in the family or the world—can have a negative effect on kids. To provide stability and hope during stressful times:

- **Stick to familiar routines.**
- **Involve your child** in fun decisions. “We’re saving money. Instead of going to a movie, let’s stay here and play a game you love. What will it be?”



## Try practice tests two ways

Research shows that taking practice tests is one of the most effective ways to study. Not only do practice tests improve students’ recall, they can also reduce the negative effects of test anxiety. Practice tests can be:

- **Cooperative.** Consider allowing your child to invite classmates over to quiz one another. Or you can help her study with flash cards by calling out questions.
- **Independent.** Your child can look over textbooks and handouts and write her own test questions, then answer them.

Source: “Practice testing protects memory against stress,” TuftsNow, [nswc.com/practicetests](http://nswc.com/practicetests).

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