

Elementary School Parents[®]

Portsmouth Public Schools
Simonsdale Elementary

make the difference!



Keep learning alive for your child over the winter break

Your child looks at the calendar and imagines the joy of having no schedule for the whole winter school holiday. You look at the same blank squares on your calendar and have a mild moment of panic.

Here are some activities that will keep him learning—and keep you from hearing, “I’m bored” during the holiday:

- **Let your child discover** the past by talking with grandparents, aunts, uncles—even you. Help him plan questions to ask, such as, “What was school like for you?” He can record the conversations, write them down, or just listen.
- **Assemble a list** from your local newspaper of places to go and things to do. Every community

has places that will interest kids. Check out a local museum (see if they have a day when admission is free). Look for free concerts you can attend. See if the local public library has any special story hours or performances.

- **Select a movie** based on a book. After you and your child finish reading the book, watch the movie. Discuss how the two were alike and how they were different.
- **Prepare food together.** Nearly every culture has some special foods associated with the holiday season. With your child, prepare foods you remember from your childhood. Share your memories. Or do some research and prepare a dish you’ve never tried.

Word games strengthen writing skills



Using proper grammar takes practice. If your child struggles with forming and punctuating sentences, turn writing into a game. Here are two fun ones to try:

1. Fill-in-the-blank game.

Review the different parts of speech and write a story with missing words. For example: “The girl stepped on a ___ (*noun*).” Take turns filling in the blanks. You can help by saying things like, “A noun is a person, place or thing. I’ll choose the word *pie!*” Make the words as silly as you’d like. Then read the story aloud.

- ### 2. Punctuation game.
- Write a short story without punctuation. Then read it together. It’s tough! This shows the importance of punctuation. Now edit the story, adding punctuation that makes it easy (or funny) to read. Suggest that your child write a story for you to punctuate. Discuss why you chose—or didn’t choose—certain punctuation marks.

Expose your elementary schooler to other countries and cultures



Children often know very little about other countries. Here are some ways you can expose your child to other cultures:

- **Learn about holiday customs** of people around the world. Use the library to discover how other people celebrate their own special days.
- **Watch plays, movies or puppet shows** about people from other countries. Many libraries and museums present these programs for free.
- **Compare coins and stamps** from other countries. They often include information about the country. You may find stamps from other countries where you

work. You can also look on the Internet.

- **Learn simple words** in different languages. Teach your child to count to 10 in another language. Learn how to say *hello* and *thank you*.
- **Look for television programs** about other countries. When you watch the news, keep a globe or an atlas nearby to show your child more about the countries.

“The more that you read, the more things you will know. The more that you learn, the more places you’ll go.”

—Dr. Seuss

Give your elementary schooler the tools needed for learning



A carpenter would never come to a job site without a box of tools. He knows that he can't do his best work without the proper tools for the task.

That's a good way to think about how your child can do her best in school. She needs to show up with the right tools to do the job. Here are a few:

- **Enough sleep.** A good night's sleep is essential to your child's health—and her success in school. Doctors say that children between the ages of seven and 12 need 10 to 12 hours of sleep per day. Without proper rest, she won't be able to concentrate in school.
- **A healthy breakfast.** Cars can't run without fuel, and kids' brains are no different. Many studies show that children who eat breakfast do better in class, earning higher grades and test scores. They are better able to focus and have fewer behavior problems. Don't worry if your child doesn't like “breakfast food.” Peanut butter on a tortilla or a slice of veggie pizza will give her a great start.
- **High expectations.** When you believe your child can do her best, she'll believe it, too. So send her off with an “I know you can do it!” and she'll have the confidence she needs to tackle another day.

Are you helping your dawdler speed things up?



It's time to leave, but your child is not ready. This is the fourth morning this week you've been late. Some kids just seem to have only one speed—slow. But there are ways parents can help these kids learn to “get a move on.”

Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out if you are doing all you can to move your dawdler out the door:

- ___ 1. **Do you make sure** your child goes to bed on time, so it's easier to get up in the morning?
- ___ 2. **Do you take time** at night to lay out clothes and pack book bags?
- ___ 3. **Does your child know**, step by step, what she has to do to get ready in the morning?
- ___ 4. **Do you give** your child “two-minute warnings” to ease transitions?
- ___ 5. **Do you build** extra time into your schedule?

How well are you doing?

More *yes* answers mean you are helping your dawdling child get up to speed. For each *no* answer, try that idea from the quiz.

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Make online safety a priority for every member of your family



Kids use computers for homework, fun and socializing, but the convenience has a cost.

The digital world can be dangerous, so parents must promote computer and Internet safety.

Experts recommend that you:

- **Keep the computer** in a central spot, such as in the family room, where you can monitor activities.
 - **Go online together.** Let your child show you his computer skills and favorite sites. Guide him to child-friendly resources.
 - **Keep track** of your child's online activities. With whom does he email or chat? What games does he play? What sites does he use? Keep online accounts in your name.
 - **Consider installing programs** that make computer use safer for kids.
- Also check your Internet service provider's safety features.
- **Learn about Internet safety.** Then talk with your child about basic rules and post them near the computer. You can find a list of rules at www.netsmart.org/resources/pledge.htm.
 - **Tell your child** not to share personal information online, such as his name, age, address or school. He should never agree to meet online-only "friends" or acquaintances in person.
 - **Do not respond** to inappropriate messages. If your child receives one, he should tell a trusted adult immediately.
 - **Remember that your child** may go online in other locations, such as at a friend's home. Take steps to ensure safety no matter where he uses the Internet.

Try a quick science experiment to encourage good hygiene!



Here's a fun science project that will show your child how the fluoride in toothpaste protects her teeth. You

will need two jars, two raw eggs (in their shells) and two cups of white vinegar. Then help your child:

1. **Label one jar** *plain egg* and the other jar *toothpaste egg*.
2. **Fill both jars** with vinegar.
3. **Weigh and measure** both eggs. Write down the measurements.
4. **Smear a layer of toothpaste** on one of the eggs and drop it into the jar labeled *toothpaste egg*.
5. **Drop the other egg** into the jar labeled *plain egg*.
6. **Cover the jars with plastic wrap** and observe the eggs for four days. Here's what you should see: Bubbles will form around the plain egg for the first 15 minutes. (That's the acid of the vinegar working.) By the next day, the eggshell will be gritty, and the egg will be bigger. After three days, the shell will be completely gone, and the egg will be soft and rubbery.

Meanwhile, the toothpaste egg will show little change, due to the protection provided by the toothpaste.

Because teeth and eggshells are both made of calcium, this experiment is a great way to help your child see why she needs to brush her teeth!

Q: My husband is deployed overseas. He won't be here for the holidays. The longer he has been gone, the harder it has been on my third grader. Now my son's grades are starting to suffer. What advice do you have to help me get through a hard holiday season and also get my son back on track?

Questions & Answers

A: Being separated from a parent is always hard. Having that parent be away during the holiday season can be even harder. Here are some ways to help:

- **Let your son know** that it is okay to miss his father. Say something like, "We love Daddy very much. Of course we're going to miss him. Whenever you feel sad, you can talk with me."
- **Talk to his teacher.** Be sure his teacher understands what he's going through and how he's feeling. Sometimes, a child feels he has to be brave at home. His teacher may find he will confide in her. Ask her how you can help support him so he gets his grades back on track.
- **Talk with your child** about some fun holiday traditions you want to continue—baking, decorating or watching a favorite holiday video. Even though the holidays won't be like every other year, they can still be a special time for you and your son.
- **Stay in touch** with your husband. Encourage him to call, send videos and email.
- **Look for ways** you and your son can help others. He'll start to put his own problems in perspective when he sees that there are others who need help.

It Matters: Building Character

Show your child that honesty is the best policy



Research shows that by the time children reach elementary school, most know the difference between being honest

and lying. But that doesn't make telling the truth easy! To encourage honesty in your child:

- **Talk about it.** Ask your child if he believes that honesty is the best policy. Why or why not? Does he want others to tell him the truth? When does he think it's okay to lie?
- **Talk about the consequences** of lying. Let your child know that lying destroys trust. If he makes a habit of lying to people, they won't be able to believe what he says—even when he is telling the truth!
- **Be a role model.** Children are good "lie detectors." They notice when parents tell the truth—and when they don't.
- **Create opportunities** for telling the truth. Say, "You broke my vase," instead of, "Did you do this?" It's better to say what happened rather than to ask unnecessary questions.
- **React calmly.** When your child lies, don't label him a "liar." Express confidence that he will make better choices in the future.
- **Reward trustworthiness.** If your child is truthful in a difficult situation, compliment him!
- **Admit your mistakes.** We all make mistakes. If your child catches you being dishonest, admit you're wrong.

Source: K. Stephens, "Lying, Fibs, and Tall-Tales: Teaching Children To Be Truthful," Parenting Exchange, niscw.com/teach-honesty.

Encourage your child to give to others this holiday season

Children want to feel like they play an important role in their community. The fact is that even the youngest child can do something for someone else.

This holiday season, find a volunteer or community service activity your child can do with you. Here are some ideas:

- **Bake something together** for a senior citizen or a parent of a new baby.
- **Make sandwiches** for people who are homeless.
- **Help take care of a pet.** If a neighbor is going away for a few days, you and your child could offer to feed and walk the dog.
- **Donate money she has earned.** It's nice when your child sees you give money to a charity. But



she'll remember it longer if she gives away even a small sum of her own to help others.

- **Take part in a clothing drive.** Many charities collect coats, gloves and hats and donate them to local shelters.

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

You and your child can learn to express anger with respect



It's hard to be angry and respectful at the same time. But expressing anger with respect is essential.

You and your child can control your reactions if you:

- **List triggers.** Think about what makes you most angry. Being disobeyed? Being told what to do? Commit to reacting calmly to these situations.
- **Identify "red flags."** Start by noticing what anger is like for you. Does it make you hot? Make you want to scream? These are important warning signs.

- **Think.** When you feel angry, ask yourself, "What made me angry?" "What else did I feel?" Anger can sometimes really be frustration, disappointment or embarrassment.
- **Leave the source.** If possible, walk away from what is frustrating you and try to calm down.
- **Make good choices.** There are many respectful ways to release anger. Write in a journal, paint a picture or exercise. When you're angry with a person, wait until you're calm to talk.

Source: E. Verdick and M. Lisovskis, *How to Take the Grrrr Out of Anger*, Free Spirit Publishing.