

Helping Children Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School



January 2020

Onalaska Elementary School

Let go of education myths and focus on what really works

When it comes to helping children learn, no one wants to use ineffective techniques. Yet research shows that people are frequently mistaken about whether an educational concept or method is valid.

Here are five common myths about learning, along with the research-based facts:

- 1. Myth:** Everyone has a specific learning style. *Fact:* Kids learn in all kinds of ways. In one situation, they may do better hearing new material. In another, seeing or touching examples may be more effective.
- 2. Myth:** People are born as smart as they will ever be. *Fact:* Intelligence and abilities can increase over time—especially when children believe they can learn and are given access to books and learning opportunities.
- 3. Myth:** The longer a study session is, the better. *Fact:* Kids retain material better if they study it repeatedly, in short sessions spread out over time.
- 4. Myth:** Rereading something is the best way to learn it. *Fact:* It's more effective for kids to read and then restate the material in their own words.
- 5. Myth:** Right-brained students learn differently than left-brained ones. *Fact:* There's no proof that one side of the brain is dominant.



Source: U. Boser, "What Do People Know About Excellent Teaching and Learning?" Center for American Progress, niswc.com/learningfacts.



Help your child make and stick to learning resolutions

It's a new year, and that means it's time for resolutions. This year, encourage your child to make learning resolutions that can help her give the rest of the school year her best effort. To strengthen her resolve:

- **Set an example.** Share what you've resolved to change. "I'm going to get more fit by strength training three times a week."
- **Guide her thinking.** "You've had trouble getting homework done on time. What could you do to fix that?" Creating a study routine, starting projects earlier and organizing her supplies are all things she could resolve to do.
- **Get specific.** Help her turn a vague idea into a concrete resolution. "I resolve to spend at least 15 minutes studying math every night." When a goal is measurable, it's easier to achieve.
- **Be supportive.** "I know it's hard, but you can do it!" Remind your child that falling short once in a while doesn't mean she can't get back on track.

Calendars help kids plan

By mid January, lots of great-looking wall calendars are usually on sale. Look for one your child will enjoy using. Then help him get into the habit of writing things on it—like the date his report is due and the days he has basketball practice. Seeing what's coming up can help him prepare—and avoid last-minute panic.



Get excited about learning

A love of learning doesn't develop only at school. To encourage enthusiasm for education when your child is at home:

- **Set the tone.** Show interest in your child's school day. Cheerfully attend school meetings and events.
- **Praise progress.** When your child learns a new skill, speak up! Help her link effort to feeling proud of her success.
- **Connect lessons to life.** Show your child how the skills she is learning can help her outside the classroom.

Support success on tests

Your elementary schooler will take a lot of tests in his school career. To help him approach them with the confidence to perform well:

- **Explain that tests** just show the teacher what he's learned, and what he needs help with. Say that it's the learning, not the grade, that you care about.
- **Instill effective study habits.** Have your child start reviewing several days before a test. Each day, help him focus on material he hasn't yet mastered.
- **Remind your child** to read test directions and questions carefully, and to use any extra time to review his answers.





How should parents handle negativity about school?

Q: I've heard my daughter say she hates school several times now. I tell her she has to go to school anyway, but I'm not sure how to make her feel better about it. What can I say?

A: When a child says she hates school, it doesn't necessarily mean she actually feels that way. Sometimes, kids say that when they are looking for attention, or when they want to put off getting up or doing homework.

Since your daughter has said it more than once, it's important for you to figure out why and address the situation. Here's how:

- **Sit down for a chat** when you are both calm. Then say, "You've said you hate school a couple of times. What's making you feel this way?"
- **Ask follow-up questions** if your child can't identify the problem. Is she struggling in a class? Are kids mean to her on the bus? Is she feeling stressed because she is participating in too many activities?
- **Brainstorm solutions.** For example, if she is struggling, she could spend more time on the subject and ask questions in class.
- **Help your child focus** on things she likes about school. By thinking positively, she can change her whole outlook.
- **Enlist help from her teachers.** Let them know how your child is feeling and ask for their ideas and support.



Are you modeling time management?

Successful students know how to make the best use of their time. Are your time management techniques helping your child develop this important skill? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

- ___ **1. Do you review** your child's study schedule and make adjustments if necessary?
- ___ **2. Do you record** your family's commitments and activities on a calendar?
- ___ **3. Do you make sure** your child's schedule is balanced? If he can't finish his schoolwork before bed because of all his activities, it's time to cut back.
- ___ **4. Do you make** daily to-do lists and encourage your child to do the same?

- ___ **5. Do you ensure** that your child has some free time each day just to relax?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are showing your child how to plan his time wisely. For each no, try that idea.

"The bad news is time flies. The good news is you're the pilot."

—Michael Altshuler

Encourage reading progress

Your child will rely on her reading ability in almost every subject. To motivate her to read and strengthen her skills:

- **Add variety.** Encourage her to read fiction, nonfiction, comics, magazines, news articles, instructions and advertisements.
- **Make reading enticing.** Build a fort in her room and let her read by flashlight.
- **Get active.** Turn your child's favorite books into family plays or videos.
- **Read aloud.** Choose some books that are a little beyond her reading level.

Talk about different roles

Recent research shows that reminding kids of the various parts of their identities—child, friend, student, etc.—increases their creativity when solving problems. It can also boost their flexibility when thinking about other people. Talk to your child about all the roles that make him who he is. He may approach problems—and people—in positive new ways.



Source: S.E. Gaither and others, "Thinking about multiple identities boosts children's flexible thinking," *Developmental Science*, nswc.com/flex.

Discipline is for parents, too

When you control your expectations and responses, it's easier to help your child control her behavior. Experts advise parents to:

- **Be realistic.** Match rules to your child's maturity level. Expect a reasonable amount of cooperation.
- **Be consistent.** Kids make better choices when they can count on what parents say.
- **Be forgiving.** Instead of getting mad, accept apologies and help your child plan how to avoid repeating mistakes.

Source: "What's the Best Way to Discipline My Child?" The American Academy of Pediatrics, nswc.com/aap-discipline.

Helping Children Learn[®]

Published in English and Spanish, September through May.

Publisher: Doris McLaughlin.

Publisher Emeritus: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.

Editor: Alison McLean.

Staff Editors: Rebecca Miyares & Erika Beasley.

Production Manager: Sara Amon.

Translations Editor: Victoria Gaviola.

Copyright © 2020, The Parent Institute[®], a division of PaperClip Media, Inc.

P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474

1-800-756-5525 • www.parent-institute.com • ISSN 1527-1013