Elementary School
# Parents®
make the difference!

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## Review the school year with your child and set new goals

It's nearing the end of a busy school year. Your child has read new books and he's mastered new skills. Now is the perfect time to talk about everything he's learned.

Make time to have a chat about school. You could even plan something special, such as going out for a treat or making a favorite meal together. During your talk:

- **Take a look back.** What was your child's favorite school project this year? In what subject did he improve the most? Which book that the class read was his favorite? What goals did he accomplish?

  Help your child see the ways he has grown. "You worked hard to master division this year. You can do challenging things when you put your mind to it!"
- **Take a look forward.** What is your child looking forward to this summer? What is he excited about for next year? Is there a subject or an area he'd like to improve in next year? Are there books he would like to read? Encourage him to make a list of everything he hopes to accomplish in the months to come.
- **Discuss how learning** doesn't stop at the end of the school year. One of the great things about the summer is that it offers the opportunity to learn new things. Help your child think about something he'd like to learn. Would he like to learn a new sport? Would he like to teach himself how to paint? Would he like to learn a new language? Together, make a plan to help him achieve his learning goal.

## Help your child prepare for end of year projects

Teachers often assign students large projects toward the end of the school year. To help your child tackle a large project:

1. **Make a plan.** Sit down with your child to develop a plan for completing the project. Have her write the due date on the calendar. Ask questions about what steps she'll need to take to get ready. "You need to make a poster. Let's check to see if we have the supplies you'll need."
2. **Make a schedule.** Now help your child figure out *when* she's going to complete each step. Having several smaller deadlines is much easier than trying to meet one big one. Have her write these dates on the calendar.
3. **Celebrate successes.** Each time your child reaches a goal, help her figure out a reward. This should be small (a favorite dessert, not a trip to an amusement park) and something she can mostly do for herself.
4. **Check in.** You'll need to see how she is progressing to help her stay on track.

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# Encourage responsibility by helping your child enjoy chores

How do you get your child to do chores willingly? Most elementary-age children love to make a plan and then carry it out. So first, involve your child in brainstorming what needs to be done and when. Then:

- **Give your child a choice.** Together, make a list of age-appropriate chores, such as taking out the trash, sweeping, folding laundry, feeding a pet and helping with yard work. Let your child choose which ones he'd like to do.
- **Schedule a family work time** when everyone has a chore to do.
- **Be a good model.** Dive into chores yourself. Avoid complaining. Instead, talk about how good it feels when you finish a chore.
- **Be encouraging.** Say, "Here's the broom so you can help! Let's do this together."
- **Make a game of it.** Set a timer and see if your child can beat the clock. Turn on some music and work to the rhythm of the beat.
- **Rotate chores** each week, so no one feels stuck doing a chore he doesn't like. Put chores on slips of paper and let family members draw from a bowl.
- **Use a chore chart.** Let your child place a star next to chores when he completes them.
- **Curb criticism.** Don't immediately say what your child did wrong. Gently show him what he could do to improve, but don't redo his work.
- **Follow chores with fun.** Have a basket of index cards listing fun stuff to do after finishing chores.

**"It is not only for what we do that we are held responsible, but also for what we do not do."**

*—Molière*

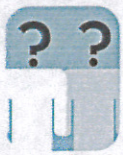
# Challenge your child to turn off the screens and turn on the fun!

Many kids spend hours staring at a TV screen, a computer screen, a tablet or a cell phone. During the summer, those hours typically increase.

That's why it's critical for parents to set limits on screen time. Experts say the easiest way to do that is by replacing screen time with other fun activities. Here are some ideas:

- **Learn to juggle.** Check out a book on juggling from the library and see if you and your child can teach each other how to do it!
- **Get a hula hoop.** Even indoors, a hula hoop offers an easy way to get exercise. Besides spinning the hoop at his waist, your child can also use it as a jump rope.
- **Explore playgrounds.** They offer a number of ways for your child to let off steam—and build muscles.
- **Draw a hopscotch game** on a sidewalk or driveway. Take turns playing.
- **Do yoga.** Yoga positions stretch and strengthen every part of the body. They enhance balance and coordination.

# Do you help your child deal with disappointment?



All children face disappointments. Are you helping your child learn to deal with them? Answer *yes* or *no* to each question below to find out:

___**1. Have you helped** your child understand what can't be changed and what can? For example, "You can't change the fact that it is raining, but you can change your plans."

___**2. Do you help your child** choose a positive response when the unexpected happens?

___**3. Do you help your child learn** from mistakes? "Next time, you'll start studying a few days in advance and earn a better grade."

___**4. Do you have this rule:** You can feel disappointed, but you can't sulk? Your child can control her actions, even when she feels let down.

___**5. Do you help your child** figure out solutions on her own—instead of trying to fix problems for her?

**How well are you doing?**

If you answered mostly *yes*, you're helping your child learn how to cope when things don't go her way. For *no* answers, try those ideas.

Elementary School Parents make the difference!

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# Community service strengthens relationships & builds character

Busy family life can disconnect parents and children from each other—and from the community. Volunteering as a family is a great way to change that. It also teaches children about responsibility, compassion, generosity and more!

When making summer plans, try to squeeze in a few volunteer activities. Your family might:

- **Clean a favorite spot.** Inspect places your family spends time, such as your street, a park or the beach. You may be surprised by how much trash and debris is there. Supervise as your family fills garbage and recycling bags.
- **Provide shelter.** Many groups build or improve housing for others. Find one that welcomes kids' help. Your child might sweep, carry items or hand out nails while you hammer.
- **Provide food.** Community food banks are usually in need of groceries and helpers. Homeless shelters and meal-delivery programs often need supplies. Your child may be able to collect food and supplies or even make sandwiches.
- **Care for animals.** Call an animal shelter to learn about its needs. If you and your child can't work directly with pets, consider other ideas, such as raising awareness about animal adoption.
- **Make visits.** Find a charity that serves elderly or homebound citizens. They may need company, meals or help with errands. A visit from a child may be more uplifting than anything else.

For more information about family community service, visit *http://kidshealth.org/en/parents/volunteer.html.*

# Five strategies can keep children reading through summer months

Students who don't read over the summer months lose an average of two to three months of growth in reading skills. Those who keep reading often experience gains.

The more your child reads, the easier reading will be for her—and the more she'll want to read. See that your child reads 30 minutes every day.

Try these activities to make reading enjoyable:

1. **Read the newspaper together.** Give your child the comics to read. Ask her which one's the funniest. Discuss sports, the weather, letters to the editor, travel destinations, etc.
2. **Read aloud together.** You read a line or page of a book. Then your child does. Or you read the narrative. Let your child read the dialogue—what characters say.
3. **Dramatize what you read.** Select a simple scene from one of your child's books. Assign character roles. Discuss what happens first, second, next. Then act it out, adding lots of dialogue.
4. **Promote practical reading.** Ask your child to read a recipe while you bake cookies. Involve her in reading instructions to build or repair something.
5. **Create reading-related jobs.** Ask your child to recopy damaged recipes. She could also organize the family bookshelf or DVD collection in alphabetical order.

## Questions & Answers

**Q: My son struggled this year in fourth grade. He will pass—but just barely. I don't have money to send him to summer school or an expensive camp. But I know he needs help or next year will be worse. What can I do over the summer to help my child catch up so he can keep up next year?**

**A:** It sounds like your child has had a rough year. But there are ways to make sure he doesn't repeat it in fifth grade.

Here are some strategies to help you get your son back on track:

- **Meet with your child's teacher** before the end of the year. Together, lay out a summer learning plan. If your son is struggling in math, find out exactly what seems to give him trouble—fractions? Multiplication? Ask the teacher to suggest any resources she thinks could help your son.
- **Take care of the basics.** Have your son's vision and hearing tested. It may be that he can't see to read the board, or that he can't hear the teacher. It's important to rule out these types of problems early.
- **Set learning goals.** How many books will he read over the summer, for example? Make a list of his goals and post it where your child will see it daily.
- **Set aside time each day** to work on school skills. Use any resources the teacher provided to structure your child's daily learning time.
- **Have some fun together.** Learning doesn't have to be drudgery! Visit the zoo or a museum. Look for a free concert. All these are ways to keep learning alive!

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# It Matters: Summer Learning

## Experiment with science this summer!

Keep your budding scientist experimenting with these clever activities. They're kid-friendly, safe, affordable and really, really cool!

Together, try these experiments:

- **Vinegar volcano.** Grab a cup or bowl, a box of baking soda, and some plain vinegar. (Conduct this experiment outside or in the kitchen sink.) Add a little bit of the baking soda to the cup, pour in some vinegar, and voilà! Chemistry in action! The fizzy rush happens because the baking soda—a base—reacts with the vinegar—an acid.
- **Raw or cooked?** Take two eggs—one raw and the other hardboiled—and try to figure out which is which. (Nope, you can't crack them.) How to do it? Put each egg on its side on a flat surface, and then spin it. The raw egg will wobble, while the hardboiled egg will spin smoothly. Why? The yolk and white in the raw egg are liquid, so they shift when moved. This affects the egg's center of gravity and makes it wobbly.
- **The sinking/floating orange.** Fill a sink with water and drop in a whole orange. It floats, doesn't it? Now peel the orange and drop it in again. It sinks, right? That's because the peel is full of tiny air pockets that make the fruit less dense (and able to float). Strip away those air pockets, and suddenly the orange is much denser. Hence, its trip to the bottom of the sink!

## Three activities will keep your child learning all summer long

Your child is as ripe for learning during the summer as she is throughout the rest of the year. So don't miss out on chances to boost her smarts during the warmer months. If you make them fun, she'll never suspect she's learning!

Here are three brain-building activities to enjoy this summer:

1. **Plant a garden.** Involve your child in the entire process. She'll have a real-world chance to use her reasoning and math skills. "We have a 10-foot by 4-foot plot in the yard. If tomatoes need to be planted at least two feet apart, how many should we buy? What else should we plant?"
2. **Host a family game night.** Set aside one evening each week to play board games together. Classics like Scrabble and Boggle are good for keeping language skills sharp. And more complex games like Monopoly and chess require your child to use reason and think critically.
3. **Participate in a library program.** Summer reading programs are terrific, but don't stop there. Many libraries offer science and math activities, too. Not only are they great for learning, they'll also help your child meet like-minded new friends.

## Maintain a consistent schedule over the summer months

Summer is a time to relax—but not a time to relax important routines. Routines help your child cooperate, develop responsibility and become self-disciplined. They also make it easier to adjust when school starts again. Maintain routines for:

- **Sleep.** When school is out, your child's bedtime and rising time may be later than usual. Once you choose a reasonable sleep schedule, however, stick with it.
- **Reading.** Schedule time for reading. Visit the library weekly and encourage reading every day, including in unexpected spots, such as the pool or the park.
- **Meals.** Make it a priority to have at least one family meal a day. This is a chance to catch up and enjoy each other's company.
- **Screen time.** Extra free time should not mean more time for screen media. Maintain healthy limits for the amount of time your child spends in front of screens.