

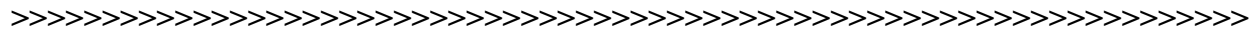
Responsibility is linked to students’ academic success

Educators agree that responsible children do better in school. Luckily, parents have endless opportunities to foster responsibility.

To boost your child’s responsibility:

- Enforce a few age-appropriate rules and consequences. State them clearly so your child knows exactly how you expect her to behave—and what will happen if she doesn’t.
- Trust her with meaningful tasks. School-age children are capable of handling responsibilities such as picking up their rooms, taking out the recycling and folding laundry.
- Talk about financial responsibility. Many kids receive an allowance. This provides a great opportunity to teach about budgeting, spending, saving and giving.
- Let your child make decisions, such as which homework assignment to tackle first. Being responsible for making decisions builds students’ confidence.
- Find ways to help others. Discuss what it means to be a responsible member of a community. Talk about different ways your family can contribute, such as by donating gently-used clothing to a charity or volunteering your time for an important cause.
- Adjust rules and responsibilities. As your child matures, her abilities will change. Perhaps she can take on more grown-up chores. Or perhaps she can make new and exciting decisions. Talk about how great it feels to be responsible!

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Use toothpicks to reinforce math concepts

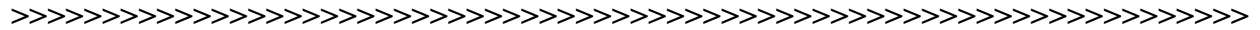
A box of toothpicks is all you need to teach your child some valuable math skills—reasoning, number sense and even basic geometry. Toothpick math is also a fun way to make time go faster while waiting at an appointment.

Here are some fun ways to put a box of toothpicks to use:

- Last one wins. This is a great game for two people. Lay out 12 toothpicks. Taking turns, players may remove one or two toothpicks. The player who takes the last toothpick wins. (Try to leave three toothpicks on the table to guarantee a win on your next turn.)
- Can you copy this? Using five toothpicks, create a design. Let your child look at it for only three seconds. Then cover it up and see if your child can recreate it from memory.
- Tricky triangles. Give your child seven toothpicks. How many triangles can he create?

For additional toothpick fun, head to superm.math.hawaii.edu/_lessons/k_five/toothpick_geometry.pdf and print out more toothpick puzzles to try.

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Tackle social problems before they affect school performance

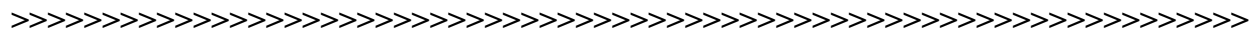
Learning how to deal with “friends” who turn out not to be friends is a tough lesson. And it’s one that can distract your child from academic learning and affect his performance in school.

Talk to your child about qualities that make someone a true friend. Suggest he avoid classmates who seem:

- Selfish. Does the person seem to think and talk mostly about himself? Is he using your child in order to get something?
- Phony. Does the person say one thing and then do another?
- Dishonest. Someone who wants to use a friend to cheat on a test is not really a friend at all.
- Unreliable. Did the person say he’d walk home with your child after school, but then head off to someone else’s house instead?

Remind your child that he is worthy of real friends who make him feel good about himself—and he should stay clear of people who have not earned his friendship.

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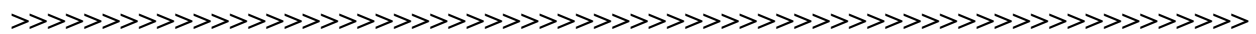
Celebrate Presidents Day with a variety of learning activities

February 21 is Presidents Day in the United States. Try these enjoyable learning activities to help your child discover more about U.S. presidents:

- Find a book with pictures of U.S. presidents. Have your child match those pictures to the faces on coins and bills. Give him pennies, nickels, dimes and quarters. He can also match pictures to one-, five- and twenty-dollar bills.
- Take a virtual tour of George Washington’s home. Visit www.mountvernon.org/the-estate-gardens/the-mansion/mansion-virtual-tour.

- Learn how the office of president was created by watching a short animated TedED video at ed.ted.com/lessons/inventing-the-american-presidency-kenneth-c-davis.
- Ask your child to imagine he’s president for a day. Then help him write a short essay, answering several questions: What is his day like? What powers does he have? What laws would he create or change?
- Write a letter. Does your child have something he’d like to say to the president? Encourage him to write a letter. Be sure to follow the guidelines at www.whitehouse.gov/get-involved/write-or-call.
- Share the legend of George Washington cutting down the cherry tree. Talk about how Lincoln was known as “Honest Abe.” Discuss the value of honesty. Ask your child what other qualities a president needs.
- Find crafts, coloring pages, word searches and more fun activities to do with your child at www.dltk-kids.com/crafts/presidents.html.

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Are you helping your child learn family history?

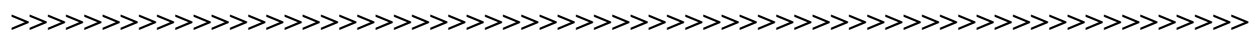
Learning about family origins is a great way to ignite a child’s curiosity and bring history to life. Answer yes or no to the questions below to see if you are helping your child learn more about your family:

- ___ 1. Do you share old family photos and family stories with your child?
- ___ 2. Do you prepare family recipes together? Preparing and sharing food is a great way to build connections.
- ___ 3. Do you encourage your child to ask older family members about their memories of childhood?
- ___ 4. Have you looked on a map with your child to see the country or countries that her ancestors came from? Check out books about those places when you go to the library.
- ___ 5. Are you keeping a scrapbook to preserve your family’s history? Keep photos and letters that show what your life is like.

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are giving your child roots in family history. For no answers, try those ideas.

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Practice tests reinforce learning and boost your child’s recall

How should your child study for tests? Research shows that taking practice tests is an effective way to study.

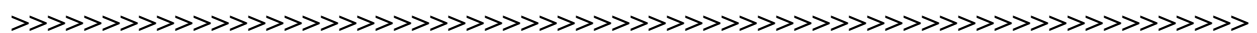
The act of recalling information is a learning activity that also helps students retain the information better. Plus, practice tests show students how well they know the content.

Practice testing can occur in several ways. Students might:

- Take quizzes in class. Help your child understand that quizzes are useful opportunities to practice recalling information. Simply taking a quiz can improve her learning and future grades.
When your child gets a graded quiz back, she should take time to correct any wrong answers and use the quiz for further studying.
- Work with others. Consider allowing your child to invite a classmate over to study and quiz one another. Or, they could meet over Zoom or FaceTime. You can also help your child study by calling out questions.
- Study independently. Your child can use flash cards and make her own practice tests. Discuss how to create questions by looking over notes, textbooks and handouts. She should notice the section headings, vocabulary words and review questions.

Don’t let your child stop at one quiz. Research shows that quizzing five to seven times reinforces learning even more!

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Boost your child’s self-confidence with new family traditions

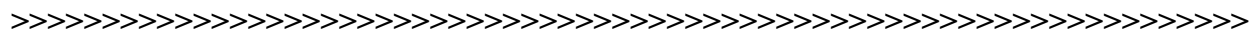
This Valentine’s Day, why not start some new family traditions that will help your child feel special? When children feel special, their self-confidence gets a boost!

Here are some fun ideas to try this month and throughout the year:

1. Send “fan mail.” Praise your child’s qualities and efforts in a note, poem or silly riddle. Send it through the post office. Or leave it under her pillow or anywhere else she will find it. Sign it, “From your biggest fan.”
2. Make a date. Each month, devote one day to your child. Write it on the calendar. Let her choose what to do and eat.

3. Give your child a place of honor. At a dinner, put your child at the head of the table. Serve her first and make a water or milk toast to her. As at testimonial dinners, have each person say only nice things about the honored guest. (Siblings will try hard to do this, as they know their turn will be coming.)
4. Create a mini-museum. In addition to the refrigerator, dedicate a wall in the house as a place to hang your child’s art, writing, test papers and certificates. Change the “exhibits” often.
5. Provide “room service.” Surprise your child when she’s getting ready for bed. Bring a healthy snack to her room. Take time to chat about her day.

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Questions and Answers

Q: My two sons could not be more different about homework. The older one spends about two hours a day on his school assignments. He asks for help constantly. He wants me to check over everything. My younger son says he doesn’t have homework or he did it at school. When he does homework, he races through it. How can I help them find a happy medium?

A: This is a snapshot of the challenges teachers face every day! Your children have the same parents and the same home environment. Yet they are as different as can be.

Surprisingly, however, their two approaches to homework can both be improved with the same three steps:

1. Talk with their teachers. Share what your boys are doing at home. Two hours of homework a day might be more than the teachers expect. Could your son have so much because he’s not finishing his classwork in school?
2. Establish a daily study time for each child. Your younger son might as well take time to work carefully. If he has no assignments, give him work to do during that time. You could, for example, ask him to read, solve math problems or review.
3. Set some ground rules. At the start of every study session, go over the work your children have to do. Help them set priorities and make to-do lists. Stay nearby doing your own work, but encourage your older son to do the work himself. Check at the end of study time to see if they finished everything on their lists.

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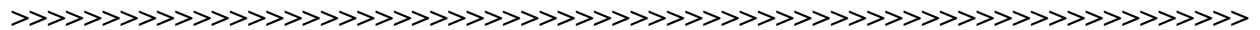


Show your child you think school is important

Taking time to set expectations and goals with your child clearly communicates your interest in helping her to do her best. Build on that by showing your enthusiasm for education in a variety of ways. Here's how:

- Maintain a relationship with your child's teacher. Keep in touch throughout the year. Share information about how your child is doing. Ask the teacher for suggestions on how to best support your child's learning.
- Attend school events in person or online to show your child that school is a priority for you. If your schedule and resources allow, consider volunteering at home and participating in school activities.
- Maintain a suitable environment for schoolwork. Make sure your child has a quiet, well-lit place to study. Keep it stocked with the supplies she needs. Look over homework and give suggestions.
- Keep up with assignments. Doing schoolwork is your child's responsibility, but you should be aware of what she is studying as well as the status of homework assignments, tests and class projects.
- Stay positive about school and schoolwork. Your attitude rubs off on your child. Whenever possible, mention that the latest science unit sounds interesting. Say a good word about your child's teacher, too. "I really like the way Mr. Thomas always gives you a study guide before your tests. I know it helps you to feel more prepared."

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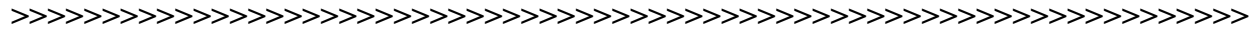
Ask three questions to ensure your expectations are realistic

High expectations are linked to high accomplishment. But how can you tell if your expectations for your child are also realistic? After all, you want to motivate him, not set him up for failure.

When setting expectations, ask yourself these questions:

1. Are they important? Make sure you choose expectations that focus on the behaviors you want your child to develop. For example, if you want him to be responsible and to succeed in school, set expectations that promote those outcomes.
2. Are they appropriate? Take your child's development into consideration. In addition to his age, think about his personality and maturity. Goals shouldn't be too easy or too difficult for him to reach.
3. Are they easy to understand? State your expectations in simple and clear terms. For example, "I expect you to start your reading by 4:00 each day."

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Too much praise has a negative effect on students' motivation

Students who receive too much of the wrong kind of praise from their parents may develop traits such as vanity, selfishness and self-centeredness. Experts note that unearned praise also has a negative impact on students' motivation.

While it's important for parents to encourage their children, it's more important to make sure praise is:

- Detailed. Highlight behaviors you want your child to repeat. "You studied every day for your test and earned a higher grade than your last one!"
- Honest. You want your child to be able to trust what you say. Rather than saying, "You're the best piano player ever!" try, "You are making progress in playing smoothly!"
- Focused on effort. Support your child's efforts to try new things. Put special emphasis on things your child works hard to do, even if they aren't a big deal to others. Perseverance is something to acknowledge and reward!
- Meaningful. Save compliments for times when your child really deserves them.

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