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SHORT NOTES

Ask for help early

If your child is having trouble with a subject, you don't have to wait until parent-teacher conferences to bring up your concerns. Call or email the teacher for ideas. He may recommend an after-school reading group or new study strategies to try at home, for example.

Snail mail

Your mailbox is full of learning opportunities! Let your youngster check the mail and sort it into piles (bills, catalogs, invitations). For a math challenge, have her gather coupons and add up how much you'd save if you used them all. Or she could read a power company brochure to learn how your family can use less electricity.

DID YOU KNOW?

One of the most common places for kids to find drugs is in a household medicine cabinet. Keep prescription and over-the-counter medications locked up, and talk to your child about what to do if a friend offers him medicine. Explain that it's dangerous to take a drug that his doctor didn't prescribe and that he doesn't need.

Worth quoting

"If you have good thoughts, they will shine out of your face like sunbeams."
Roald Dahl

JUST FOR FUN

Q: How do you tell which end of the worm is the head?

A: Tickle the middle and see which end laughs.



A plan for homework

Experts agree: Children tend to rise to their parents' expectations. And the expectations you set for your youngster about homework can motivate her to work hard. Consider this advice.

Create a "home office"

Setting aside a special workspace in your house shows your child that homework is a priority. Help her pick a place that's away from distractions, such as her bedroom or a corner of the family room, and stock it with school supplies. Then when she's working, let her hear you tell younger siblings, "Your sister is doing homework, so play quietly."

Make time

Will your youngster do homework right after school or later in the evening? Some kids work better if they have a snack and take a break after being in school all day. Others do best if they start right away—while they're still in "school mode." You might have your child try both to see



which works best. Once she decides, she should pencil in "homework" on a calendar or planner so she expects to do it at a certain time each day.

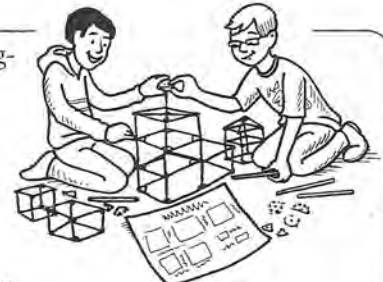
Encourage independence

When your child does homework, stay nearby and do your own thing (read a book, prepare dinner). That way, you're available if she needs you, but you're showing that you expect her to do her homework herself. *Tip:* If she asks for help, find out what she has already tried, and offer suggestions for figuring it out on her own. ("Maybe you could look at yesterday's assignment.")♥

Let's collaborate

Working well with others is a skill your youngster needs for school and his future career. Try these ideas at home:

- Team up to make family decisions like where to go on a day trip. Share your ideas, and try to agree on the answer. Ask, "Does everyone agree?" and if not, explain your reasoning. ("I know you like the national park, but it's far. Going to the state park means more time there and less time in the car.")
- Encourage your youngster to collaborate with friends when they visit. Would they like to build a city with toy buildings and cars? They might work together to draw a blueprint. To organize a neighborhood kickball tournament, they could divvy up teams and make a bracket.♥



Empathy: The bullying antidote

What causes children to bully others? There's no one answer, but empathy—the ability to understand and share another person's feelings—can help prevent bullying. Guide your child to develop empathy with these suggestions.

Use your imagination. Kids love to pretend. Encourage your youngster to imagine he is a new student in school, for instance. Ask him to



invite a student he doesn't know well to play with him at recess or to read a book together in the library. This can make your child less likely to bully others—and more apt to step in if someone else bullies his classmates.♥

say what that person may be feeling (“I don't know anyone, so I'm a little nervous”) and how he'd like to be treated (“I hope someone will talk to me”).

Connect with others. It's easier to feel empathetic toward someone you're familiar with. Suggest that your youngster get to know his classmates. He could

ACTIVITY CORNER



Making connections

There are no wrong answers in these games—as long as you can defend your choices! Play together, and your child will practice thinking deeply and strategically.



1. Creative categories. Choose a category (foods, places), and take turns naming something that fits. The catch? Each answer has to relate to the one before it. For instance, *carrot* is related to *cream cheese* (carrot cake has cream cheese frosting), and *cream cheese* is related to *bagel* (bagels taste good with cream cheese). Keep going until someone is stumped.

2. Degrees of separation. Name two famous people who don't seem connected (Benjamin Franklin, Dr. Seuss). The next player has to link them—in six moves or less. *Example:* Franklin links to George Washington (both were founding fathers). Washington links to Abraham Lincoln (both were presidents). Lincoln links to Dr. Seuss (he and the Cat in the Hat both wore tall hats).♥

Q & A

Be a parent volunteer

Q: I've always wanted to volunteer in my daughter's school, but I work during the day. Is there a way I can still help out?

A: Absolutely. Any kind of help you provide will make a difference. Contact the teacher—she may be able to send home projects for you to work on in the evenings. For instance, she might give you materials to make geography games or ask you to create a list of kid-friendly poetry websites.

Also, consider volunteering with an after-school activity like chess club or Odyssey of the Mind, or at an evening event, such as a science fair or school carnival. Call the school office or visit the website to find out about activities and opportunities.

Finally, if you're able to take a few hours off, look at the school calendar, and plan ahead. Maybe you could take a shift at a book fair or chaperone a field trip.♥



PARENT TO PARENT

Find teachable moments

At back-to-school night, my son's teacher talked about how she uses “teachable moments” so kids learn something from unexpected events.

For example, during a recent thunderstorm, the class counted the seconds between the lightning and thunder. Then they divided the number of seconds by 5 to figure out how many miles away the storm was.

I decided to be on the lookout for teachable moments, too. Last week, I called home while I was on a business trip. That led to a conversation about time zones around the world and when the sun would set where I was and at home. And yesterday, my son spotted a hot air balloon in the sky. We wondered whether it would drift in the same direction as the wind—and it did.

We are both learning new things, and now we look for teachable moments when we're out together!♥



OUR PURPOSE

To provide busy parents with practical ideas that promote school success, parent involvement, and more effective parenting.

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