

# Helping Children Learn<sup>®</sup>

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

Hamilton Wentworth Catholic District  
School Board



December 2012

## Help your child develop 'expert' reading habits reading together

Reading experts have identified critical skills that improve readers' comprehension and vocabulary. You can work on them with your child. As you read together:

- **Make predictions.** Ask what might come next. This will help your child pay attention to the details in a story. Look for clues in the story that give hints about what might happen. When he has finished reading, talk about his predictions. Were they correct? If not, see if there were some clues he missed.
- **Look for interesting words.** Children who read often have bigger vocabularies than those who don't. As your child reads, point out new words. "Wow! This is a funny word. Can you figure out what it means?" See if the story helps him understand the meaning. If not, look up the definition in a dictionary together. Help him make a list of the words he's learned so he can use them when he speaks or writes.
- **Relate reading to your child's life.** If a character learns a lesson, ask if your child has had a similar experience. If he has special interests—dinosaurs, sports, space—help him find books on those topics at the library. And don't forget, books make great gifts!



Source: C.C. Block and S.E. Israel, "The ABCs of Performing Highly Effective Think-alouds," *The Reading Teacher*.



## Your child's attendance is important both before and after winter break

December is a great month for getting together with family and friends. But don't steal time from your child's education. As you schedule events, avoid plans that will keep your child out of school.

You may think missing a few days is not a problem, but learning builds day by day. If your child misses the introduction of new facts and skills, she may fall behind.

Your child's absence can cause a problem for her teacher, too. She

will have to take valuable class time to help your child catch up.

The rest of the class will suffer as well. Studies show that every child in the class learns less when teachers have to help students catch up on work they missed because they were absent.

Source: H.N. Chang and M. Romero, "Present, Engaged, and Accounted For: The Critical Importance of Addressing Chronic Absence in the Early Grades," National Center for Children in Poverty.

## Promote proper punctuation

Have your child write a short story without punctuation. Then read it together. Does it make sense? Probably not! Punctuation is important. Help your child add the needed periods, commas and question marks. Now it should make sense when he reads it aloud.

## Involve your child in setting consequences

Your child got mud all over the floor when she didn't take her boots off. You're really angry, but before you scold her, take a deep breath. Then ask her, "What should we do?"

She might say, "I don't know." Your reply should be, "That won't help." If you wait a minute, she might offer to clean up the mess she made.



When kids decide on a consequence, they're more likely to follow through.

Source: R. Guarendi, *Discipline that Lasts a Lifetime*, St. Anthony Messenger Press.

## Discussing online safety can protect your child

Even though people are always connected through technology, kids often don't have the maturity to be wise in cyberspace.

Talk about cyberbullying and online safety with your child. Schools have specific rules when it comes to computers, cell phones and social media, so review those and discuss them with your child. Establish specific rules for your family, too.

Decide as a family when your child is ready for a cell phone or social media accounts. Remember that your child may use a library computer to access the Internet, so be sure that she knows the rules of what is acceptable online behavior.



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## How can I help my child adjust to a new situation?

**Q:** My husband and I divorced this year. He won't be here for the holidays. His absence has been hard on my daughter, and her grades are starting to suffer. How can I get through the holiday season and get my daughter back on track?

**A:** Being separated from a parent is always hard—especially during the holidays.

Let your daughter know that it is OK to miss her father. Say something like, "You love your Daddy very much. Of course you're going to miss him. Whenever you feel sad, you can talk with me."

Let the school know what your child is going through and how she feels. Her teacher may find she will confide in her. Ask how you can work together to support your daughter until she gets her grades back on track.

As for the holidays, talk about some fun holiday traditions you want to continue—baking, decorating or watching a favorite holiday video. Together think of some new traditions to start this year.

Reach out to other family members and friends. If you can, schedule some one-on-one time for your daughter with a grandparent, a relative or a family friend. Build a support system for your child—and for yourself.



## Are you giving gifts that really matter?

Looking for just the right gift? Perhaps you can't find it in the store or your budget is too tight for much extra spending. Luckily, the gifts children want—and need—most are things that don't cost a penny. Are you giving your child these gifts? Answer *yes* or *no* to each question:

\_\_\_ **1. Do you give your child** the gift of time? Spend time with him whenever you can.

\_\_\_ **2. Do you give your child** the gift of reading? Set aside time to read together every day.

\_\_\_ **3. Do you give your child** the gift of responsibility? Give him things to do that help keep your home running smoothly.

\_\_\_ **4. Do you give your child** the gift of your love? Each day, say, "I love you" to your child.

\_\_\_ **5. Do you give your child** the gift of fun? Do things just because they are silly and make you both laugh.

**How well are you doing?** *Each yes means you are giving your child gifts that are priceless.*

*"Above all, an education prepares you to make choices in life—to evaluate and decide based on information, knowledge, experience and wisdom."*  
—Arne Duncan

## Your child can develop responsibility by helping

"I have so much to do!" December is a busy month for everyone. Your child can build responsibility by helping you. He could:

- **Make** dessert for your holiday dinner.
- **Check** the newspaper for money-saving coupons.
- **Set** the table.
- **Fix** breakfast for the rest of the family.



## Encourage your child to plan ahead for projects

Your child may not have a science project to do now, but she can still get ready. Have her keep a notebook where she can collect questions she has about science, articles that interest her, photos from magazines and other ideas. Have her check out one book about science each week when you visit the library. When it's science project time, she'll have a head start!

## Look for ways for your child can help others this season

The holiday season is the perfect time for your child to learn about his community by helping others. Encourage him to:

- **Make a card** for a senior citizen.
- **Watch a pet.** If a neighbor is going away for a few days, offer free care.
- **Give a gift.** Many organizations hold different kinds of drives. See if your child can make something small to contribute to their collection.
- **Offer your time.** Call a few local organizations to see what help they need over the holiday season. Set up a time to help as a family.

Source: M. Ungar, *The We Generation: Raising Socially Responsible Kids*, Lifelong Books.

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