

*25 Ways Parents Can ...*

# Help Children Learn



**...and Help Them Do Better in School**



# Home Is Your Child's First Classroom— and You Are Your Child's First Teacher

Research has found that the home—not the school—is the most powerful factor in determining a student's success in school. But once children start school, families sometimes feel left out of the learning process. They want to help their children do well in school, but they aren't always sure what they can do.

Studies show that children are better able to handle challenges at school when their families are involved. When you take time to reinforce learning at home, your child is more likely to:

- Earn better grades.
- Have higher test scores.
- Adapt well to school.

This publication offers 25 parent-tested tips you can use to help your child with science, math, social studies, writing and reading. You will also find tips on ways to help your child organize and complete assignments.



## Science

**1** **Make it rain.** You'll need a large jar and a dish that's big enough to fit over the opening. With your child, carefully fill the jar with hot water, then pour most of it out. The air that's left in the jar above the water will be warm and humid. Next, have your child fill the dish with cold water and set it on top of the jar. As the warm, moist air is cooled by contact with the cold dish, drops of water will form. The drops will get larger and eventually your child will see "rainfall" inside the jar.

When the weather report predicts rain in your area, see how similar the conditions are to those that caused rain in the jar.



**2** **Take a nature walk.** You can do this any time of day, any time of year. All that is necessary is a block of time so you don't need to hurry.

Together, take a slow walk around your neighborhood or a park. Let your child poke in the dirt, look into bushes and lift rocks or logs to see what lives underneath. (Be sure to replace everything before you leave so you don't disturb the lives of the creatures you are studying.) Watch insects carefully.

**3 Practice careful observation.** You don't have to go far to help your child develop this important scientific skill.

Have your child:

- **Choose a tree to study.** Take photos or draw pictures of the tree at various seasons during the year.
- **Gently take apart a flower.** What do you see?
- **Wait for a sunny day.** Then, wet two washcloths. Hang one in the sun to dry. Hang one in the shade. Ask your child to predict which will dry first. Wait to see if the prediction is right. Talk about why.



**4 Watch a math- or science-related TV show** with your child at least once a week. Or listen to a podcast about math or science together. Many public and cable stations feature math or science programs. Check the listings and plan ahead.

**5 Encourage your child to be a collector.** Collecting can motivate your child to learn new ways to make sense of the world and discover how things are alike and different. Suggest collecting items from nature such as rocks, acorns, seashells, leaves or pine cones.

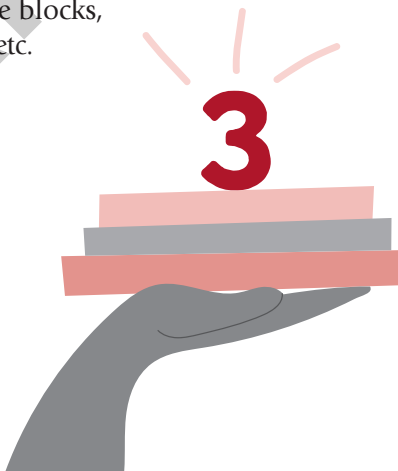
Provide a place for treasured collections. It may be a dresser drawer, a shoebox or a shelf in a bookcase. Encourage your child to count, sort, label and display the collection.

## Math

**6** Have family fun with a math puzzle. Give each letter of the alphabet a monetary value. A is one cent, B is two cents, and so on. Now try to find the words that are worth the most money. Here are some ideas:

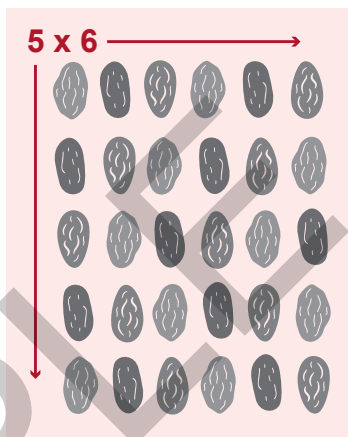
- Whose name is worth the most?
- Who can think of a jewel name that is worth the most? (Is a “diamond” worth more than a “ruby”?)
- How many words can your child think of that are worth exactly \$1.00?
- What is the shortest word your child can find that is worth the most?

**7** Choose a “number of the week.” Have your child make a large poster featuring that number. Find ways to use the number as often as possible—for example: Cut sandwiches into three pieces, walk three blocks, read three bedtime stories, etc.



**8** Encourage your child to make and find arrays. An array is an arrangement of even rows and columns—it's great for practicing counting or multiplication. At snack time, your child might create an array with raisins or crackers. If there are 5 rows of 6 raisins, how many raisins does your child have in all? To find out, your child can count by 5s or multiply  $5 \times 6$ . Challenge your child to rearrange the raisins to make as many different arrays as possible, like  $6 \times 5$ ,  $3 \times 10$  or  $10 \times 3$ .

Once you start looking for arrays together, your child will find them everywhere: panes in a window, eggs in a carton, ice cubes in a tray, squares on a checkerboard, etc. Pass time in a waiting room by counting or multiplying to find the number of tiles on the floor. At the post office, have your child figure out the number of mailboxes on the wall.

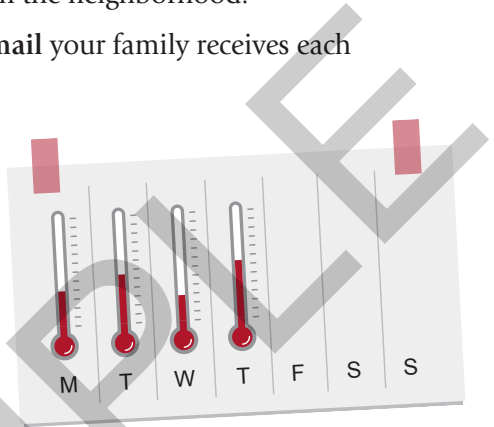


**9** Use old catalogs to help your child practice estimating. Ask your child to look through a catalog and choose three or four things that look interesting. Then have your child estimate the total cost of the items, including tax and shipping. (Suggest rounding up or down.)

Have your child use a calculator to check the work.

**10** Teach your child about graphs. Even very young children can learn to use graphs. Seeing a useful purpose for graphs at home can reinforce learning at school. Here are some things your child might enjoy graphing:

- The colors of all the cars in the neighborhood.
- The number of pieces of mail your family receives each day for a week.
- The number of T-shirts owned by every member of the family.
- The temperature outside each day before leaving for school.
- The amount of money your child has saved toward something special.
- The favorite ice cream flavors of friends and relatives.



When a graph is complete, it's time to analyze the data your child collected. Ask questions like:

- What color car is most common in our neighborhood? Least common?
- On which day did we receive the most mail? The least?
- How many T-shirts does our family own in all?
- On average, how much money did you save each week?
- What is the most popular ice cream flavor? How many more people like chocolate than vanilla?

## Social Studies

**11** Talk about where things come from. Have your child look for labels to see where household items were made. Find the places on a map. A calculator may have come from China. A box of cereal may have a Battle Creek, Michigan or White Plains, New York, address. Talk about where the wheat for your bread came from. Where is cotton for blue jeans grown? How do these products get from the field to your house?

**12** Tell your child where your ancestors came from. Together, find these places on a map. If possible, help your child learn about the routes your ancestors traveled when they came to this country. Where do your relatives live now? Check the map, then use the map's scale to calculate how far away relatives live.



**13** Choose a "Person of the Week." Pick someone your child feels has done something important. It can be a political figure, an athlete, an entertainer, a local hero, etc. During the week, have your child look for news stories about the person.



**14** **Send your child on a treasure hunt.** Ask your child to make a map of your house or neighborhood. Hide a treasure and mark its location on the map. Have your child follow the map to find “buried treasure”—a snack bar or another small treat. Or, for practice following directions, write a set of clues that will send your child from one part of the house to another: “Look to the right of the washing machine. Behind the third box, you’ll find a clue.” For extra practice, have your child plan a treasure hunt for you.

**15** **Teach your child to use a globe.** You can usually find a globe at your local library. Together, find where you live. Follow the closest latitude line around the globe. Find two or three other cities that are at approximately the same latitude. Then follow the longitude line. What cities in Canada or Mexico are closest to the longitude of your city? Also point out the equator. What countries does it run through? Together, look up the weather in cities at different latitudes. What does your child notice? (In general, it’s warmer as you get closer to the equator and colder as you get closer to the poles.)

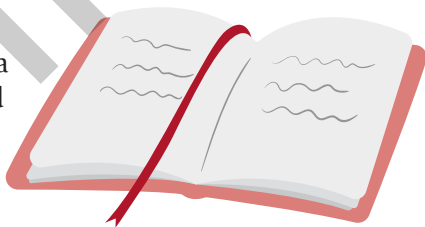


## Writing

**16** Help your child see that writing is a natural part of life. Here are some ideas:

- Ask your child to make a list before you go shopping. Or have your child check your list and add one or two favorite foods.
- Keep a notepad and pencil on the kitchen counter, or hang up a white board. Encourage family members to leave messages or even jokes for each other.
- Have your child write a note to the tooth fairy. (You might have the tooth fairy leave a receipt!)

**17** Give your child a journal, notebook or diary for a gift. Some children use the journal as a daily diary. Others use it to record thoughts, ideas or concerns. A journal can help your child begin the habit of daily writing.



**18** Encourage your child to write regularly to another person. Grandparents love to receive letters in the mail—and they always take the time to write back. Or help your child find a pen pal, such as a neighbor's child who is away at college or a cousin who lives in another country.

**19** Use reading time to encourage your child to write. Choose books about writers or writing. Here are some books your child may enjoy:

- *Dear Mr. Henshaw* by Beverly Cleary
- *Harriet the Spy* by Louise Fitzhugh
- *Mostly Michael* by Robert Kimmel Smith

Does your child have a favorite author? Visit the library or bookstore together. See if your child can find a biography about that person's life. Be sure to ask your librarian for other good books about writing.

**20** Play word squares. Have your child write a four- or five-letter word across the top of a piece of paper. Write the same word down the side—like this:

**S T O P**  
**T**  
**O**  
**P**

Now fill in other words. Your child should end up with a word square that looks like this:

**S T O P**  
**T A P E**  
**O P E N**  
**P E N S**

This is a game the whole family can play.

## Schoolwork

**W**hen your child has assignments, projects or studying to do at home, how can you provide support? Although your child needs to do the work, there are things you can do to help.



**21** **Have a regular time and place for schoolwork.** Set up a quiet, comfortable area. (The kitchen table is fine.) Make sure your child has supplies close at hand—pencils, paper, a calculator. While your child works, there should be no interruptions, no phone calls and *no* TV.

**22** **Make it a daily habit.** Don't ask, "Do you have any assignments tonight?" Every day, expect your child to set aside some time for studying or other learning activities. If there are no specific assignments, your child can review, read or write a story.

**23** Teach your child the SQ3R formula when studying. The letters stand for a proven five-step process that makes study time more efficient and effective—Survey, Question, Read, Restate and Review. Here's how this method works:

- 1. Survey.** Look over the material to see what it's about. Check out the chapter headings. Look at photos and graphs. Read the words in bold type. This will give your child an idea of what's important.
- 2. Question.** Have your child develop some questions that the assignment might answer. What is the main idea? Where do the events take place? Have your child turn headings into questions.
- 3. Read** the assignment. While reading, your child should look for answers to the questions.
- 4. Restate.** In your child's own words, what are the most important parts of the chapter? Ask your child to tell you the main ideas covered.
- 5. Review.** Has your child found answers to all the questions? What else did your child learn? What was surprising? Have your child answer questions included in the textbook and read the summary at the end of the chapter.

**24** Let your child be the teacher and you be the student. When one family tried this approach to learning state capitals, the parents found that there were quite a few that they didn't know. Their child looked up the answers.

After a while, the parents found that, in the process of looking up the answers and "teaching" them, their child had learned all the state capitals. This technique works equally well in other subjects, whether your child is learning about vowel sounds in reading, multiplication facts in math or the life cycle of a butterfly in science.

**25** Help your child break long assignments into manageable chunks. For example, if your child has a long report due in two weeks, a schedule might look like this:

1. Visit the library. (1 day)
2. Read, take notes. (3 days)
3. Make an outline. (1 day)
4. Write first draft. (2 days)
5. Revise, correct spelling. (1 day)
6. Write final paper. (1 day)

Have your child create a due date for each step and write it on a calendar. Suggest building in extra time in case one or more of the steps takes longer than expected. Your child can check off each step as it's completed.

Children love to learn and discover new things. In fact, they're learning all the time—and not just at school. That's why you can make home the very best classroom of all!



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