

# Elementary School Parents<sup>®</sup> *make the difference!*

Portsmouth Public Schools  
Simonsdale Elementary



## Help your elementary schooler 'reset' and get back on track

If you run into a problem with a computer program, you can often fix it by pushing the “reset” button. It gives you a chance for a fresh start and is an easy way to correct problems before they get out of hand.

It may be time to push the reset button on your child’s school year as well. If her year is not going as well as you’d hoped, here are a few ways you can reset for the rest of the year:

- **Make change a family affair.** If you’ve decided that your child needs to spend more time doing homework, make it quiet time for the whole family. You can work on paperwork or read while your child studies.
- **Replace bad habits.** While it’s hard to break a habit, it’s much easier to put a different one in its

place. If your child is in the habit of watching TV as soon as she walks in the door, suggest that she read for 30 minutes instead. She’ll still have a chance to relax—but she will also strengthen her reading skills.

- **Get organized.** This month, you can find lots of great-looking calendars available on sale. Look for one your child will enjoy using. Then help her get in the habit of writing down things like the day her book report is due. That can help avoid a last-minute panic.
- **Celebrate successes.** Help your child see the link between her new habits and her results. “You studied for that test and got nine out of 10 correct. That’s great!”

Source: R. Fry, *Get Organized*, Career Press.

## Five test-taking tips can lead to test success



Regardless of how well your child knows the material for a test, he will do better if he

knows some basic test-taking strategies. Your child should:

1. **Ask questions.** If he doesn’t understand the directions or a question, he should ask the teacher for clarification.
2. **Manage his time.** Tell him to look over the questions and answer the easy ones first. If he gets stuck on an especially hard question, he should move on and come back to that question when he’s finished everything else.
3. **Use the process** of elimination when answering multiple choice questions. He should cross off answers he knows can’t be right. Then he can focus on the ones that are left.
4. **Be neat.** His handwriting should be clear and his mistakes should be erased completely.
5. **Use extra time** to review his answers and check for careless mistakes.

## Seven strategies for keeping your child's reading progress on track



You're proud of your child for learning to read! But now that she's accomplished this feat, how can you support

her? Remember that reading skills must be developed and maintained. The older your child gets, the more she'll depend on them for learning.

To support your child's education and keep reading progress on track:

- 1. Relax.** Let your child select reading materials she likes. She doesn't have to limit herself to books. She can read comics, magazines, video game instructions and recipes.
- 2. Make connections.** When you plan a trip, find books related to the location. Or have her read about historical events that happened near your home.
- 3. Build excitement.** Make reading irresistible. Let your child stay up 15 minutes later to read in bed.

Or let her build a fort and read inside by flashlight.

- 4. Role-play.** Turn favorite books into family plays or movies. Add props and costumes.
- 5. Join (or start) a book club.** Get friends together for book-related discussions, activities and snacks.
- 6. Set a timer.** If your child resists reading, a timer might help. Say, "Read to me for three minutes. When the timer beeps, you can stop." Add a minute every few days.
- 7. Read aloud.** Try reading your child more advanced books. When parents read, kids enjoy more challenging words and stories.

**"Today a reader, tomorrow a leader."**

— Margaret Fuller

## Help your child improve memory & build strong observation skills



Scientists have strong observation skills. They notice and remember details. Here's a fun way to help your child build

these same skills.

Ask your child to describe the front of a building he knows well. It could be your house, your apartment building or the school. Just choose a building that he sees regularly.

He should describe it as accurately as he can. How many stories high is the building? What color is the front door? How many windows are there? Are the window frames painted a different color?

Have him write down what he thinks he remembers. Then take a trip. Walk outside to look at the front of your house. Walk down the street to see the school.

Check the reality against the details your child remembered. What observations were correct? Which details did he miss?

You can also turn this into a game when you're on a walk. Say, "How many windows were on the front of the house we just passed?" See if your child can remember without looking.

**Source:** S. Berman, *Thinking Strategies for Science: Grades 5-12*, Corwin Press.

## Do you handle school problems in positive ways?



No parent likes hearing that their child has a problem at school. But your reaction can make the difference between helping to solve the problem and standing in the way of a solution.

Answer *yes* or *no* to each question below to find out if you are helping address school issues positively:

- 1. Do you listen to the teacher** when she contacts you *before* you start explaining away your child's behavior? Being defensive doesn't build cooperation.
- 2. Do you wait to discuss the issue** with your child until you can do so calmly and without anger?
- 3. Do you involve your child** in developing a solution to the problem?
- 4. Do you let the teacher know** how you plan to handle the problem?
- 5. Do you stay in touch** with the teacher and the school to see if your solution is working?

**How well are you doing?**

More *yes* answers mean you are trying to solve problems in positive ways. For each *no* answer, try that idea.

**Elementary School**  
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Practical Ideas for Parents to Help Their Children. ISSN: 1523-1275

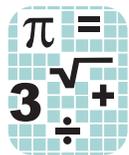
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Published monthly September through May by The Parent Institute®, a division of NIS, Inc., an independent, private agency. Equal opportunity employer. Copyright © 2015 NIS, Inc.

Publisher: Phillip Wherry.  
Editor: Rebecca Hasty Miyares.  
Illustrator: Joe Mignella.

# Practice working with fractions with your elementary schooler



Fractions can be one of the most challenging math ideas for children to learn. As a result, many students feel

that they never quite understand how to work with them.

Here's an easy way to practice working with fractions:

1. **Cut several long strips** of paper, each one a different color. The strips should be the same length and about three inches wide.
2. **Let your child choose** one colored strip to represent one whole unit. Have her label this strip  $\frac{1}{1}$ .
3. **Then choose another color.** Fold it carefully and cut it in half. Label each piece  $\frac{1}{2}$ . Then talk about what that means: These

two pieces make up one whole. This is one piece of two, so we write  $\frac{1}{2}$ .

4. **Do the same** with a different color for thirds, fourths, sixths and eighths. Always label each of the pieces and talk about what the fraction represents. "This is one piece of three, so we'll write  $\frac{1}{3}$ ."
5. **Let your child play** with the pieces to see what she discovers. How many fourths does it take to make one half? Which is larger— $\frac{1}{3}$  or  $\frac{1}{4}$ ?
6. **Keep these pieces.** As your child is adding or subtracting fractions, she can check her work with this fraction kit.

**Source:** D. Adams and M. Hamm, *Helping Students Who Struggle with Math and Science*, Rowman & Littlefield Education.

# Reduce frustration by keeping your discipline technique simple



There's no way around it: Your child is going to misbehave—and it's going to be frustrating! You can't change that,

but you can control your expectations and responses. That's why the American Academy of Pediatrics encourages parents to:

- **Be realistic** about children's abilities. If you demand too much from your child, you'll both be disappointed. Make a few simple rules he can understand. Match them to his age and maturity-level. Then expect a reasonable amount of cooperation.
- **Mean what you say.** Think carefully before you state a rule, promise or consequence. Is it fair? Will you really follow through?

Once you've made a good decision, stick to it! Kids make better choices when they can count on what parents say.

- **Consider your child's feelings.** Kids appreciate parents' understanding. It helps them behave. Say, "I know you're disappointed that you can't have a sleepover. Maybe another night."
- **Be forgiving.** No child—or parent—is perfect. If you do something you regret, such as yell at your child, discuss it when you're calm. Apologize and say what you'll do differently next time. Then keep your word! Teach your child that everyone can learn from mistakes.

**Source:** "Disciplining Your Child," Healthy Children, American Academy of Pediatrics, [nswc.com/aap-discipline](http://nswc.com/aap-discipline).

**Q:** Lately, my child has been telling me she hates school. It doesn't happen every day, but it has happened more than once. I'm not sure how to respond—she has to go to school, after all. How can I get to the root of the problem and how can I help?

## Questions & Answers

**A:** Not all children who say they hate school actually do. Sometimes, they're just looking for attention—or for a chance to put off homework. And not all parents who get involved with their child's school issues end up making things better.

Still, if she's said this more than once, there's probably something going on. Here's what to do:

1. **Talk to your daughter.** Wait for a time when she's relatively calm and when you have time to talk. Then ask her what's going on. "You've said you hate school a couple times. What's making you feel this way?"
2. **Identify the problem.** Listen closely to what your child says. Does she hate math class? Are kids mean to her on the bus? Is she feeling overwhelmed because she's participating in too many activities?
3. **Help your child find solutions.** For example, if she's struggling in a class, ask the teacher for advice. Does she need to spend more time on the subject? Is she turning in her homework?
4. **Be positive.** Help your child see that nearly every situation has positives and negatives. Then help her build on the positives and minimize the negatives.

# It Matters: Attendance

## Academic success starts with regular attendance



“Does it really matter if my child misses school?” parents wonder. “Yes!” say experts. Research shows

that regular attendance is linked to current and future school success. When kids miss too much school, they miss more than daily lessons. They miss the chance to build social and academic foundations that help with future learning.

To minimize attendance issues:

- **Remember that** excused and unexcused absences take a toll on learning. Keep track of how often your child is absent or tardy. In general, if a child is out of school 10% or more of the year, absences are considered particularly serious.
- **Keep the school calendar** handy when making plans. Schedule appointments and trips when school isn't in session. If your child needs to miss school, talk with the teacher.
- **Tell school officials** about problems that lead to absences. Many families face challenges with health, transportation, child care and other issues. Community programs may be able to help.
- **Avoid unnecessary absences** by establishing family routines that make life easier. Small changes, such as organizing school supplies at night and getting enough sleep, can make a big difference.

**Source:** H. 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, [www.nccp.org/publications/pub\\_837.html](http://www.nccp.org/publications/pub_837.html).

## Reduce school absences due to illness in one simple step

Scientists estimate that up to 80% of infections are spread by hands. That means a simple step—hand washing—is the top way to stay well and avoid missing school.

Share these tips with your child:

- **Wash properly.** Wet hands, lather with soap and wash for 20 seconds. It takes about this long to sing the “Happy Birthday” song twice.
- **Include all parts of the hands**—front, back, fingernails, between fingers, etc. To stay clean, use a fresh paper towel to turn off the faucet and open the bathroom door.
- **Wash hands often**, especially before eating. Soap and water work best. If they aren't available, use a hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.



- **Sneeze or cough into your elbow** instead of your hand to reduce the spread of germs to others.

**Source:** C. Lau and others, “Hand hygiene instruction decreases illness-related absenteeism in elementary schools: A prospective cohort study,” *BMC Pediatrics*, [www.biomedcentral.com/1471-2431/12/52](http://www.biomedcentral.com/1471-2431/12/52).

## Three family routines help you get your child to school on time



Students are late for school for all kinds of reasons—missing the bus, oversleeping and being unable to find something important. Some tardies are unavoidable, of course. But others are easily prevented with daily habits, such as:

1. **Homework routines.** Your child should do her homework at the same time, and in the same place, each day. Have her check her school bag for anything she needs you to read or sign. When study
2. **Nighttime routines.** Stick to a regular bedtime each night. Your child might brush her teeth, select the next day's outfit, put on her pajamas, pack her lunch and set her alarm clock. Any late-evening activities should be relaxing, such as listening to music or reading.
3. **Morning routines.** Post a checklist of your child's responsibilities, such as getting dressed, having breakfast and brushing teeth.

time is over, she should pack her bag and put it by the door.