

Elementary School Parents[®]

Hough Street School
Mrs. Lori Wilcox, Principal

make the difference!



A new calendar year is a time to review, make adjustments

It's the start of a new year—and nearly the halfway point in this school year. So it's a good time to take stock and make any needed adjustments.

Spend some time talking with your child about how the school year is going. If the two of you set learning goals at the start of the year, review those goals now. Is she making progress? How can she make the rest of the school year even better?

Then make some learning resolutions. Here are a few to consider:

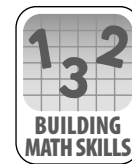
- **Reduce screen time.** Talk about the time your child spends in front of a screen. How much time does she watch TV? Play computer games? Chat and IM with friends? If she's an average seven- to 18-year-old, she's spending seven-and-a-half hours on these

activities a day. Yikes! Set a goal of reducing her total screen time to no more than two hours a day.

- **Spend time reading.** There is no skill that will help your child more in school. And reading, like other skills, gets better with practice. Encourage your child to read, and don't worry about what she reads. Let her read about sports, her favorite TV star or a hobby.
- **Go back to beginning-of-school routines.** Has your child's bedtime begun to slip later and later? Does that mean mornings are feeling more rushed? Is your family's regular study time now not quite so regular? Routines like these make life easier—and help kids do better in school.

Source: Kaiser Family Foundation, "Daily Media Use Among Children," www.kff.org/entmedia/entmedia012010nr.cfm.

Use a calculator to improve 'mental math'



In a time when calculators are never far away, do children still need to learn basic math skills? *Absolutely*, say the experts.

Knowing how to do calculations in your head is a good way to stimulate thinking. It makes it easier to tackle higher math. It's hard to think about an algebra problem if you can't quickly add $7 + 15$.

Here's how to use a calculator to strengthen your child's mental math:

Call out a three-digit number. Have your child do the same. Now give him five seconds to estimate what the two numbers will add up to. Then check with a calculator.

Or use this same trick as a subtraction challenge. Have him estimate the answer. Then check the answer.

As he gets faster, you can make the challenge greater. While he does the math in his head, you use the calculator. Is he faster than the machine?

Source: D. Adams and M. Hamm, *Helping Students Who Struggle with Math and Science*, Roman & Littlefield Education.

Eating breakfast improves attendance & concentration



There used to be a cereal that advertised itself as the “Breakfast of Champions.” That may or may not have been true—but there is no question that some sort of healthy food in the morning helps kids become champions in school.

One Harvard Medical School study looked at how breakfast affected attendance and school performance. They found that children who eat breakfast have:

- Better attendance.
- Fewer episodes of tardiness.
- Higher math scores.
- A stronger ability to concentrate in class.

Of course, with today’s hectic schedules, there isn’t always time to sit down for a long breakfast. So you can be prepared by keeping a few healthy grab-and-go options. A granola bar and a piece of fruit will get your child off to a good start. So will dried cereal and fruit juice. In a pinch, a piece of last night’s pizza will do!

Source: “The Case for Eating Breakfast,” Healthy Children, www.healthychildren.org/English/healthy-living/nutrition/pages/The-Case-for-Eating-Breakfast.aspx.

“The great aim of education is not knowledge, but action.”

—Herbert Spencer

Family meetings can help your child feel connected & valued



Children sometimes feel isolated or “different.” They may feel disconnected or anxious in social situations. They

might also feel like failures. Such feelings lead to low self-esteem and make it harder to succeed in school.

Family meetings can help your child feel valued, capable and connected. In meetings, your child can learn to express what he thinks and feels. He can get needed emotional support. Plus he can join in family planning and problem solving.

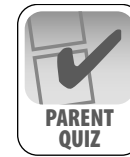
To start, announce you’re going to hold weekly meetings. Agree as a family on a time and place.

At the first meeting, ask family members to talk, listen and be supportive. Go around the table four times. Allow all family members to speak about:

1. **Positive experiences from the week.** For instance, “I felt really good about my spelling test.” Offer praise and encouragement. “Great job!” or “I’m so proud of what you did.”
2. **A problem they had that week.** Listen and validate your child’s feelings. Get the family to offer solutions to the problem.
3. **Goals they want to achieve in the coming week.** Help your child come up with specific objectives and a plan of action to accomplish his goal.
4. **Their schedules for the next week.** Let your child know if you’ll be working late or taking him to the doctor. Ask about his after-school activities and social plans.

Source: “How To Hold a Family Meeting,” About.com, <http://childparenting.about.com/library/howto/htfamilymeeting.htm>.

Are you helping your child use time wisely?



January is all about time. We turn over a new page on the calendar and start a new year. This is a good month to review whether

you are helping your child learn to use time wisely. Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

___ 1. **Do you help** your child develop a sense of time? “Seven days until Grandma comes.” “Dinner in 30 minutes.”

___ 2. **Do you create** a countdown calendar and cross off the days when your child is looking forward to something special?

___ 3. **Do you also create** a countdown calendar when your child has a big project due?

___ 4. **Do you help** your child break up big projects into small steps he can achieve one by one?

___ 5. **Do you have** a regular bedtime and study time and keep a calendar for things your family has to do?

How well are you doing?

Each *yes* means you are helping your child develop a sense of time—and how to use it wisely. For *no* answers, try those ideas.

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Choose the best books to read aloud with your child



Choosing books to read with your child can be fun and rewarding. It can also be overwhelming as you face shelf after shelf of library books.

How can you find the best books to read aloud? Here are some tips:

- **Does this book relate** to something that interests my child? Would she like to look at these pictures? Is the book similar to something we have enjoyed in the past?
- **Will this book teach** my child some new words? Each time you read a book with your child, you are helping her expand her vocabulary. The best books do

this so easily that children don't even know they are learning.

- **If this book is a story book**, is it a story that my child could tell later? Could she act it out? One of the reasons that fairy tales remain so popular after hundreds of years is that they tell stories children love to hear again and again.
- **Is this book sturdy** enough for my child to handle? Is the print large enough so she can read it easily? Here's a rule of thumb: The younger the child, the more sturdy the book needs to be.

Source: M. Strickland, L. Abbott, "Experiencing the Early Reading Experience: Books, Strategies, and Concepts," *The Reading Teacher*, September 2010.

Do you know what teachers wish students and parents would do?



Parents often wish they knew what teachers were thinking. What do they want students—and parents—to do? One expert asked his son, who was also a teacher, about this, and the answers were fascinating.

When it comes to parent involvement, teachers hope parents will:

- **Take responsibility** for study time. Teachers can't follow kids home and make sure studying takes place. They rely on parents to enforce rules about this.
- **Have high expectations.** Sometimes parents let kids off the hook by saying things like, "I don't like reading either. She got it from me." Instead, expect that your child will succeed.
- **Understand teachers'** schedules. Teachers want to communicate

with parents, but sometimes their time is limited. Keep this in mind when chatting at unexpected moments.

- **Attend parent conferences.** You should attend parent-teacher conferences, even if your child is doing well.
- **Avoid absences.** Missing an occasional day of school is understandable. Missing a week should be due to an unusual circumstance, since missing too much school hurts learning.
- **Expect timely feedback.** If it's been more than a week since your child turned in work, ask the teacher about it. A long wait makes it harder for your child to learn from mistakes.

Source: R. Taibbi, "What Teachers Wish Parents Knew," *Psychology Today*, www.psychologytoday.com/blog/fixing-families/201102/what-teachers-wish-parents-knew.

Q: My six-year-old son just can't seem to control himself. If I tell him to clean up his room or start his homework, he loses his temper. And he doesn't just get angry—he dissolves into a full-blown tantrum. It's at the point where I just let him do whatever he wants because I don't want the battle. His teacher says his behavior isn't much better in school.

Questions & Answers

A: No one in your family—and especially not your son—can be happy with his current behavior. Your child needs limits to feel safe. And while he's young, he needs you to set the limits so that eventually he can learn how to control his own behavior.

Helping your child learn self-control is a slow process. But it's not too late to start. Here's how:

- **Give him words** he can use when he is feeling strong emotions. If he gets angry, he can say, "It makes me angry to have to turn off the TV." Using these words should work as a signal to himself to stop, take a deep breath and calm down.
- **Prepare him** for difficult situations. Tell him he may be disappointed, but it's time to turn off the TV. Then ask, "What should you do? That's right, stop, take a deep breath and stay calm."
- **Model this behavior** as well. Say, "I'm upset because that man cut me off in traffic. So I am going to take a breath and stay calm so I am in control."
- **Praise him** when he stays in control. Remind him he is showing mature behavior, and that you are proud of him.

—Kris Amundson,
The Parent Institute

It Matters: Discipline

Ask yourself questions when disciplining



Discipline—guiding your child’s behavior in loving, effective ways—may be the toughest part of parenting. It’s also one of the most rewarding.

When making a discipline decision, it helps to ask three questions: “Am I being firm?” “Am I being fair?” “Am I being consistent?” Answering *yes* is usually a good sign. For example, imagine:

- **You’re shopping** with your child, and she demands a toy. In a calm, *firm* voice, you might say what’s *fair*. “You can buy it when you save enough allowance.” What if your child keeps asking—or even throws a tantrum? Don’t give in. Take a *consistent* stand.
- **It’s study time**, and your child resists working. Be *firm* about the rules. “Study time is from 4:00 to 4:30 at our house. If you don’t have homework, you can read.” Before enforcing rules, however, make sure they’re *fair*. Have you chosen the best study time for your child? Should she have a say in where she studies? Sticking to a *consistent* schedule will reduce arguments.
- **Your child rushes off** to school and forgets something ... again. Stay *firm* about your expectations. Don’t bring your child’s lunch to her every time she forgets it. Instead, create a *fair* way to help her remember, such as posting a checklist of school necessities. Be *consistent* in holding her responsible—and in complimenting her success!

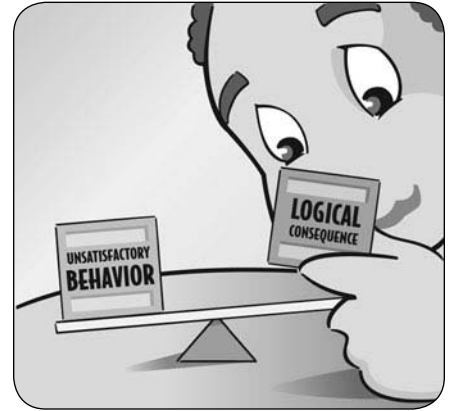
Effective discipline includes using logical consequences

Consequences are a natural part of life. If your child refuses to eat dinner, for example, he may be hungry. But sometimes consequences don’t occur naturally, and parents have to create them.

When possible, make them logical. This involves choosing consequences that are related to behavior.

Good logical consequences are:

- **About the same size** as the behavior. If your child dawdles for five minutes, he might miss five minutes of a fun activity. But missing the whole activity wouldn’t be logical.
- **Likely to improve** a behavior. They should help your child recognize mistakes and learn how to do better. “When I waste time, I don’t get to do what I planned.”



- **Fair to your child**, even if he doesn’t agree. When consequences make sense, kids are less likely to resent them. They can respect consequences without liking them.

Source: “Natural and Logical Consequences,” Purdue University, www.ces.purdue.edu/providerparent/PDF%20Links/NaturalLogicalConsequences.pdf.

Build your child’s respect for people and belongings



Respect and obedience aren’t the same thing. Respect is a feeling—not just a behavior. To build your child’s respect for people and belongings:

- **Be a role model.** Kids imitate what parents do. If you treat yourself and others with respect, your child is likely to do the same.
- **Follow the rules.** Remember to discuss *why* a rule is important. Ask yourselves, “What if everyone broke this rule?” This will help your child respect it.
- **Look for examples.** Where do you notice respect and

disrespect? In books? On TV? In real life? What do you and your child think of what you see?

- **Take care of things.** Make it a priority to treat books, toys and other items with respect. Choose special places for belongings, and put them away after each use.
- **Be positive.** Make sure your child feels cared for and trusted. This builds self-respect. Help her see herself as lovable and capable.

Source: S. McChesney, “Respect-How to teach it and how to show it,” *teAchnology*, www.teach-nology.com/tutorials/teaching/respect/.