

Helping Children Learn®

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

Hamilton Wentworth Catholic District
School Board



March 2012

Decrease your family's stress by increasing time spent outdoors

Statistics show that most kids spend over six hours a day watching TV, playing video games or checking out Internet sites. Childhood obesity has doubled. And many families are coping with serious stress.

And these problems seem to have occurred more frequently as people spend less time outdoors. Spending time outside is fun for kids and is a great way for them to let off steam and burn calories. Research says outdoor play can help them reduce stress, focus and do better in school.

If it's hard to get your child out the door, go with her. Kids tell researchers they'd like their parents to spend more time outdoors with them.

So this spring, start a new routine. Have one "outdoors hour" each day. Turn off electronic devices. Get up and get the family outside. You might:

- **Go for a walk, run or bike ride.** See if you can walk for at least 30 minutes a day.
- **Head to the playground.** Or find a neighborhood basketball court and shoot some hoops together.
- **Explore nature.** Get some books on birds or trees from the library. Then head to a nearby park, a wooded area, or even your own backyard. Start a list of birds you see or make a scrapbook of leaves.

Source: "Be Out There Discussion Guide," National Wildlife Federation, www.nwffaffiliates.org/ht/a/GetDocumentAction/i/22557.



Repetition builds fluency

Teachers talk about *fluency*—a term that means reading smoothly and with expression. If your child reads word by word and if his reading sounds "choppy," he needs to work on building fluency. To help:

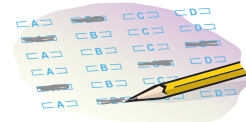
- **Review** words that appear in the story before he starts to read.
- **Read** the story aloud to demonstrate fluent reading for your child.
- **Read** the story aloud together.

Source: "Fluency," Reading Rockets, www.readingrockets.org/helping/target/fluency/#do_parents.

Prep for standardized tests

Spring is test time for many children. To help your child prepare:

- **Remind her to follow directions.** Before giving a test, teachers tell students things they need to know. Should they try to guess? Should the essay question be written on every other line? Make sure your child listens carefully.
- **Give your child practice** in following directions. Give her a recipe and ask her to follow it. Or ask her to look through a newspaper article and circle all the nouns. Try timing your child as she complete these tasks—standardized tests often have a time limit.



Knowledge cards review math terms

Understanding key terms is a first step to success in math. For example, in math a *product* isn't something on the shelf of a store—it's the answer to a multiplication problem.

To help your child master math vocabulary, have him create "knowledge cards." Here's how:

1. **Look through his math book.** Together make a list of the vocabulary words he needs to know.
2. **Give him some index cards.** On the front of each card, have

him write a vocabulary word. Have him create a drawing or a diagram that illustrates the meaning of the word.

3. **Have him write the definition** on the back of the card. Ask him to explain it in his own words.

If he reviews these knowledge cards often, your child will be familiar with the terms on the next math test.

Source: H.F. Silver, J.R. Brunsting and T. Walsh, *Math Tools Grades 3-12*, Corwin Press.

Plant seeds of responsibility

Spring is a great time to plant a garden. Whether you have an outdoor plot or indoor pots, allow your child to take responsibility for at least one plant. Shop for the seeds together. Help your child plant them and expect him to be responsible for watering and weeding.



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When is a child's 'sickness' really school avoidance?

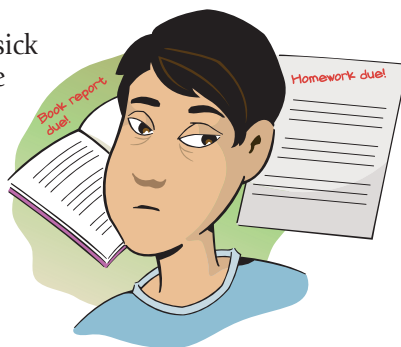
Q: My son frequently says he's too sick for school. He has a headache or his throat hurts. Since we don't want to spread illnesses, I tend to give in. But he's never sick on weekends. What should I do?

A: You're right to worry about sending a sick child to school. He could infect the whole class. So there are times when he should stay home.

Does he have a fever? Children should not go to school if they have a fever. Also keep him home if he's vomiting or has diarrhea. Check the school handbook or website for guidelines on when to keep your son home.

But mysterious illnesses that never seem to occur on weekends could be a signal that something else is going on. Talk with his teacher. Ask if your son is struggling with a subject (if he is, missing school will make it worse) or if he appears to be having problems with other students.

If you suspect your son is just avoiding school, don't let him stay home. Missing even one day every two weeks can lead to serious learning problems. Your son's teacher, the school nurse and the counselor can work with you to reduce his anxiety and make attending class a more positive experience.



Are you a reading role model?

There's no question that your attitude about reading has a big impact on how your child feels about picking up a book. When you show your child how much you value reading, she's likely to follow your lead. Answer the following questions *yes* or *no* to see if you're a reading role model:

___ **1. Do you try** to read something for pleasure each day?

___ **2. Do you try** to share interesting things that you've read with your child? It may be a short news story or something you read on the Internet.

___ **3. Do you keep** a book handy for times you may have to wait—in the doctor's office or in a long line?

___ **4. Do you keep** books and magazines nearby in your home to make it easy for family members to find something to read?

___ **5. Do you read** food labels and talk about the information with your child at the store?

How did you do? Each yes answer means you are a role model for reading. For each no answer, try that idea from the quiz.

"The time to read is any time."
—Holbrook Jackson

Looking back can encourage

Mastering a new skill is hard. Sometimes kids may feel that they'll never learn it. When your child gets discouraged, turn her focus from how far she has to go to how far she's come. Say:

- **"Last year** you couldn't add three-digit numbers. Now that's easy for you."
- **"You thought** you'd never finish your report, but you did it and it was great!"

Remind your child that practice and perseverance contributed to her success in the past. Tell her that you know she'll work hard and succeed again.

Ask questions to develop, improve your child's mind

Your child needs sharp thinking skills for decision-making and problem-solving. To stimulate your child's thinking:

- **Don't just nod** when your child gives an opinion. Ask why he feels that way.
- **Give your child** the chance to change your mind occasionally. Challenge her to come up with information you might not have considered at first.
- **Discuss** the plot when watching TV or a movie together. Did it make sense? What could have improved the show?

Restocking rekindles interest

Remember how excited your child was to shop for supplies at the start of the school year?

Recapture that enthusiasm with a special trip to the store for something small: some new markers, self-stick notes or pens. Making sure she has a well-stocked study spot is a great way to say "I think learning is important."



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