

# STEPS TO Homework Success



When your children do homework, they reinforce what they learned at school and expand their knowledge. But they learn more than the information in their assignments—they also build study skills and habits that they'll need throughout school and life.

Here are ways you can provide support and help your youngsters succeed with their homework.

## BEFORE

### Create a study area

Many children work best in a special study area, such as at a bedroom desk or the kitchen table. However, some youngsters do better sprawling on the living room floor or sitting on their bed. Consider letting your child decide where he'll work—he's more likely to stay on task when he's comfortable. Regardless, his work area should have adequate lighting and homework supplies, such as pens, pencils, paper, a ruler, a calculator, and a dictionary.

### Get assignments

Remind your youngster that it's her job to write down assignments in school. She may need to copy them from the board or write them in her agenda as her teacher talks. When she gets home, check that she has the instructions and handouts she needs—you'll help her get in the habit of bringing home her assignments the day they're given.



### Make a daily plan

Glance over your child's homework, and help him come up with a study plan. You might suggest that he tackle tougher or

longer assignments first while he's fresh and alert. He should be able to follow most homework instructions without supervision, but let him know you're available to discuss them.

### Break projects into steps

Encourage your youngster to use a calendar to stay on schedule as she works on a project. Have her divide each project into steps and write them on the calendar. A science project, for example, might include steps like: develop hypothesis, conduct experiment, record results, write lab report. *Tip:* She may need your help breaking assignments into chunks and choosing deadlines.



### Team with teachers

Ask your child's teacher about homework rules and how she would like you to help (or not help) him. Find out what kinds of assignments your youngster should expect. Provide your phone number and email address, and encourage the teacher to contact you if problems arise. The sooner you are aware of an issue, the more quickly a solution can be found.

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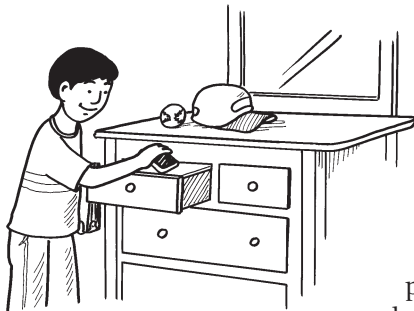
## DURING

### Keep a routine

Starting homework at the same time each day can make learning a habit for your child. Have her try a couple of different times to see what works best. Possibilities include immediately after school, before dinner (but after she has had time to play), or after dinner.

### Increase concentration

Some youngsters need calm surroundings to focus on homework. Others may study better with background music. But television is too much for anyone to ignore. Your child



should keep the set off during study time so his mind is tuned in to his homework. Likewise, if he has a cell phone or a handheld video game system, have him turn it off and put it out of sight so that he isn't distracted during homework time.

### Have family quiet time

Whenever possible, try to match your household's schedule with your youngster's study time. If homework is done from 7 to 8 p.m. each day, make this a quiet time for the entire family. Do paperwork or read alongside your child while she studies. This will help her stay focused.

### Provide support

If your youngster is stuck, guide him in the right direction rather than providing the answers. For example, instead of answering his question, "Mom, how many feet are in a mile?" ask, "How do you think you can figure that out?" Your child will learn to work independently and to problem-solve. *Tip:* When he would benefit from your assistance, offer to pitch in. For instance, you could quiz him on spelling words or multiplication facts.

### Give reminders

A simple prompt ("Finished that poem?") may be all that's needed to encourage your youngster to complete a project. But watch for signs that she's frustrated or seems to be spending too much time on her homework. If she consistently has trouble finishing assignments, ask her teacher for advice.



## AFTER

### Check homework

Take a moment to inspect your child's work when he's finished. Knowing that you will be looking at his assignments increases the chance that he will finish them *and* do his best. Check to see that his work is neat and complete. If you find several misspelled words or calculation errors, ask him to look over it again. But you shouldn't correct his work—that's his responsibility. Plus, mistakes show the teacher where your youngster needs help.

### Boost confidence

Praising hard work as you notice it encourages your child to keep learning. A warm comment ("Nice job on those division problems") can give her confidence when she tackles her next assignment. Remember, the right attitude can make a big difference!



### Find ways to improve

When graded homework is returned, look for the teacher's notes. These tell you if your youngster understood the assignment or where he went wrong. If he received a poor grade, ask him to think about the reasons. Did he copy the assignment correctly? Did he follow the instructions? Discovering what went wrong can keep him from repeating mistakes.

### Talk about learning

You can stay up to date on what your child is learning in school by talking with her regularly about her homework. For instance, during dinner you could ask, "How is your geography project coming along? What have you discovered so far?" Or while you're in the car, the two of you might look for words on that week's vocabulary list and discuss their meanings.

### Save assignments

Help your youngster create a system for filing returned homework. He might keep each subject in a different color folder. Then, he can use the papers to study for tests and quizzes. *Idea:* Suggest that he post ones he did especially well on—they can be a source of encouragement when he struggles with an assignment.

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*Tip:* The key is for you to stay involved and monitor your child's homework without doing it for her. With your guidance and encouragement, your youngster will learn how to work independently and plan for success.

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# Build Better Behavior

*Good behavior is a habit all parents can try to instill in their children, but it doesn't happen overnight. Use patience and the strategies in this guide to help you lay a foundation for good behavior at home and at school.*



**Give positive attention.** Try to set aside a little uninterrupted time with your child each day, and let her take the lead in deciding how to spend it. She might want to have a special story time with you or take a walk around the neighborhood to talk about the day. She'll feel more important and secure—and be less apt to misbehave in an effort to make you notice

her. *Tip:* While you're enjoying each other's company, be sure to give her your total attention. Turn off distractions like your cell phone or the television.

**Set ground rules.** Your youngster may be more likely to behave if he knows exactly what you expect.

Talk about the rules for behaving at home and in public. These might include things like keeping his hands to himself and listening quietly when others are speaking. Remember, you know your child best—choose rules that fit his age and abilities. As he gets older, you can update the rule list. *Tip:* To help everyone remember the rules, post them where they can be seen. Also, state them in a positive way. Instead of "Don't leave your bike on the driveway," write, "Put your belongings away when you finish using them."

**Discuss consequences.** The best time to talk about consequences is before a rule is broken. Let your youngster know in advance what will happen if she misbehaves or breaks a rule. For instance, you could say, "If you put your bike in the garage, you will be able to ride it tomorrow." *Tip:* Involve your child in deciding fair punishments for breaking rules.

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## A measure of self-control

This activity can help your youngster practice taking control of her own behavior.

**1.** Help her draw a thermometer on paper and add horizontal lines to divide it into thirds. She can color the bottom third blue and label it "Keeping my cool." Have her color the middle section yellow and write "Getting warmer." And she should color the top portion red and label it "Danger zone."

**2.** Together, brainstorm a list of ideas she can use to control herself when her "temperature" starts to rise. For instance, if she's starting to feel frustrated (perhaps her brother makes a

face at her), she might close her eyes and take a deep breath. If she's entering the danger zone (say, she feels like hitting him), she could walk away for a few minutes and cool down.

**3.** Let her write the ideas on the paper. Then, hang up the thermometer where it can remind her that she is in control of herself.





**Point out benefits of behaving well.** When your youngster sees the results of good behavior, he may try harder to stay on course. You can reinforce the idea by mentioning the positive consequence in connection with his behavior. “Sam, since you did all your chores without being reminded, we’ll have an extra half-hour to spend at the park.” *Tip:* It may be tempting to “bribe” your child to behave well, but this can make him dependent on rewards in the future. Skip the sticker or candy in favor of a more natural reward (say, time for an extra bedtime story because he got ready quickly).

**Catch your child being good.** Look for times when your youngster is behaving well, and praise her for it. Try to make your compliment specific: “I know you’re disappointed your brother got to pick the cereal—you handled it nicely.” Pointing out what she did right helps her recognize good behavior so she can repeat it in the future.

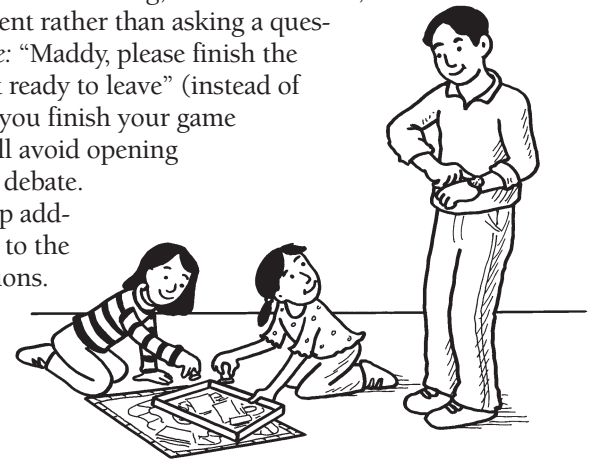
**Use logic.** It’s easier for your child to understand cause and effect if the consequences are related to his misbehavior. For example, if he skates without his helmet, it makes more sense to take away the skates than to take away dessert. *Tip:* Where appropriate, use “make it better” consequences that encourage your youngster to correct his behavior in a positive way. If he knocks down his sister’s block tower, he could help her rebuild it, for instance.

**Use statements instead of questions.** When you expect your child to do something, tell her in a clear, polite statement rather than asking a question. *Example:* “Maddy, please finish the game and get ready to leave” (instead of “Maddy, can you finish your game now?”). You’ll avoid opening the door to a debate.

*Tip:* Also, skip adding, “Okay?” to the end of directions.

It makes it sound like your request is optional.

Rather than saying, “Let’s get ready to go, okay?” just say, “Let’s get ready to go.”



**Be consistent.** Even the most well-behaved youngster will act up or test the rules occasionally. When that happens, the best idea is to stick to your rules and consequences for breaking them. Knowing that you will respond exactly the same way every time he misbehaves can motivate your child to make better choices.

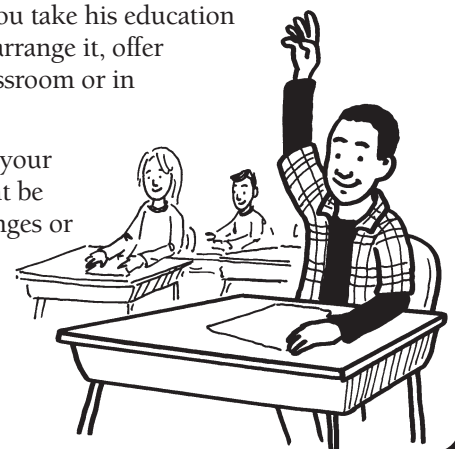
## When behavior is a problem at school

If your child acts out at school, what should you do? Here are some strategies to try:

- **Be a team player.** Meet with the teacher to discuss ways you can work together to improve the situation.
- **Communicate regularly.** Find out which method the teacher prefers (notes, emails, phone calls). Ask her to tell you about your youngster’s good days as well as the not-so-good ones. That way, you can praise him for his good behavior as well as talk to him about problems.
- **Try to keep expectations consistent between home and school.** Let your child know that you expect good behavior in both places. For example, if talking out of turn is the problem at school, remind him not to interrupt at home.

- **Volunteer.** When you are active in your youngster’s school, you show him that you take his education seriously. If you can arrange it, offer to help out in his classroom or in the cafeteria.

*Note:* If you think your child’s behavior might be related to family changes or other stress, or could have a physical cause, check with his school counselor or his pediatrician.



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# Supporting Your CHILD'S EDUCATION

You can help your youngster succeed in school. How? By getting involved in his education. From talking to him about what he's doing in school to staying in touch with his teacher and attending school events, there are many easy ways to support your child's learning. Consider these suggestions.



## EVERYDAY STRATEGIES

Encourage your youngster to do his best at school with these ideas for supporting his education at home.

**COMMUNICATE EXPECTATIONS.** Set high expectations for your child, and he'll be likely to try to meet them. For example, let him know you expect him to work hard in school. Talk regularly about what you expect in the short term (study for a quiz) and long term (go to college). Then, be sure to recognize his successes along the way.



**MAKE TIME FOR READING.** Reading regularly can help your youngster do well in all subjects. Books introduce her to new words—and new worlds. Plus, developing the reading habit now can help her enjoy reading for a lifetime.

Try to read to your child at bedtime each night, and encourage her to read on her own, too.

**KNOW WHAT YOUR CHILD IS LEARNING.** Have him explain the steps in a science experiment or tell you about a story he's writing. Your curiosity will show him that his schooling matters to you. At the same time, going over the information will reinforce what he is learning.

**SEE YOURSELF AS AN "ASSISTANT."** You can support your youngster when she does homework...without doing it for her. Look through her backpack together, and find out what her assignments are. Then, help her schedule enough time so she's not rushing to do them at the last minute.

### PROVIDE EXPERIENCES.

Each time your child visits a nature center, helps you grocery shop, or attends a concert, he collects new knowledge. For example, he might learn the names of frog species, use a scale to weigh vegetables, or hear classical music. Take him on errands with you, and try to plan family outings that will expose him to new ideas.



## AN ACTIVE ROLE

When you stay up to date on what's going on in school, your youngster feels supported. Here's how you can play an important part in her academic life.

**KNOW SCHOOL POLICIES.** At the start of the year, go over the school handbook together. You and your child will find everything you need to know about policies (discipline, attendance). *Tip:* Help her remember school procedures by reviewing the handbook a few times during the school year.

**USE TOOLS.** Together, look at the school schedule and write important dates on your family's calendar (test days, class pictures). Also, read school newsletters and websites. *Note:* If your youngster's school offers an online grade service, use it to check on his progress regularly.

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**ATTEND SCHOOL EVENTS.** Make time to go to book fairs, plays, and other school functions. Take siblings along to events that are open to families, such as a school carnival or family math night. When your whole family gets involved, your child will feel proud of her school.

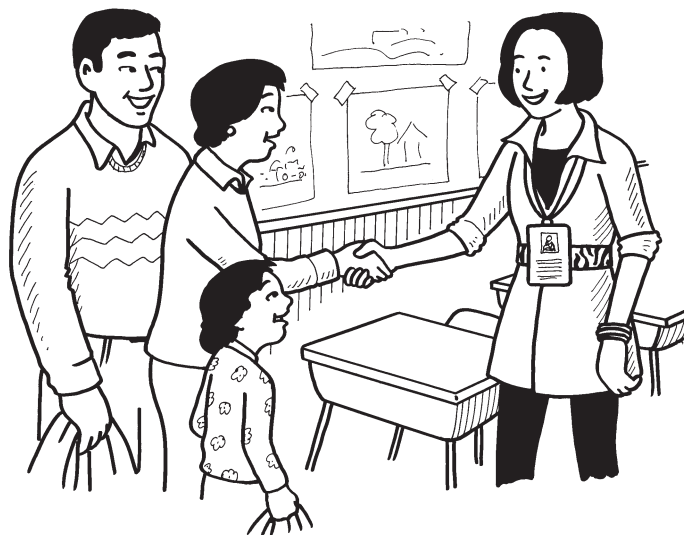


**USE SPECIAL SERVICES.** If your youngster gets special services (for a learning disability or because English is his second language), stay in touch with the resource teacher. Attend annual reviews of his IEP (Individualized Education Plan). Talk to your child about what he's entitled to (extra time for tests, preferential seating), and encourage him to take advantage of the services.

**HELP STRIKE A BALANCE.** When your youngster wants to sign up for extracurricular activities, make sure she will have enough time for schoolwork, family, and fun. You might have her concentrate on one club, after-school class, or sport at a time, for example.

## PARENT-SCHOOL COMMUNICATION

Students are most successful when parents and teachers work together. Use these ideas for communicating with your child's school.



**INTRODUCE YOURSELF.** Meet teachers at open houses or back-to-school nights. Then, stay connected by saying hello at school events, volunteering when possible, and responding promptly to notes and emails.

**SOLVE PROBLEMS EARLY.** Contact staff members before small issues grow into large ones. If your youngster is having trouble with a subject or seems frustrated, call the teacher. Ask what you can do to help, and look for solutions together.

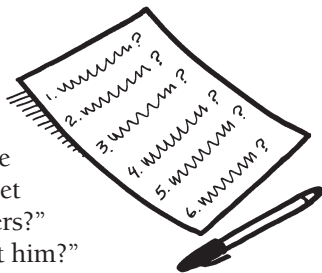
**SHOW APPRECIATION.** Keep in touch with your child's teacher when things are going smoothly as well as when you have a question or concern. For instance, you might email her to thank her for suggesting a good book to your youngster or providing extra help with math.

### GET THE MOST OUT OF CONFERENCES

Parent-teacher conferences give you the chance to find out how your youngster is doing in class. Try these suggestions.

#### BEFORE THE CONFERENCE

- Prepare a list of questions to take along. For example, you might ask: "What should my child know or be able to do by the end of the year?" "How does he get along with peers and staff members?" "Do you have any concerns about him?"
- Think about information that might help teachers understand your youngster. You can share strengths, weaknesses, hobbies, and interests. Consider letting teachers know about personal news affecting your child (divorce, a death in the family).



#### AT THE CONFERENCE

- Listen carefully to what the teacher says. Make notes so you can remember points to share with your child or to follow up on later.
- When it's your turn to talk, mention your most important concerns first, in case time runs out. If you need more time, you can ask the teacher to schedule another meeting or a telephone conversation. Be sure to ask for the best way to reach her (email, phone call, note) in the future.

#### AFTER THE CONFERENCE

- Talk to your youngster about what his teacher said. Be sure to include compliments she gave, as well as areas to improve. Together, work out an action plan, including steps your youngster will take and ways to check on his progress. Post the action plan in his room, and discuss it regularly.

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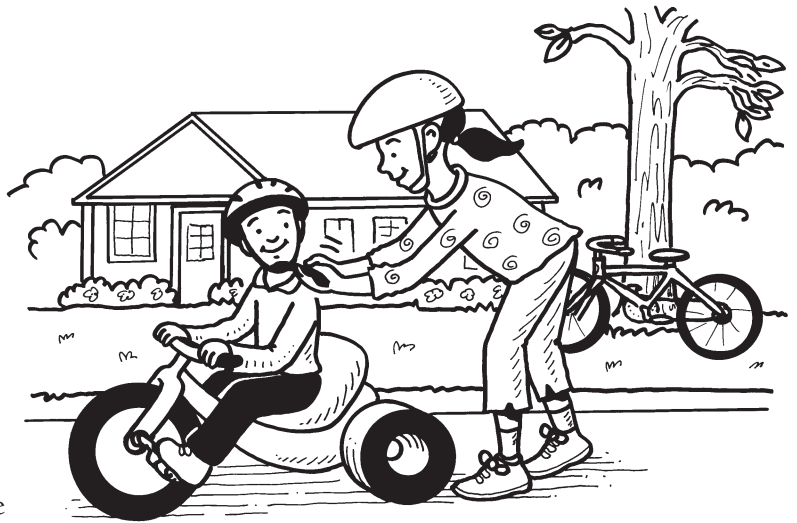
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# Kindness and Compassion

Performing simple acts of kindness and compassion encourages your child to think of others and makes her feel good about herself—a one-two punch that also helps to prevent bullying. Try these ideas to inspire your youngster to be a kind and compassionate person.



## AT HOME

What do kindness and compassion look like? Use these activities to help your child spot kindhearted actions in her daily life.

### Make a reminder

Look up *compassion* and *kindness* in the dictionary together. Then, have your youngster collect quotations about these qualities from books or websites. *Example:* “Always try to be a little kinder than necessary.” —J. M. Barrie. Ask your child to invent



her own sayings, too, such as “Be a ray of sunshine and brighten someone’s day.” Next, let her use her favorites to create a place mat. She can write the quotes graffiti-style on construction paper. Slip the paper into a plastic sheet protector so her place mat lasts longer. *Tip:* Suggest that your youngster spread the compassion message by making a place mat for each family member.

### Catch kindness

Show your child how much kindness happens around him every day—he’ll see ways he can be kind, too. Have him make a label to stick on a clean, empty jar. It might say “Be kind” or “We’re a kind family.” Place the jar in an easy-to-reach location

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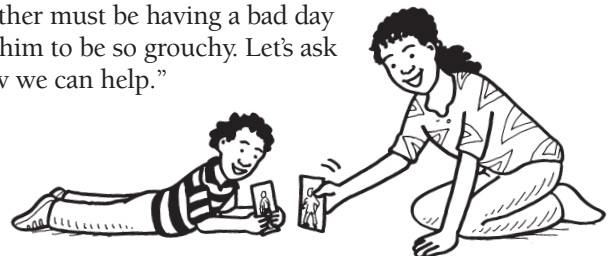
## The anti-bullying connection

Empathy is a powerful tool against bullying. When children can imagine themselves in another person’s shoes, they’re less likely to be bullies and more prone to step in if someone else is bullied. These strategies will help your youngster consider how other people feel:

- Using pictures in magazines, take turns inventing scenarios that encourage you to put yourselves in another person’s place. *Example:* “Someone tripped this boy on the playground. How would you feel if that happened to you?”
- While watching videos or reading, point out when one character shows empathy for another. “George could see

how sad Lucy was when those kids were teasing her. I’m glad he stood up for her.”

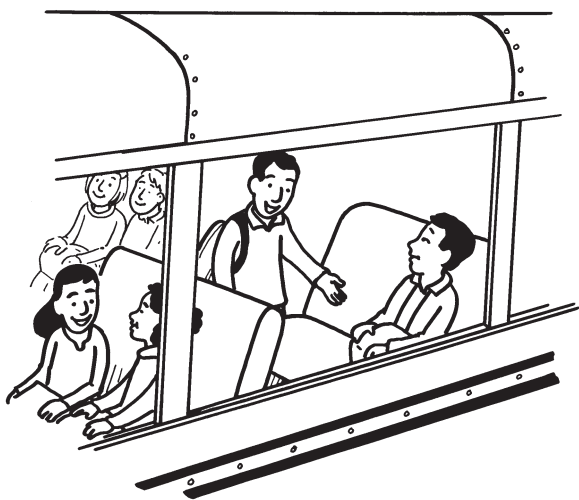
- Think aloud to help your child understand how to show empathy for people who act angry, rude, or mean. “Your brother must be having a bad day for him to be so grouchy. Let’s ask how we can help.”



along with slips of colored paper and a pen. Now tell everyone in the family to add a note to the jar when they “catch” someone being kind. For instance, “Dad made soup for me because I didn’t feel well” or “Jeremy cleaned up the dog’s muddy paw prints so Mom didn’t have to do it.” Once a week, read the slips aloud. Then, start a new batch.

## AT SCHOOL

When students are kind and compassionate, there is more learning and less bullying. These ideas can help your youngster be a caring classmate.



### Welcome someone new

Have your child think about what it feels like to be the new kid. You might remind him how he felt on his first day somewhere. Maybe he was afraid the kids at basketball camp wouldn’t like him or that he’d have no one to play with at an after-school program. Then, help him think of ways to make things better for a new student. For example, he could sit with the classmate on the bus or invite him to join a kickball game at recess.

### Share a compliment

While your youngster doesn’t have to be best friends with everyone in her class, she does need to be nice to them. Encourage her to focus on each person’s strengths instead of reasons she might not like them. Try prompting her with questions like “Who is a good athlete?” or “Who draws cool pictures?” Suggest that she use those answers to give compliments. For instance, in art class, she can tell a classmate she likes his painting. After a spelling bee, she could congratulate the winner. She may be surprised to see that a few nice words will encourage others to be kind, too.

## AROUND TOWN

When your youngster regularly puts others first, kindness and compassion become second nature. Take advantage of big and small opportunities for her to make a difference in the community.

### Pay it forward

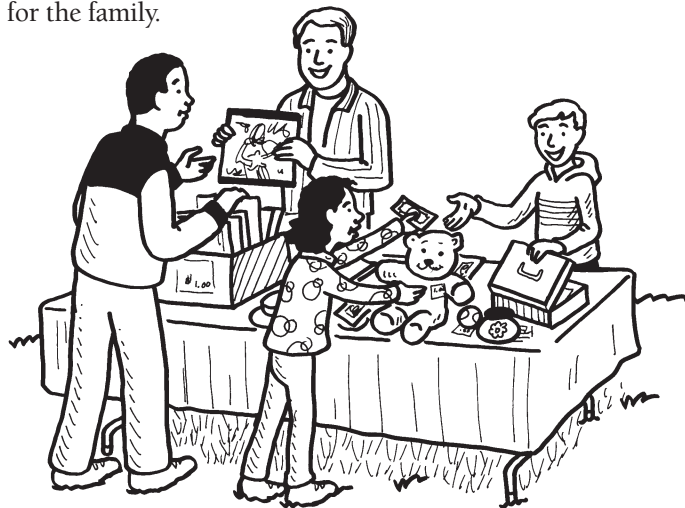
Make it a family policy to do two kind things for each one done for you. Be sure to let your child know that even small things count. Someone might hold the door open for her to enter a restaurant, for example. To pay the kindness forward (twice), your youngster could hold the door for another person—and offer to get an elderly couple’s order when it’s called.

For times when she can’t pay it forward right away, your child can watch for chances to catch up during the day.



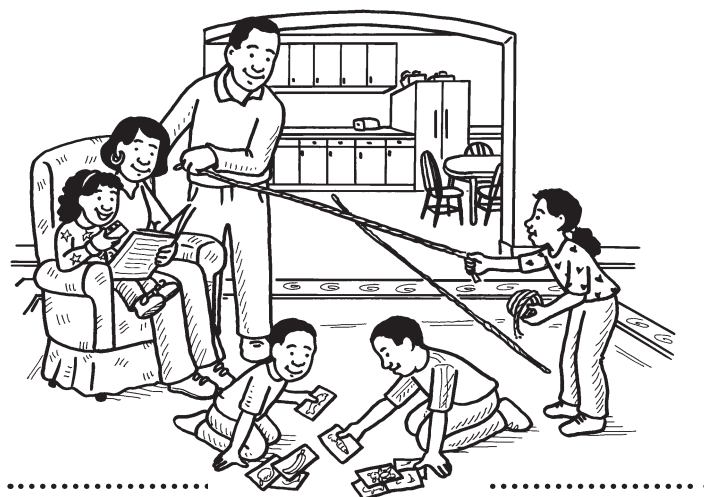
### Encourage a can-do attitude

In tough situations, your youngster may want to show compassion but feel that his actions won’t make a difference. For instance, he might want to help a neighborhood family who lost everything in a house fire. Remind him that while some things are too big for him to fix completely, there’s still plenty he can do. Then, brainstorm ideas together. His list could include everything from donating clothes from his own closet to bigger things like having a yard sale to raise money for the family.





# Reading, Writing, & Math



Your child reads, writes, and does math in school every day. What if you could help her do better in all of those subjects by enjoying activities together at home? With this guide, you can! Try these 10 ideas to boost her skills while sharing quality time.

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## Reading

### Story box

Here's a creative way to act out stories—and increase your youngster's understanding of them.



Read a story together, and let your child decorate a shoe box to match the setting. If it takes place in a city, she could

line the inside of the box with blue construction paper and glue on construction-paper buildings with squares of aluminum foil for windows. Suggest that she add toy animals or people for the book's characters.

Encourage your youngster to retell the story to you. She might move the toys around and use different voices to say lines from the book.

### Almanac game

Play this almanac game to build your child's knowledge of history, geography, and other subjects.

Shuffle a deck of cards (ace–9 only, ace = 1), and stack them facedown. On your turn, draw two cards (say, ace and 7), and make them into a two-digit number (17 or 71). Open a children's almanac to that page, and have each player read it silently. Then, the person who drew the cards takes the almanac and asks each player a question using information on the

page. Examples: "What is the capital of Maine?" "When did the Gold Rush begin?"

Everyone who gets a correct answer scores a point. If anyone gives the wrong answer, the person who asked the question gets his point! After every player has a turn drawing cards, the high score wins.

### Audio book library

Make a priceless collection of audio books by recording your youngster—and other family members—reading her favorite books.

Ask your child to pick a book and practice reading it. When she can read it with expression and at a good pace, help her record herself.

Also, record yourself reading bedtime stories to her, and ask grandparents, aunts, and uncles to make audio books when they visit. Now your youngster can enjoy story time with her favorite people, even when they're at work or out of town.

## Writing

### Family comic strip

Every family has funny tales they love to tell. Pick one that makes your family laugh, and turn it into a comic strip.

Maybe your suds-covered dog once escaped during a bath and ran around the house while you chased him. Let everyone pick a part of the story to write and illustrate. Each person can draw his panel on a sheet of paper (stick figures are fine!) and add dialogue.

("Come back here, Roger!")

Have your child glue the panels in order onto poster board and hang the comic strip somewhere for everyone to enjoy.





### Rock-hunt poetry

Anyone can be a poet with this clever outdoor activity.

Ask your youngster to search for rocks big enough to write words on with chalk. Encourage him to write a variety of nouns (*pizza, truck*), verbs (*jumped, flew*), and adjectives (*huge, blue*). He might also make a few rocks with common words like *the, and, a, and is*.

Now your child can arrange the word rocks into a poem. Have him read his verse aloud and move the rocks around until he's happy with it. Then, he could copy his poem onto paper so he'll have it to keep.

### Trading cards

Designing trading cards can give your youngster experience doing research and writing nonfiction.

Let your child choose a category like animals, vehicles, or food. Each family member can make at least three trading cards to fit the category. For animals, your youngster might create cards for a koala, an otter, and a dolphin. She could find facts about them in library books or online (try *kids.nationalgeographic.com* or *kids.sandiegozoo.org*). Then, she can write details on one side of each card and draw a picture of the animal on the other.

Read each other's cards—and trade to collect the ones you like best!

## Math

### Yarn measurement

Your child can have a ball with this estimation challenge.

Ask your youngster to stand somewhere in your house and name a spot she can see. For instance, she might stand by a kitchen chair and “spot” the refrigerator. Then, she should cut a length of yarn that she thinks will reach it. To check her estimate, she can lay down the yarn. How close did she come?

Next, let her pick other distances, estimate, and check. As she practices, her estimation skills will improve.

### Number of the day

“Good morning! What's today's number?” Start each day with a new number, and find creative ways to use it.

Give your child 10 craft sticks, and ask him to write a number (1–100) on each. Put the sticks in a cup, and every morning, he can pull one out to select the number of the day.

Then, hold a contest to see who can find it the most times that day, and keep a running count. Road signs, food packages, and clocks, for instance, are great places to find numbers. Or use the number for activities and projects. For 27, play basketball until one team scores 27 points. Or for 63, make a mosaic with 63 tiny squares of construction paper.

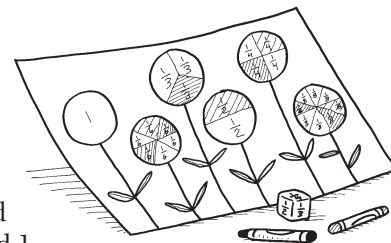
### Fraction flowers

Try to be the first player to color in all the (fractional) petals of your flower!

First, cover a die with masking tape squares, and label them  $\frac{1}{2}$ ,  $\frac{1}{3}$ ,  $\frac{1}{4}$ ,  $\frac{1}{6}$ ,  $\frac{1}{8}$ , and 1.

Next, have each player trace around a cup on paper to make six circles (“flowers”). Leave one flower whole, and draw lines to divide the others into halves, thirds, fourths, sixths, and eighths. Write the fraction you've made on each section (example:  $\frac{1}{6}$  on each “petal” of the flower with 6 sections).

On your turn, roll the die, and color in a matching fraction. If no matching fractions are left, try looking for *equivalent* ones. For instance, roll  $\frac{1}{2}$ , and color  $\frac{2}{4}$  (since  $\frac{2}{4} = \frac{1}{2}$ ). The first one to color in all her flowers wins.



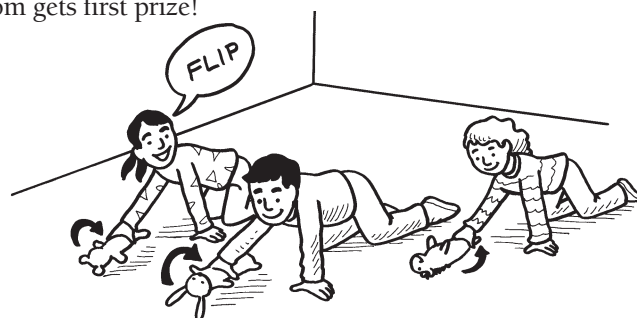
### Flip, slide, turn

This stuffed animal game can help your youngster learn about flips (reflections), slides (translations), and turns (rotations) in geometry. Here's how.

Start at one side of a room, and take turns shouting “flip,” “slide,” or “turn.” Each player moves his stuffed animal according to the direction given.

A flip is a mirror image—your child could move his animal from its feet to its head or from its back to its stomach. For a slide, simply slide the animal forward one length (so its head is where its feet were). And for a turn, a player should rotate his stuffed animal 90 degrees.

The first stuffed animal to reach the opposite side of the room gets first prize!



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