Elementary School
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make the difference!
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Set high expectations that your child can achieve

Setting expectations can be tricky. Research shows that students generally live up to family and teacher expectations, whether those expectations are high or low. So, you want to set the bar high for your child.

It's also important to be realistic. Most students are not going to excel at everything. If only near-perfection satisfies you, your child may think, "What's the point?" and stop trying altogether.

To make sure your expectations are realistic and effective:

- **Encourage your child's** best effort in all pursuits.
- **Have unique expectations** for each of your children. Avoid comparing your child with siblings, friends or classmates.
- **Express pride** in your child's effort and hard work. Say things like, "You should be proud of yourself."
- **Remember that** your expectations are for your child, not for you. Kids are entitled to their own dreams. Avoid expecting your child to do what you wish you had done.
- **Learn about your child's interests.** When children feel like their families value their passions, they are more motivated to do their best.
- **Be a good role model.** Let your child see you give your best effort. Set expectations for yourself and talk to your child about how you plan to meet them.

Source: J.A. Fredricks and others, *Handbook of Student Engagement Interventions: Working with Disengaged Students*, Academic Press.

Older kids can motivate your child to read

Lots of factors have an impact on your child's love of reading, but one of them may be closer to home than you realize. It's an older sibling! Studies show that children who see their older brother or sister reading for pleasure are more likely to seek out books themselves.

It's not just that book-loving older kids model good reading habits. They're also great resources when it comes to sharing books, suggesting new stories to explore and talking about literature.

To help your child reap the benefits of having an older sibling (or other older child) around:

- **Make reading a family affair.** Set aside some group reading time each week. Include older siblings or cousins.
- **Involve the babysitter.** The next time you go out, ask the sitter to bring along a favorite book. When children notice how important reading is to older kids, they may become interested in it, too!

Source: M. Knoester and M. Plikuhn, "Influence of siblings on out-of-school reading practices," *Journal of Research in Reading*, John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

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‘Quick writes’ turn writing into fun for elementary schoolers

Writing can be hard work. But a *quick write* is a fun and easy way to encourage children to get their ideas down on paper.

Quick writes are just what they sound like—writing that people do in short periods of time. Usually, a quick write is based on a prompt. You present a question or idea and set the timer for five minutes. Then both you and your child write down everything you can before the timer beeps.

Once the quick write is finished, compare what each of you has written. Try these prompts:

- **Would it be a good** or a bad idea if dogs could talk? Why?
- **The best birthday** I can imagine would be … .
- **The most challenging part** of being a student is … .
- **It was a stormy day,** so I decided to … .
- **Ten years from now,** I will be … .
- **I invented** the most amazing machine. It can … .
- **When I woke up** this morning, I was a different person. I was … .

Even students who usually stare into space when it’s time for a writing assignment may like a quick write. Kids are often surprised to discover just how much they know or have to say about a particular subject.

> **“Writing is like any other sort of sport. In order for you to get better at it, you have to exercise the muscle.”**
>
> *—Jason Reynolds*

Science will come alive with these simple experiments

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 hard-boiled—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 hard-boiled 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. Now, peel the orange and drop it in again. It sinks. 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 the fruit is more dense than the water. Hence, its trip to the bottom of the sink!

Do you show your child what respect looks like?

Children learn about respect from watching the adults in their lives. Are you modeling the behavior you want your child to have—so that your child will show the same respect for you, teachers and others? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

___**1. Do you treat** your child and others with kindness and honesty?

___**2. Do you admit** mistakes when you make them, apologize for them and try to fix them?

___**3. Do you listen** attentively when your child is speaking to you? If you aren’t able to listen right then, do you schedule a time to talk later?

___**4. Do you maintain** self-control and find healthy ways to vent your anger—rather than taking your frustrations out on your child?

___**5. Do you enforce** household rules and the consequences for breaking them fairly and consistently?

How well are you doing?

If most of your answers are *yes*, you are demonstrating respect for your child. For *no* answers, try those suggestions.

Elementary School Parents make the difference!

Practical Ideas for Parents to Help Their Children.

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It's never too late to beef up your engagement with school

When families and schools work together, the results can be incredible—including increased academic achievement, and better student attitudes and behavior.

Involvement in your child's education doesn't need to be complicated or time consuming. And even though the end of the school year is around the corner, it isn't too late to get involved.

Starting right now, you can:

- **Attend school events**—in person or online. Participate and make an effort to connect with staff and other families.
- **Pay attention** to school information sent home and posted online. Keep track of important dates, such as end-of-year tests and celebrations.
- **Volunteer.** Ask your child's teacher if there is anything you can do to help out. Perhaps you could read to students, organize take-home folders or help in another way.
- **Join the parent-teacher group.** If you can't attend meetings, check the school website to learn about issues and programs.
- **Ask teachers questions.** "How can I help my child succeed?" "What are the most important school tasks for us to accomplish each day at home?" "Are there any areas where my child's work needs improvement?"
- **Keep talking to your child** about school. Ask about classes and learning. Remind your child that education is important to you.

Help your child master math vocabulary with four strategies

When children learn math, they also need to learn a whole new vocabulary. If they have to stop to think about words like *product* or *quotient*, they won't be focused on doing the math.

Here are a few strategies to help your elementary schooler build a strong math vocabulary::

1. **Create visual aids** that show a term doing the thing it represents. The math term *circumference*, for example, is the distance around the edge of a circle. So your child could write the word *circumference* around the edge of a circle.
2. **Play Math Concentration.** Have your child write a math term on an index card and write its definition on another card. Then place five or six pairs of cards face down. Take turns flipping over only two cards at a time. The goal is to make a match by turning over a math term and its correct definition.
3. **Link math symbols** to math words. Have your child create flash cards with a symbol on one side and the word it represents on the other. Use the flash cards to help your child review.
4. **Make connections.** Help your elementary schooler connect new terms to concepts that are already familiar. Is your child learning about *centimeters?* Talk about how there are 100 *cent*s in a dollar, 100 years in a *cent*ury, and 100 *cent*imeters in a meter.

Q: In the last year, my fifth grader has become so negative. Nothing is ever right. My child doesn't seem to like school, the teacher or anything else for that matter. Last week, we did something special together—just the two of us. Later, my child said it was "All right, I guess." I'm losing patience. What can I do?

Questions & Answers

A: You are wise to be concerned. Constant negativity reduces motivation and increases the likelihood of stress, anxiety and depression. Negativity can also impair memory, attention and problem-solving skills.

Here are some steps to take:

- **Ask about** what makes your child feel down, and pay close attention to the answer. If there is one issue that comes up over and over, you may have hit on the problem. Brainstorm ways your child can address the situation.
- **Let your child complain,** but don't dwell on the topic. If your child whines about an assignment, listen for a minute or two. Then, redirect your child's focus by saying, "Well, you still need to finish it." Say that everyone has responsibilities—whether they like them or not.
- **Model the attitude** you'd like to see. Face disappointments with some positivity. Say things like, "I'm bummed I have to work on Saturday, but it will feel great to finish this project!"
- **Realize you aren't responsible** for fixing everything. Empower your child to solve some problems independently.
- **Make a medical appointment** if your child seems consistently anxious or depressed.

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It Matters: Mental Health

Encourage your child to develop self-respect

There is a strong link between self-respect and mental well-being. Children who feel good about themselves and understand their self-worth are more likely to experience better mental health.

Here are some elements of self-respect and ways to help your child develop them:

- **Competence.** It feels great to be good at things. Give your child opportunities to learn and practice new skills—everything from reading to playing sports to doing household tasks.
- **Accomplishments.** Notice and compliment your child's progress. "You've read three books this week. I'm impressed!"
- **Confidence.** It helps to have family members who stay positive through challenges. Display a "You can do it" attitude. Help your child see mistakes as great opportunities to learn.
- **Freedom.** Boost independence by letting your child make age-appropriate choices. For example, "Would you like to organize your closet today or tomorrow?"
- **Support.** Show that you accept, appreciate and love your child unconditionally. Ask questions about your child's beliefs, concerns and dreams for the future. Help your child solve problems.
- **Imitation.** If you have self-respect, your child is more likely to have it as well. Be kind to yourself and believe in your worth.

Playtime is linked to improved mental health in children

When children have fun, their brains release chemicals that cause happiness and reduce stress—which leads to improved mental health.

To get the most from playtime:

- **Make time for active play.** Your child needs at least one hour of daily exercise for physical and mental wellness. Active play (jumping rope, playing tag, etc.) counts toward that hour. Have your child keep a physical activity diary for a week—does it total at least seven hours?
- **Limit recreational screen time.** Hands-on, real-life play stimulates your child's brain better than passively watching a screen. Together, make a list of screen-free playtime activities. When your child wants to play a video game, point to the list.

- **Play with your child.** Family play is great for strengthening bonds. Have a family board game night, build something together or ask to join in your child's pretend play.

Source: S. Wang, Ph.D. and S. Aamodt, Ph.D.,"Play, Stress, and the Learning Brain," *Cerebrum,* National Library of Medicine.

Help your child learn how to recognize and manage feelings

All kids feel worried or upset sometimes. Being aware of these feelings and thoughts is the first step toward managing them in healthy ways. Here's how:

- **Talk about thoughts.** When your child seems sad or anxious, ask, "What are you thinking about right now?" Your child might say, for example, "I'm worried no one will sit with me in the cafeteria at lunch tomorrow."
- **Show understanding.** Put your child's feelings into words. "I know you're worried about finding someone to eat with at lunch tomorrow."
- **"Flip" thinking.** Tell your child to make negative thoughts do a "flip" so they're more positive or helpful. Your child might think, "I can ask my reading buddy to have lunch with me" or "I can tell my teacher I'm worried about sitting alone."

If your child often seems worried or upset, talk to your child's teacher, school counselor or pediatrician.

Source: "Catch, Check, and Change Your Thoughts," National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine.