

# A-Z Learning Activities



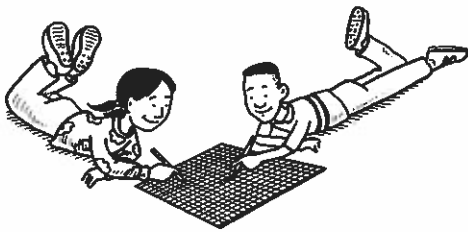
Looking for an answer to the complaint, “There’s nothing to do”? Use these ideas to help beat the boredom blues—and build the skills your child needs to succeed in school.

## Action math

Have your youngster turn math word problems into mini-skits to act out. For “Annie had five apples; she gave three to Dan; how many does she have left?” she could gather five apples, use dolls to represent Annie and Dan, and create silly dialogue.

## Block out

Use graph paper to boost spelling and vocabulary skills. Draw a 15 x 15 box on the paper, and take turns writing words crossword-style until no more words will fit. Score one point for every letter you fill in. High score wins.



## Coin counter

Practice money skills when dining out. *Example:* How many quarters does the chicken dinner cost? Your youngster can use paper and pencil or a calculator to find the answer. (If the dinner costs \$5.75, he would divide 5.75 by .25 for an answer of 23 quarters.)

## Describe this

Choose an object, set a timer for one minute, and have everyone list words that describe it. For a rock, your child might write, “gray, hard, round, rough.” When time’s up, players compare lists and cross off duplicates. Whoever has the most words left is the winner.

## Eavesdropper

Try this game to practice listening skills with a radio or an audiobook. Pick a fairly common word (please, music, table). The first person to hear the word raises her hand and gets to pick the next word to listen for.

## Firsts and lasts

Name an animal (alligator). Ask your youngster to name another animal that starts with the last letter of the first animal (rabbit). Continue (tiger, rattlesnake) until one of you is stumped. Then, choose a new topic (movie titles, foods), and play again.

## Growing science

Cut a half inch off the tops of two carrots. Put the carrot tops in separate saucers of water. Keep one in a sunny spot and the other in a dark place. Have your youngster check them daily and add water as needed. Which one grows faster?

## Hand signals

Use sign language in a home spelling bee. Pick words from your child’s spelling list or a favorite

book, and have her sign the letters instead of saying them aloud. *Tip:* Borrow *Sign Language for Kids* by Lora Heller from the library to learn the sign language alphabet.

## Inside, outside

Teach your youngster classification skills. Secretly think of a category (school supplies), and have him figure out what it is by guessing various objects. If his guess belongs in your category (pencils), say, “Inside.” If it doesn’t (tomatoes), say, “Outside.” When your child names the category, he gets to start a new round.

## Jumbled numbers

Work on place value and addition with this three-dice game. With your child, take turns rolling the dice and making the largest three-digit number possible. Write down your numbers on a piece of paper as you go. *Example:* If your youngster rolls 2, 5, and 1 on her first turn, she would write 521. At the end of five rounds, add up your numbers. Whoever has the largest total wins.

## Knock five

With a permanent marker, write the numbers 5, 10, 15, 20, and 25 on five paper cups. Stand the cups on the ground 10 feet away. Take turns rolling a small ball toward them, and score the total on the cups you topple. Then, reset for the next roll.



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## Letter lookout

Have your youngster list seven random letters on a piece of paper. While in the car, ask him to search for places that start with each letter. *Example:* For “O,” your child might write “office supply store” or “Opal Street.” *Variation:* Play this at home with a map or road atlas.

## Magnetic pull

Experiment with different-sized magnets. Let your youngster guess how many small objects (paper clips, pins, nails) each magnet can pick up at once. Have her test each guess. Does the size of the magnet make a difference?

## Name game

While waiting in line, challenge your child to make as many sentences as possible. The catch? Each word of the sentence must start with a different letter of his name. *Example:* Eric = Elephants ran into church.

## One, two, three

Take turns counting to 30 by one, two, or three numbers at a time. The object of the game is to keep from being the person who has to say “30.” *Example:* The first player says “1, 2.” The second player can say “3, 4, 5.” Keep going until someone is forced to say “30.”

## Picture writing

At the library, find a book about Egyptian hieroglyphs. Then, ask your youngster to invent a picture language of his own and use it to write you a note. Try to figure out what each symbol means—and ask him if you’re right.

## Questions, questions

Think of a storybook character your child knows (Wilbur the pig in *Charlotte’s Web*). Have her ask questions about the story to guess who it is. For example, if she asks, “What is the character’s



problem?” you might say, “He’s afraid the farmer will eat him.” Limit older children to yes-or-no questions (“Is the character human?”). When your youngster figures it out, it’s her turn to pick a character.

## Rap rhythms

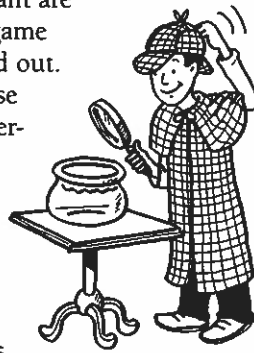
Play with poetry by having your child write rap lyrics to the tune of “Mary Had a Little Lamb.” Be sure he keeps the same rhythm. *Example:* “Someday we will travel far” works for the first line; “Some children run from dogs” does not. Show him how to count syllables to get the rhythm right. Then, have him chant his new poem like a rap star.

## Save 12

Deal three cards to each player. Take turns drawing from the deck and discarding a card from your hand until someone can make a number sentence totaling 12 ( $5 \times 4 - 8 = 12$ ;  $4 + 9 - 1 = 12$ ). That player scores a point. Play to 10 points. *Note:* Aces = 1, and face cards = 10.

## Thief!

How observant are your kids? This game will help you find out. While others close their eyes, one person (the “thief”) secretly removes something from the room. When players open their eyes, they try to find what’s missing. The first one to guess correctly becomes the next thief.



## Uncapped fun

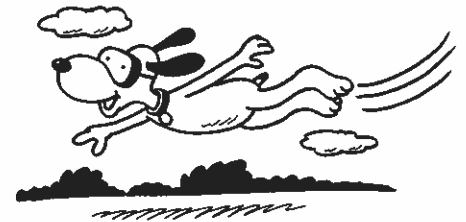
Build spatial skills by removing the lids from 10 or more different-sized plastic containers. Set a timer, and challenge your child to put the lids on the correct containers before time runs out.

## Vocabulary view

With your youngster, look out the window and choose a familiar object. Then, each of you writes down everything that makes up the object. For example, a list for “tree” could include branches, leaves, bark, and blossoms. The longest list wins.

## What if?

Ask your child a silly question (“What if dogs could fly?”). See if she can come up with a silly answer (“Squirrels couldn’t hide in trees”). Then, have her ask you a silly question. Keep going until one of you can’t think of an answer—or can’t stop laughing.



## X-ray writing

Your youngster can make invisible messages by dipping a cotton swab in lemon juice and writing on plain paper. When the “ink” dries, the words will disappear. To read the messages, tell your child to hold the paper under a lamp. The letters will magically reappear!

## Yardstick racetrack

Instead of speed, use distance to find the winner of this race. Take turns rolling toy cars across the floor, and have your youngster measure how far they travel with a yardstick or measuring tape. The car that goes the farthest wins the race.

## Zany wordplay

Can your child find the hidden meaning of “sock sock” (pair of socks), “cycleycleycley” (tricycle) or <sup>man</sup>board (man overboard)? Using index cards, create a deck of word mysteries for each other to solve. For extra fun, your youngster can illustrate each card.

## Home & School CONNECTION

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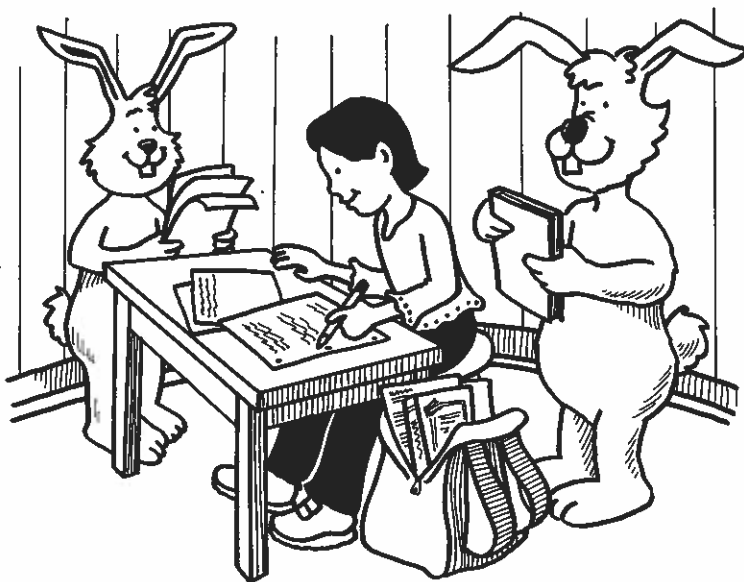
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# Homework Help

“Why do I have to do homework?”

This is one time when answering a question with a question can work. Ask your child why she does soccer drills or practices her trumpet. Explain, “Homework helps you do better in school, the same way that practicing soccer helps you play better in games.”

Use this guide to help your youngster get the most out of homework—and put an end to homework battles.



## Developing a homework routine

The way you approach your child’s homework sends an important message. Show her that homework is important by giving it a regular time slot, helping her choose the best way to work, and teaching her to organize assignments and supplies. Here are some tips:

- Does your youngster need playtime before settling into homework, or does she prefer getting her work done right after school? Try each way for a week, and keep track of the results (how long her homework takes, her mood, how well she does her work). Together, decide which time slot works best.
- Let your child experiment with work conditions, too. Some children concentrate better in silence, while others need background noise such as soft music. If your youngster has trouble paying attention at the kitchen table, let her try stretching out on the family room floor.
- Keep school supplies in a basket or shoe box, stored in a handy spot. When it’s homework time, your child can grab the container and get started. Include pencils, paper, crayons, markers, ruler, scissors, glue, and other items she might need like a calculator and dictionary.
- Be sure your youngster has a plan for bringing home papers and books. You might get her a special folder (*example*: her favorite color) where she can put assignments as they’re given. Before leaving school, she can look through the folder and take the books she needs.



- Encourage your child to use a calendar to keep track of assignments. Have her list her subjects (reading, math, social studies, science) on each weekday and write in homework and projects. Crossing off completed items will give her a sense of accomplishment.

## Playing a supporting role

To get the most out of homework, your youngster needs to do it himself. If you provide too many answers, teachers won’t know where your child needs help. But you can offer the support he needs. Try these ideas:

- Go over the instructions. Have your youngster explain the directions to you before he begins so you can make sure he understands them.
- If he gets stuck, ask questions that will lead him to an answer. For instance, if he asks, “Where was George Washington born?” you might say, “Let’s read the chapter headings together and see if you can find out.” For an essay assignment, have him talk his ideas over with you before he starts writing.
- Review homework after your child finishes, and check to make sure his work is neat and complete. If he does his homework in after-school child care or with a sitter, set aside a time to go over it later.
- Help your youngster set priorities. You might encourage him to do his hardest assignments first, when he is most focused. If he has a spelling quiz Friday, have him review his words each day and allow extra study time Thursday.



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■ When your child has a large project, help him break it into smaller pieces. Suggest that he write down each step and hang the list in his room. For a science project, he might spend two days choosing an idea, a week doing the experiment, and another week writing up his lab report.

*Tip:* If your youngster is struggling with assignments, contact his teacher. Together, you can come up with suggestions to help him.



project about the main character.

■ Involve the whole family. Hold a geography bee when your youngster has to memorize names of continents and oceans. Make your child the host of a family game show where "contestants" answer questions he poses. *Note:* Have him write out questions and answers first so he gets extra practice.

## Breaking up boredom

Your child may never love homework, but there are ways to make it more fun. Consider these ideas:

■ Encourage your youngster to start a homework group. Working with friends is not only more entertaining, it can increase understanding. Suggest that they take turns explaining math problems or quizzing each other on vocabulary words. When your child teaches others, he boosts his own skills.

■ Help your child bring out his creative side. For example, he might write a poem about rainbows using a different color ink for each line. Or he could turn a book report into a scrapbook

■ Plan study breaks, especially when your youngster is working on long or tough assignments. Suggest working for 30 minutes, then taking a 10-minute break to walk around the block or read a comic book.

■ Go somewhere else. You might head to the library, a coffee shop, or even a quiet corner in the park to do homework. A new environment can provide a welcome change of pace.

■ Celebrate success. When your youngster finishes writing a report on tigers, take a family trip to the zoo. He can see the subject of his hard work up close!



## Online homework help

How can your child find answers when she's stumped? Help may be as close as a computer screen. Here are a few places to try.

**Yahoo! Kids School Bell** • <http://kids.yahoo.com/directory/School-Bell>

Yahoo's School Bell contains links for language arts, science and nature, math, and social studies. Students can submit questions to be answered, learn songs to help them memorize multiplication tables and parts of speech, and read about cultures, governments, and flags.



**Fact Monster Homework Center** • [www.factmonster.com/homework](http://www.factmonster.com/homework)

Find help for most school subjects here. Your child can read biographies of famous people, study with math flashcards, and use reference materials (dictionary, encyclopedia, almanac, atlas).

**Kids Kconnect** • [www.kidskconnect.com](http://www.kidskconnect.com)

Featuring an alphabetized list of hundreds of topics, this site is a great place to start for reports and projects. Students will find information about people, animals, and more.

**B. J. Pinchbeck's Homework Helper** • [www.bjpinchbeck.com](http://www.bjpinchbeck.com)

This site contains dozens of links to resources ranging from All Living

Things to Webster's Dictionary. Or your youngster can click on a school subject, like social studies or art, and find information from the U.S. Census Bureau Map Finder or the Artcyclopedia art gallery.

**Kid Info** • [www.kidinfo.com/School\\_Subjects.html](http://www.kidinfo.com/School_Subjects.html)

Children can choose from a list of school subjects to find helpful links. At Language Arts, they'll learn how to write a good letter or find favorite authors on the Web. In the math section, kids can play games to reinforce basic skills, try mind-bending brain-teasers, and create five different types of graphs. This site also features history, geography, health, science, and more.

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# Peaceful Parenting

Elementary kids can make parents proud one minute and frustrate them the next. Without strategies to handle trying behavior, some parents resort to yelling, and wish they could find a way to stop.

The good news? There are many techniques you can use instead of shouting. Here are 10 programs and strategies that offer alternatives to raised voices. Try them and see what works for you.



## 1. Put behavior in perspective.

Knowing what's "normal" for elementary children can keep frustrations in check. Their push toward independence and their growing knowledge of words may lead to unacceptable behavior, like back talk. When you respond, show by example how you want your youngster to act. For instance, instead of shouting at him, let him know in a calm voice that he hurt your feelings.

## 2. Count to three.

The next time your youngster whines, throws a tantrum, or behaves in a way you want to stop, try using the "1-2-3" system developed by child discipline expert Thomas Phelan. Without lecturing or showing emotion, simply say, "That's one" for the first offense. If the behavior continues for a few seconds longer, say, "That's two." The third time, state, "That's three. Take five," and send your child to her room for a break (try one minute per year of age). Decide in advance which behaviors will warrant using "1-2-3."

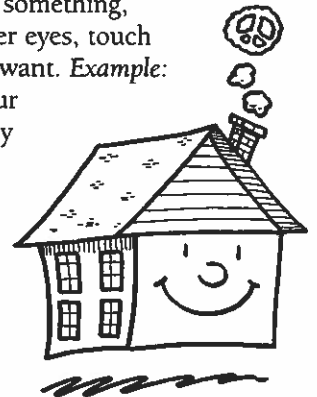
## 3. Put it in writing.

Child psychologist Ruth Peters suggests putting a behavior plan in writing. Start by listing daily expectations, such as brushing teeth and doing homework. Next, write down unacceptable behaviors like tattling. Finally, list rewards, which can be as simple as extra computer time. Decide how many tasks your youngster must complete—and the limit on the number of violations he can have—to receive rewards. Post the agreement where he can easily see it, and help him check off the list throughout the day.



## 4. Ask effectively.

When you ask your child to do something, bend down to her level. Look into her eyes, touch her gently, and clearly say what you want. *Example:* "Jenny, please sit down and start your homework." As you speak, gesture by pointing to the chair, then her textbook. Notice her efforts when she does what you've asked ("Great! You've started your homework. Now you'll have free time after dinner").



## 5. Be clear.

Whenever possible, instead of simply refusing your child's request to do something, tell him specifically when he will be allowed to do it. For example, if he asks you if a friend can visit, don't just say, "No, Mike can't come over to play" or, "Not until you've picked up your things." Try explaining, "You may invite Mike over after you've put your coat and shoes in the closet."

## 6. Give notice.

Imagine how you'd feel if you were talking to a friend on the telephone and you suddenly got disconnected. That's how your child might feel when she's asked to stop an activity without warning. Try to give advance notice when she needs to shift her attention. *Examples:* "Ten minutes till we eat. Finish that stage of your video game"; "We have to leave the amusement park in a half hour. Which ride do you want to go on again?"

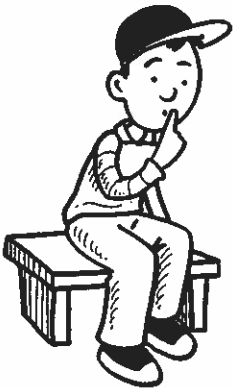
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**7. Find solutions.**

When you feel like raising your voice, view whatever's upsetting you as a chance to solve a problem. Invite your youngster to suggest ways to remedy the situation. *Example:*

"We have one TV and two people who want to watch different shows. What could we do?" Then, ask, "What might happen if we do that?" Be prepared to help your child think of solutions. Over time, he will learn to consider choices and choose ideas that work best.



**8. Tame conflict step-by-step.**

Conflict-resolution skills can bring peace to times of tension. Try family psychiatrist Lyndon Waugh's suggestion for the whole family. First, think. Recognize that you are angry, and tell yourself anger is okay as long as you respond appropriately. Consider what you are really angry about. Next, talk and listen. Calmly state your feelings, admit any responsibility for the problem, and listen to the other person's point of view. Finally, brainstorm solutions. Pick an idea everyone can live with, and choose a time to get together to talk about whether it's working.

**9. Watch for warning signs.**

Pay attention to how you feel just before you become angry. Does your heart beat faster? Do you feel pressure in your chest? Do you clench your hands? By knowing your warning signs, you can catch yourself before you erupt. Think of ways you can calm down, such as breathing deeply or walking away for a few minutes.

**10. Know your limits.**

When your youngster "pushes your buttons," it may be a sign that something else is going on. For example, if your child's ungratefulness upsets you or makes you angry, ask yourself if you're overindulging her. Perhaps there's something you wished you had when you were growing up. Learning to identify what's happening under the surface and separating your issues from your youngster's behavior will go a long way toward putting you in control of your anger.

**Resources**

For more suggestions, check your local library for these titles:

**1-2-3 Magic: Effective Discipline for Children 2-12** by Thomas W. Phelan, Ph.D.

**Don't Be Afraid to Discipline: For Ages 7-16** by Dr. Ruth Peters

**Easy to Love, Difficult to Discipline: The 7 Basic Skills for Turning Conflict into Cooperation** by Becky A. Bailey, Ph.D.

**Kid Cooperation: How to Stop Yelling, Nagging & Pleading and Get Kids to Cooperate** by Elizabeth Pantley

**Peaceful Parents, Peaceful Kids: Practical Ways to Create a Calm and Happy Home** by Naomi Drew

**Raising a Thinking Preteen: The "I Can Problem Solve" Program for 8- to 12-Year-Olds** by Myrna B. Shure, Ph.D.

**Raising Your Spirited Child: A Guide for Parents Whose Child Is More Intense, Sensitive, Perceptive, Persistent, and Energetic** by Mary Sheedy Kurcinka

**Tired of Yelling: Teaching Our Children to Resolve Conflict** by Lyndon D. Waugh, M.D.

**When Your Kids Push Your Buttons and What You Can Do About It: For Parents of Toddlers to Teens** by Bonnie Harris

**Your School-Age Child: From Kindergarten Through Sixth Grade** by Lawrence Kutner, Ph.D.

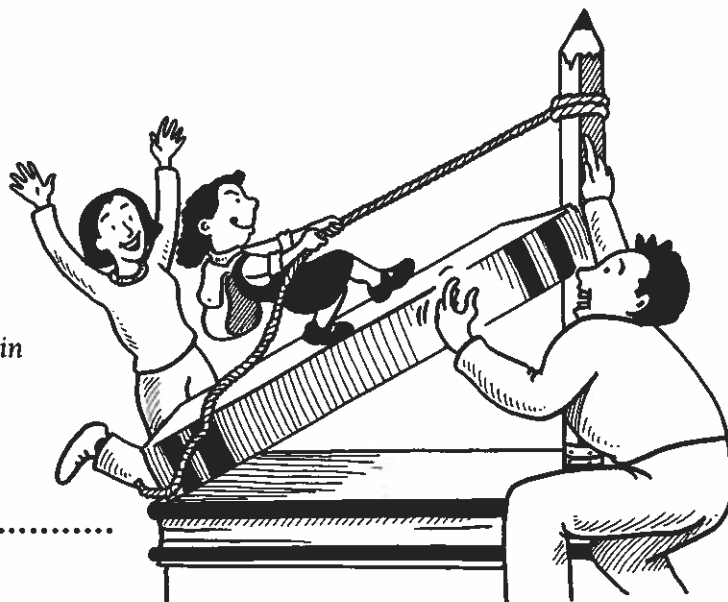
*Editor's Note:* This list was compiled for information purposes only and does not imply endorsement of these particular books. Feel free to pick and choose the ideas that make sense for your family.



# Motivation Methods That Work

“Have you finished your book report?” “When are you going to take out the trash?” Does it seem like you’re constantly nagging at your youngster to get things done?

Instead of nagging, try the suggestions and “can-do” tips in this special report. You’ll boost your child’s enthusiasm for doing what he needs to do—in school and at home!



## Offer praise

Never underestimate the power of a “Good job!” Children crave approval from their parents. A positive response, such as a hug or a smile, can be a great incentive. Whether it’s for washing a sink full of dishes or passing a math quiz, a word of encouragement will show your youngster that you notice his hard work. His self-confidence will soar, and he will want to keep trying.

**Can-do tips:** Let your child overhear you bragging to a friend when he cleans his room without being asked. Hang tests on the fridge, or send copies of a good report card to relatives.

## Create excitement

When your youngster needs help getting motivated for a task, find a way to make it enjoyable. For example, if you make reviewing for a test entertaining, you’re not only helping her study, you’re teaching her that learning doesn’t have to be boring.

**Can-do tip:** The next time your child is preparing for a test, turn studying into a game. *Example:* Draw a baseball diamond on a piece of paper. Ask her questions related to what she’s studying. Tell your youngster that she gets a base hit for every correct answer and a strikeout for every incorrect one. For every three base hits, she scores a home run.



## Show interest

Let your child know that what he’s involved in is important to you. When you express

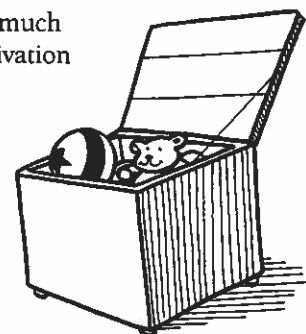
curiosity about the new computer game he’s playing with his friends or you regularly attend parent-teacher conferences, your youngster will see that you’re interested.

**Can-do tips:** Ask your child questions about his day. *Examples:* “How was the field trip?” “What was the score of the game?” Attend extracurricular and school functions, such as music recitals and parent nights, whenever possible.

## Give rewards

Simple rewards, like extra privileges, can be powerful motivators. But rewards should be used sparingly. Bargaining too much can limit your child’s natural motivation by putting the focus on getting something.

**Can-do tips:** Offer your youngster a special snack or extra TV time when she finishes her homework quickly. Or surprise her with a thank-you card in her lunch bag for helping you clean the garage.



## Use consequences

Experts agree that punishing kids for not doing what they’re supposed to do doesn’t always produce improved results. However, linking consequences to performance can provide a reason for your child to get the job done while giving him a greater sense of control over his life.

**Can-do tip:** Try to connect what your youngster needs to do with an outcome. *Example:* “After you rake the leaves in

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the yard, you can go skateboarding.” This way, it will be an action on his part, rather than you, that lets him do something he wants.

## Encourage problem solving

When your child runs into a problem, don't solve it for her. Instead, give her clues that will help her discover the answer. The more she does on her own, the more confident she will feel about her work, and the harder she will try. And she'll learn how to handle future problems.

**Can-do tip:** If your youngster comes to you for homework help, have her turn the problem into a question. *Example:* If she asks you for the name of the first president of the United States, suggest that she ask herself, “Where in my textbook did I read about the first president?”



## Manage stress

You may not realize it, but stress can zap your child's energy. Feeling that he can't get everything done can keep your youngster from trying to do anything. Help him simplify his schedule so he can regain the motivation he needs to focus on what's most important: school, family and friends, exercise, and relaxation.

**Can-do tip:** If your child seems overwhelmed, make some schedule changes. Cut back on after-school activities like clubs and sports, and limit playdates.

## Establish expectations

It's important for parents to set high standards for their children at home and in school. Students whose parents expect them to do well in school have a better chance of learning success. Encourage your youngster to give her best effort in everything she does. Let her know that some things may be harder for her than others, but there's no excuse for not trying.

**Can-do tips:** Teach your child to be responsible at home by assigning chores and setting clear guidelines for behavior. If she's struggling with schoolwork, offer tutoring or other help to improve her skills and boost her self-confidence.



## Provide choices

Children, like adults, are motivated by their own interests. Allowing your child to make decisions will give him a sense of control and encourage him to tackle the job at hand.

**Can-do tip:** Give your youngster plenty of opportunities to have a say in day-to-day decisions. For example, ask him which movie you should rent for the evening or whether he'd like to visit a museum or a pet farm on a weekend trip. Let him choose whether to spend his allowance on a new video or the next book in his favorite series.

## Accept mistakes

Some kids are afraid of trying new things because they think making a mistake means they failed. When your youngster messes up, tell her you believe in her, and give her a chance to try again. Treating mistakes as opportunities instead of failures shows that you value effort, not just achievement.

**Can-do tip:** When your child makes a mistake, help her explore what went wrong. *Examples:* If she gets a poor grade, you might ask questions like, “Did you understand the teacher's instructions?” and “Did you remember to bring your review worksheets home?” If she forgets that she has practice after school, try, “Did you write the date on your calendar?” By figuring out why mistakes happen, your youngster will improve her chances for success in the future.

## Home & School CONNECTION

# Standardized Test *Secrets*

**Confident. Prepared. Relaxed. Well rested.** These are the traits of successful test-takers. How can you ensure that your child does his best on standardized tests? Try these ideas to help before, during, and after tests.

*Editor's Note:* We chose to use a boy in this report, but the examples apply to both boys and girls.



## Before:

**Understand the purpose.** Your child may wonder why he has to take standardized tests. Let him know that the tests measure how students in his school are doing compared with other schools and districts. The tests also show areas he needs to work on and how his skills change over time. Plus, they help teachers and administrators do their jobs better.

**Support the teacher's efforts.** Chances are your child's teacher will give him many activities to prepare for the test. She may also share information about ways to practice at home. Remind your youngster that these exercises will help him do his best. Be on the lookout for testing schedules and other information from the school that you'll need to keep him on track.

**Reassure your child.** Standardized tests are very different from classroom tests. For example, about half of the questions are expected to be too difficult for the average student. The tests are also put together so that many test-takers won't finish within the time limit. Let your youngster know that even if he misses many questions, he can still score well.

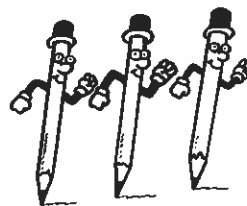
**Use practice sheets.** Most standardized tests require separate answer sheets with small circles to be filled in with pencil. Filling in the circles quickly and efficiently is tough for many children. Your child should use firm, up-and-down pencil strokes. It's important for him to completely erase answers he changes and to avoid stray marks. You can make a homemade practice sheet with rows of small circles. Or the teacher might have samples to share.

**Get in shape.** Two essential ingredients for successful test taking are a good night's rest and a healthy breakfast. If your

child is worried about the test, a warm bath and read-aloud time can help take his mind off it. A well-balanced breakfast will give him energy on test day. The menu might include cereal with milk, or eggs and toast, plus fruit or juice. Be careful not to offer more food than normal—being too full can make him sluggish.

## During:

**Take extra supplies.** Your school may provide all the supplies your youngster needs for the test. Just in case, it's a good idea to give him several pencils with medium-sharp points (a very sharp pencil can break easily). A good eraser and a few sheets of blank scrap paper are also useful. For added energy, snacks of raisins, grapes, or granola bars are great for breaks.



**Follow directions.** Encourage your child to read all directions slowly and carefully. If he's allowed to write in the test booklet, have him circle or underline important words. If he is confused about what to do, tell him to ask the teacher or test administrator right away.

**Use time wisely.** Most standardized tests are divided into timed sections. At the beginning of each section, your youngster should scan all the questions. That will give him some idea of



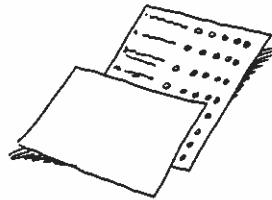


how much time to spend on each one. A simple method is to divide both the amount of time and number of questions in half. For instance, say he has 30 minutes and 20 questions. In the first 15 minutes, he should answer at least 10 questions.

**Read every answer.** It's often tempting for test-takers to read multiple-choice questions and mark their answers immediately. The best approach on standardized tests is to read the question and all the answers. Then, go back and select the best one. Your child may need to practice this two-step approach until he feels comfortable.

**Make good guesses.** On most standardized tests, it's better to guess at an answer than to leave it blank. Coach your youngster to cross off the answers he's sure are wrong. That way, he can improve his chances of choosing the right answer. Remind him not to spend too much time on particularly hard questions. If he's completely unsure, he should make his best guess and move on.

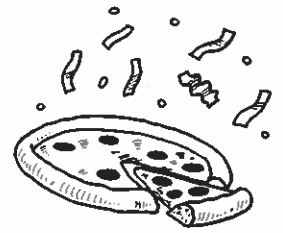
**Stay in order.** One mistake many children make is getting the questions and answers out of order. Encourage your youngster to keep his place on the answer sheet with a piece of blank paper. He can slide the paper down to reveal one row of circles at a time. Every few questions, he should make sure he's on the correct row.



**Check answers.** If your child reaches the end of a section with time left, he should go back and check his answers. Some test-takers circle difficult questions as they work so they can easily find them later.

## After:

**Celebrate.** Finishing a standardized test is an accomplishment. Give your child plenty of time to relax and wind down. Taking the test requires a lot of mental energy! Consider treating him to a special meal, a video rental, or a walk in the park. It's important to tell him how proud you are of his hard work.



**Share the results.** When you receive a copy of your child's scores, make sure you understand what they mean. Scores are often reported in percentiles and can be confusing, so ask the teacher for help. Talk with your youngster about the areas he did well in and any he needs to work on. He will probably be very curious and may ask lots of questions. Remind him that standardized tests are a tool to help him learn.

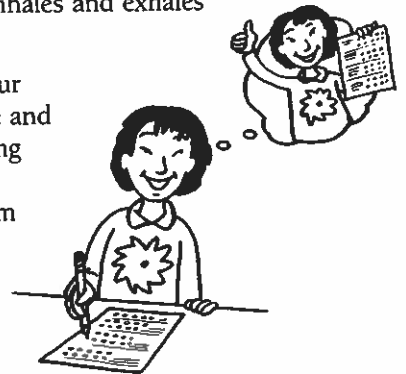
## Tackling test anxiety

Taking standardized tests can be frightening and stressful. What should your youngster do if he freezes up on test day? Here are several tips he can try to help him relax and concentrate.

**Steady breathing.** Encourage your child to close his eyes and take slow, deep breaths. Have him pay attention to the way his chest rises and falls. Suggest he count each time he inhales and exhales until he reaches 10.

**Relaxed muscles.** Your youngster can also tense and relax his muscles. Starting with his face, have him squeeze his muscles from his head to his toes, holding the muscles tense for five seconds and then releasing them.

**Positive thinking.** Ask your child to close his eyes and imagine himself confidently answering the questions. If he pictures himself doing well on the test, he's apt to feel more at ease.



## Home & School CONNECTION

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