

Helping Children Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

Alice G.K. Kleberg Elementary School



March 2013

Use creative questions to improve your child's thinking skills

One of the best ways to boost your child's comprehension and critical thinking is to ask questions. The trick is to seek the right kinds of information—and make it interesting! A well-known classification system, called Bloom's Taxonomy, describes six human thinking skills. Parents should ask questions that focus on each of these skills:

- 1. Knowledge.** Talk about facts. Focus on basics, such as *who*, *what*, *when* and *where*. "When did the war start?" The answers are clearly right or wrong.
- 2. Comprehension.** Test how well your child understands the subject. She might describe, explain or predict something. "If we were a family of tadpoles, where would we live?"
- 3. Application.** Have your child connect previous learning to new experiences. "Chickens hatch from eggs. What happens with ostriches?"
- 4. Analysis.** Discuss how things work or how they're organized. "If you had to build a house, what parts would you need?"
- 5. Synthesis.** This involves thinking about old information in new ways. "Where could Christopher Columbus explore if he lived today?"
- 6. Evaluation.** Help your child make a judgment or decision about the information she learns without worrying about *right* or *wrong*. "If you could go back in time, what would you do during the Civil War?"



Source: "Improving Your Child's Thinking Skills," FamilyEducation.com, <http://school.familyeducation.com/gifted-education/cognitive-psychology/38660.html>.



Early absences have a big impact

When a child misses school in the early grades, it can greatly impact his education throughout the rest of his school years. Studies show that early absences create a cascading effect from which students seldom recover.

Students learn and master basic information and skills in the early grades. Kindergartners who miss just one day of school every two weeks score lower in reading, math and other knowledge at the end of first grade.

Early absences also set a pattern. Kids who get in the habit of missing school continue that pattern, which leads to missing even more learning. Studies show that missing school is one of the strongest predictors of dropping out of high school.

To learn at school, children must be at school. Make sure attendance is a priority for your family!

Source: S.D. Sparks, "Early Grades Become the New Front in Absenteeism Wars," Education Week, <http://tinyurl.com/9fju5ov>.

Teach these test-taking tips

As standardized testing season approaches, review these tips with your child:

- **Look over** the entire test before beginning.
- **Answer** what you know first.
- **Ask** if there's a penalty for incorrect answers.



Source: G. Gruber, *Gruber's Essential Guide to Test Taking, Grades 3-5*, Sourcebooks, Inc.

Tackle the most difficult homework first

Your child has math homework, a book report and his least favorite, spelling. Have him do the spelling first. Here's the reason:

- **Hard tasks are inevitable.** We all have to do things we don't like. Talk about jobs you dislike but have to do anyway.
- **All it takes is a push.** Have him set a timer for 15 minutes and start his spelling. A short amount of time may make it less painful.
- **Finishing that dreaded task** will feel great. Encourage your child to focus on how he'll feel when the job is finished.



Source: R. Emmett, *The Procrastinating Child: A Handbook for Adults to Help Children Stop Putting Things Off*, Walker & Company.

Respect builds character

Help your child understand that being respectful of others is character-building. When she respects her teacher, classmates and herself, she is learning important traits that will help her in school and in life.

Encourage her to:

- **Practice** the Golden Rule.
- **Speak** politely.
- **Appreciate** diversity.
- **Discuss** important values, like honesty.

Source: "My Child's Academic Success: What Does 'Strong Character' Mean? II—Helping Your Child Become a Responsible Citizen," ED.gov, www2.ed.gov/parents/academic/help/citizen/part5.html.



How can I keep asthma from affecting my child's learning?

Q: My son was just diagnosed with asthma. He does not want anyone at school to know because he still wants to "have fun with his friends" at recess. How can I work with his teacher without having my son singled out—and make sure it doesn't affect his schoolwork?

A: Asthma is a serious health problem. It's the biggest reason children miss school. Asthma causes nearly 14 million absences a year. For safety reasons, you need to work with your child's teacher to create plans that will protect his health and safety while making sure that he stays focused on doing well in school.

First, check about rules for medicine at school. See the school nurse or talk to someone in the office. Be sure that your son knows how to take his medication.

Plan with his teacher for times when your son may be at risk. Recess is often a time that can trigger an attack. Teach your son to self-monitor so he avoids situations that bring on an attack.

Pay attention to times of the year with more frequent asthma attacks. Allergies, for example may trigger attacks. At these times, your son will need to pay extra attention to how he feels.

Asthma should not prevent your son from having fun at recess—or from learning. But he needs to learn his own limits so he can stay healthy.



Are you teaching your child to be a good decision-maker?

We all want our children to make wise choices. When the time comes, we hope they'll say *no* to peer pressure and *yes* to positive things, which will help them achieve in school. Are you doing all you can now to teach your child to make these wise choices? Answer *yes* or *no*:

___ **1. Do you give** your child opportunities to make choices every day?

___ **2. Do you talk** about family decisions together?

___ **3. Do you think** out loud when you are making a decision and talk about how you are making the choice?

___ **4. Do you encourage** your child to ask questions? Questions build his critical thinking skills and encourage him to evaluate choices.

___ **5. Do you teach** your child that every choice he makes has consequences?

How did you score? Each *yes* means you're helping your child make better choices today and in the future.

"The purpose of education is to replace an empty mind with an open one."

—Malcolm Forbes

Tickle your child's funny bone to encourage reading

Enjoy the lighter side of reading by having a Funny Reading night. Here are two activities to try:

- **Take turns reading** jokes and riddles.
- **Have your child write** a variety of words on small pieces of paper, then place them in a row on the floor. Help her arrange the words into a funny sentence. Fill in words like *a*, *to*, *of* and *the*.

Effort leads to success

Students who believe they can get smarter—particularly through effort—are more likely to:

- **Tackle challenges** enthusiastically.
- **Enjoy learning.**
- **Understand** that everyone makes mistakes.
- **See mistakes** as opportunities to improve.
- **Respond to failure** by trying new approaches.

Send the message that hard work and persistence build intelligence. And remember that effort counts more than the final result.

Source: D. Stipek, Ph.D. and K. Seal, *Motivated Minds: Raising Children to Love Learning*, Henry Holt and Company.

Chores build responsibility

Help your child develop a sense of responsibility through chores. Even simple tasks have a big impact. Chores:

- **Teach** life skills.
- **Build** a sense of investment.
- **Help** children feel pride in their work.
- **Help** children improve in school.
- **Remind** children that they're needed.



Source: W. Sears and M. Sears, *The Successful Child: What Parents Can Do to Help Kids Turn Out Well*, Hachette Book Group.

Helping Children Learn[®]

Published in English and Spanish, September through May.

Publisher: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.

Editor: Stacey Marin.

Staff Editors: Rebecca Miyares & Erika Beasley.

Production Manager: Pat Carter.

Translations Editor: Victoria Gaviola.

Layout & Illustrations: Maher & Mignella, Cherry Hill, NJ.

Copyright © 2013, The Parent Institute[®], a division of NIS, Inc.

P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474

1-800-756-5525 • www.parent-institute.com • ISSN 1527-1013