



## Strengthen thinking skills by asking six types of questions

Talking with your elementary schooler is an effective way to build thinking skills—especially if you ask certain kinds of questions.

Experts recognize six categories of thinking skills. Ask questions that help your child:

1. **Recall knowledge.** Ask about facts your child knows. “Who is the president?” “What is the capital of Virginia?” Words that will help with this include *who*, *when*, *what*, *where* and even *list*.
2. **Explain ideas or concepts.** When your child learns new things, check the depth of comprehension. “How would you illustrate the water cycle?”
3. **Apply knowledge.** How will your child use information in new

situations? “What has our country learned from the Civil War? How can we apply it to life today?”

4. **Analyze.** Many things can be divided into groups, such as types of animals. Have your child compare and contrast groups of things. “How are fish and humans different? How are they alike?”
5. **Evaluate.** Ask for your child’s opinion about things. “How have smartphones changed our lives?” “Why do you think Benjamin Franklin is so famous?”
6. **Create.** Ask your child to create a solution to a problem. Use words such as *invent* and *what if*.

Source: P. Armstrong, “Bloom’s Taxonomy,” Vanderbilt University, The Center for Teaching.

## This four-step process can end procrastination



At one time or another, most students put off completing their schoolwork. But

when procrastination becomes a habit, it can negatively affect school performance.

To break the procrastination habit, have your child:

1. **Select just one thing to do.** Sometimes kids put things off when they feel overwhelmed. Tell your child to focus on one assignment at a time.
2. **Set a timer for 30 minutes** and begin working on the assignment. While the timer is ticking, your child should focus only on that assignment.
3. **Avoid breaks.** Your child should get water or a snack *before* starting the timer to avoid interrupting work flow.
4. **Celebrate.** Once the timer goes off, encourage your child to do something fun, such as kicking a ball around outside for a few minutes.

Your child can repeat this process until schoolwork is complete!

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

# November is a great month to teach and learn with your child



Education doesn't just happen at school—it happens everywhere! And November is a month full of learning opportunities:

- **Nov. 4**—King Tut Day. With your child, check out a book or go online to learn more about the discovery of King Tutankhamen's tomb.
- **Nov. 8**—Election Day. Talk to your child about rights, responsibilities and why it is important to vote.
- **Nov. 11**—Veterans Day. Talk about the sacrifices military people have made for our freedom. Ask your child to make a card for a veteran you know.
- **Nov. 14-18**—American Education Week. Try to visit the school one day this week to show your support for education.

- **Nov. 16**—International Day of Tolerance. Talk with your child about the importance of being respectful to people whose beliefs differ from yours.
- **Nov. 21-27**—National Family Week. Spend extra time as a family this week. Play games, cook meals and read together!
- **Nov. 24**—American Thanksgiving. Have family members make a list of all the people and things they are thankful for.

**"The beautiful thing about learning is that nobody can take it away from you."**

—B.B. King

## Show your child how to become a more confident test-taker



Test anxiety often comes from self-doubt. When students don't think they will succeed on a test, they often don't.

To help your child become more confident before a test:

- **Take off the pressure.** Tell your child that tests just show the teacher what students have learned so far, and what they need help with.
- **Find out what the test will cover.** Encourage your child to listen carefully when the teacher talks about the test—and to ask questions if needed.
- **Avoid last-minute panic.** Your child should begin to study several days before the test. Cramming the night before a test rarely works.
- **Teach efficient studying.** Tell your child to focus on the not-yet mastered material first.
- **Help connect new material** to information your child already knows. These connections improve students' recall ability.
- **Encourage positive self-talk.** When stuck during a test, your child can say, "I am prepared and I know this. The answer will come to me."
- **Talk about your child's strengths.** Confidence in one area can lead to success in other areas.
- **Visualize success.** With eyes closed, have your child picture all of the test questions answered correctly.

Source: S.M. DeBroff, *The Mom Book Goes to School: Insider Tips to Ensure Your Child Thrives in Elementary and Middle School*, Free Press.

## Are you making the most of your report card talks?



Perhaps your child's report card is great. Or maybe it's worse than you feared. Whatever the report card says, it provides a valuable opportunity to talk with your child about school and study habits.

Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to see if you are making the most of report card talks:

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you take** your child's report card seriously and set aside time to review and discuss it together?
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you ask** if your child agrees with the grades, and why or why not?
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you remain** calm and try not to make your child feel even more disappointed?
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you help** your child make a plan to improve or maintain grades for the next grading period?
- \_\_\_ **5. Do you contact** the teacher if you or your child have concerns or questions?

**How well are you doing?**

If most of your answers are *yes*, you're turning report card time into learning time. For each *no* answer, try that idea in the quiz.

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# Encourage your elementary schooler to become a leader



Some students seem to be born leaders. They have the self-confidence, friendliness and helpfulness that make other

people want to work with them.

But all children, whether they are born leaders or not, have the ability to *become* leaders. Here are some ways you can help your child develop leadership skills:

- **Look at leaders in the news.**

Whether you're watching a story about a winning football team or a community effort to build a park, help your child see that someone was the leader of that group. Talk about the qualities that make people good leaders.

- **Be a leader yourself.** When you take a leadership role—whether it's at school, in business or in your community—tell your child about

what you're doing and why. "I'm volunteering to help your school raise money so they can purchase more classroom computers."

- **Teach your child** to see things from other people's points of view. Good leaders aren't bossy. They make people *want* to work together.
- **Find leadership opportunities.** Children can learn leadership skills in houses of worship, clubs, Scouts, athletic teams and many other organizations. Family meetings are another good way to develop "home-grown" leadership. Let children take turns chairing the meetings and managing family projects.
- **Don't push.** Pressuring children beyond their abilities destroys self-esteem. If your child seems stressed or unhappy, it's time to lighten up.

# Research links nutrition quality to academic performance



Have you heard of the expression "food for thought"? Well, it turns out to be, quite literally, the truth.

Good nutrition really does feed the brain. And it starts with breakfast. Research shows that eating breakfast helps students stay on task and recall information. Eating breakfast regularly is even linked to improved overall school performance.

If your child gets breakfast at school, discuss the importance of eating it. If your child eats at home, keep low-sugar, unprocessed foods on hand. And be prepared for a rushed morning with a healthy breakfast that your child can eat on the way out the door.

Whether you're packing lunch or your child is eating a school lunch, discourage eating high-calorie and high-fat foods. When students eat a meal that is high in fat and sugar, their bodies tend to become very tired—which makes it difficult to concentrate.

Children are typically hungry when they get home from school, so be sure to keep a variety of healthy snacks on hand—fruits, veggies, cheese, yogurt and whole grain crackers.

Try to buy only the food you want your child to eat. Your child can't eat unhealthy food if it's not there.

**Source:** C. St John, M.P.H., R.D.N., "Proof Positive: Breakfast Improves Kids' Grades, Mood and Weight," Healthy Eating.Org.

**Q:** My elementary schooler struggled with math last year and now doesn't like it. I understand because I'm not good at math either. How can I encourage a better attitude about math?

## Questions & Answers

**A:** Parents' attitudes about math have a lot to do with how well their children do in math. Kids whose parents tell them they didn't like math when they were in school often struggle with math as well. Likewise, children whose parents instill a sense of enjoyment of math tend to perform better.

To help your child develop a positive attitude about math:

- **Set the tone.** Let your child know you believe *everyone* can be successful in math. If you say this often enough, your child will start to believe it!
- **Avoid stereotypes.** Men and women can be engineers. Children of all races can be successful in school. In fact, students who are successful in math can go a long way toward breaking the stereotypes that others may hold.
- **Talk about careers.** Young children may decide that being a Ninja Turtle or an Avenger is a great career choice. Expand the options. Talk about people who use math in their jobs—an airline pilot, a weather forecaster, an architect, an astronaut, a researcher, an engineer, etc.
- **Connect math** to the real world. When you and your child go to the store, bank, restaurant, etc., point out all of the ways people use math. At dinner, challenge family members to tell one way they used math that day.



# It Matters: Building Character

## What should you do if your child is caught cheating?



You receive a note from the teacher that says your child was caught cheating. Your first instinct may be to

ground your child for life.

Instead, experts suggest setting aside time to talk and really listen to your child. Ask what happened and find out why your child felt the need to cheat.

Here are four common reasons some students cheat:

1. **They are afraid** of what their parents will do if they bring home a bad grade. Make sure your child knows that a low grade would not affect your love. You would be more concerned about the situation than angry.
2. **They have high expectations** for their own academic achievement. Tell your child not to put too much emphasis on grades. Grades don't reflect a person's worth or intelligence.
3. **They think cheating is no big deal.** Explain that cheating is always wrong. Cheaters rob themselves of learning the material and they are unfair to honest students.
4. **They were asked to.** Tell your child that letting someone look at a test or copy an assignment is wrong. A real friend would never ask someone to do that. Help your child role-play turning down a request to cheat: "I'd like to help you, but I don't like cheating. Besides, we could get into a lot of trouble."

**Source:** J. Craig, Ph.D., *Parents on the Spot! What to Do When Kids Put You There*, Hearst Books.

## Teach your child to persevere when faced with challenges

If your child has set a goal to reach, such as earning an A on a project or making the competitive soccer team, achieving it will probably take hard work. And there may be times your child will feel like giving up. That's why it's important to encourage perseverance, especially when things are difficult. Here's how:

- **Discuss past successes.** Did your child save money to buy something? How did your child do it? What did success feel like? What did your child learn?
- **Choose a fun, realistic goal.** Make it something that can be reached quickly. If your child wants to read an entire series of books, start small. Set a goal for your child to read the first book.
- **Listen for ideas.** Kids often mention goals without actually setting them. ("I'd love to be in the talent show" or "I hope I finish my report on



time.") Together, create a step-by-step plan for success.

- **Brainstorm different strategies** to try if your child doesn't meet a goal. And help your child revise a goal if it is too ambitious.
- **Be a cheerleader.** Say things like, "You are really sticking with this. I'm impressed!" Even if your child misses the mark, praise effort.

## Use role models to encourage positive character traits



Although you are the primary role model in your child's life, you don't have to be the only one. Here's how to use other role models to instill positive character traits:

- **Talk about relatives,** friends or celebrities who show respect, responsibility, compassion or other desirable traits. Say how much you admire them and why.
- **Share your heroes** with your child. Talk about people such as

Anne Frank, Martin Luther King, Jr., Abraham Lincoln and Mother Teresa. Discuss the traits you admire in them.

- **Together, find or draw pictures** of people your child admires. Ask why your child thinks highly of them. Heroes can be fictional—from books or movies—or people in your family, such as an uncle who helps build houses for people in need or a grandmother who worked to put a child through college.