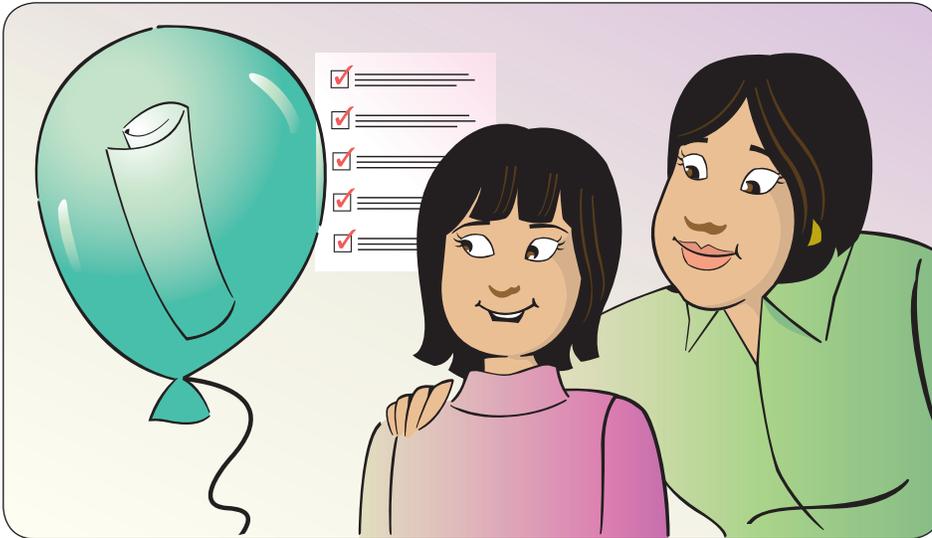


Elementary School Parents[®]

Portsmouth Public Schools
Simonsdale Elementary

make the difference!



Three easy ways to celebrate your child's academic success

She did it! She learned all her multiplication tables. Or she was chosen Student of the Week for her good behavior.

Setting goals and reaching them is one of the best ways to motivate children. Sometimes, just reaching the goal is enough. But other times, an accomplishment calls for a celebration. So when your child sets and reaches a tough goal, try one of these fun ideas:

1. Take a picture. Get a picture of your child holding her report card. Snap a shot of her in front of her science fair project. Or ask your child to draw a picture of her accomplishment.

Frame it and put it by your child's bed. That way, every time

she wakes up, she'll see an image of herself as an achiever.

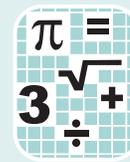
2. Plan a special surprise. On one side of a piece of paper, write down a goal your child wants to achieve. On the other side of the paper, write down a small reward—such as having a friend over for a sleepover.

Now roll up the paper and put it into a balloon. Tell your child that when she reaches her goal, you'll pop the balloon together.

3. Make a victory dinner. Set a "fancy" table. Cook your child's favorite foods. Decorate the table. Have a special family dinner to celebrate your child's success.

Source: M. Borba, *Parents Do Make a Difference*, Jossey-Bass.

Keep math alive over the winter break



Graphs help people understand information at a glance. Learning to create and use graphs is an important math skill—especially in the early elementary grades.

Here are some things your child might enjoy graphing over the winter break:

- **The colors of all the cars** in the neighborhood.
- **The number of pieces** of mail received each day for a week.
- **The number of T-shirts** owned by each member of your family.
- **The amount of money** saved toward something special.
- **The number of different** eye colors of people in your family.
- **The numbers of various** types of pets in your neighborhood.
- **The temperature outside** during each day of the winter break.

Seeing a useful purpose for graphs at home can reinforce learning at school.

The ‘magic of seven’ can make learning lists more manageable



Your third grader is learning her spelling words. Your fifth grader has to know all the states and their capitals. Here’s a tip from brain researchers that will make the job a lot easier:

Divide the list into groups of no more than seven items. Why? Because brain research shows that around age nine, children can remember things in groups of seven. From the days of the week to the digits in a phone number, their brains can manage about seven items at a time.

So the key to helping children remember is to break any long list into chunks of seven. After your child masters one chunk, she can move on to another.

Remember that learning facts one time won’t make them stay in your child’s long-term memory. That takes three things: practice, practice and more practice. So give your child lots of chances to review the facts and soon they’ll be in her brain to stay.

Source: P. Wolfe, *Brain Matters: Translating Research into Classroom Practice*, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

“Where parents do too much for their children, the children will not do much for themselves.”

—Elbert Hubbard

Encourage your child to do more than the bare minimum



It was a windy evening when Juan took the recycling to the curb. Instead of leaving it to blow around the neighborhood, he did something extra. He placed a rock on the papers so they would not become litter.

Juan had learned to do more than the bare minimum. It’s a great lesson in responsibility—and it’s something you can teach in your home.

For instance, you could ask your child to think about the following “extras” in the kitchen:

- **If he made a snack** after school, did he leave the kitchen clean?
- **If he used the last** of the peanut butter, did he tell someone to add it to the grocery list?

• **If he poured the rest** of the water out of a pitcher, did he refill it? Helping your child do more than the bare minimum will also help him be successful in school:

- **Instead of leaving** his backpack where someone could trip over it, he will place it in his cubby.
- **Instead of turning in** a sloppy report, he will take the time to write it out neatly.
- **Instead of waiting until the last** minute to work on his project, he will start early and go beyond what is expected. He’ll include an illustration in his essay. He’ll add a great cover to his report.

Source: S. Turansky and J. Miller, *Say Goodbye to Whining, Complaining, and Bad Attitudes In You and Your Kids!* WaterBrook Press.

How well do you encourage your child’s creativity?



Creativity builds critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Parents can do a lot to help their child’s creativity. Are you doing all you can to boost your child’s creativity? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

- ___ **1. Do you encourage your child** to try to find new ways of solving problems?
- ___ **2. Do you give your child** old toys or broken tools to take apart and put back together?
- ___ **3. Do you challenge your child** to try to think of other ways to use an ordinary object?
- ___ **4. Do you look for ways to be** creative in the kitchen, such as by decorating cookies?
- ___ **5. Do you keep supplies** on hand for creative activities—construction paper, markers, crayons, fabric scraps, old magazines?

How well are you doing?

Mostly *yes* answers mean you are working hard to boost your child’s creativity. For *no* answers, try those ideas to nurture your child’s creative spirit.

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Five strategies can help your child discover the joy of reading



Some kids seem to have their noses constantly in a book. But other children haven't found the joy of reading yet.

Here are some fun things you can do with your child to encourage her to read more:

1. **Ask your librarian** to recommend high-interest books. There are books that appeal to almost every child. Kids who enjoy adventure may find that they love the Magic Tree House Series. Those who like to laugh may enjoy The Diary of a Wimpy Kid Series. These books are great for getting your child interested in reading.
2. **Go on a library scavenger hunt.** The next time you're in the library, make up a list of questions that require your child to use different reference books. Make these fun—the batting average of her favorite baseball player, the average temperature at Disney World. When she finds the answers, give her a small reward.
3. **Keep track** of how many books your child reads. Paste a sticker on a chart for each book she completes. Or, encourage her to make a paper chain—one link for each book. Can she make a chain long enough to stretch around her entire room? The whole house?
4. **Look for audio books.** There are wonderful recordings of favorite books—many may be available in your public library. Sometimes just hearing the words to a book can encourage a child to go back and read it later.
5. **Read aloud.** It's one of the most traditional ways to get children to read—but it really works. Choose a book you both enjoy, set aside 15 minutes for reading and invite your child to snuggle up with you.

Show your elementary schooler how to be a scientific thinker



You don't have to be a rocket scientist to teach your child about science. Just do simple things like these:

- **Encourage your child** to be a collector and to organize objects like seeds, rocks, shells and bottle caps.
 - **Encourage investigation.** Give your child a magnifying glass. Ask her, "What do you see?" "What's similar and what's different?"
 - **Talk about the science** that happens in your home. For instance, which cereals get soggy?
- Why do foods in the refrigerator get moldy? Why do some plants need more water than others?
- **Show an interest** in science yourself. Predict the weather. Observe the stars. Weigh snow. Mix paints.
 - **Nurture curiosity.** Ask your child questions like, "Why do you think ...?" "What might happen if ...?" and "How can we find out ...?"
 - **Go to the library.** Check out a few books and DVDs on different science topics.

Source: T. Bickart and others, *What Every Parent Needs To Know About 1st, 2nd and 3rd Grades*, Teaching Strategies, Inc.

Q: My first grader is very shy and has a difficult time making friends. What can I do to help him come out of his shell?

Questions & Answers

A: Some children have lots of self-confidence and others do not. While you can't change your child's personality, you can help him feel more confident to speak to and work with others.

To help your child make friends:

- **Role-play with him.** Shy children don't always know what to say to another child. Say, "Let's pretend you're on the playground. Isobel and Jack are playing a game that you'd like to join. What could you say?" At first, you might have your child pretend to be the other children. You can pretend to be him. But then change roles and give him a chance to play himself.
- **Read books about friends** together. Talk about what good friends do—and don't do. As your son thinks about what makes a good friend, he may start to look for people in his class who can be his friend.
- **Build on your child's strengths.** Use these as a way for him to meet other children who share his interests. Does he like music? Perhaps he could sing in a children's choir. Is he athletic? He might want to play on a soccer team.

As your child practices the skills that he enjoys, he will develop self-confidence. This may help him make friends with the other children who share those interests.

It Matters: Building Character

What should you do if your child is caught cheating?



Your child has just come home with a note from the teacher that says she was caught cheating. Your first

instinct may be to ground her for the rest of her life.

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

Did your child cheat because she:

- **Is afraid of what you will do** if she brings home a bad grade? Make sure your child knows that low grades would not be the end of your love for her. You would be more concerned than angry.
- **Has high expectations** for herself to get good grades? Tell her not to put too much emphasis on grades. Grades don't reflect a person's worth or intelligence.
- **Thinks cheating is no big deal?** Tell her it is wrong. Cheaters rob themselves of really learning the material and they are unfair to honest students.
- **Was asked to?** Tell your child that letting someone look at her test or copy her paper is wrong. A real friend would never ask her to do that.

Help her role-play turning down an invitation to cheat. "I'd like to help you, Maggie, but I don't like cheating. Besides, we could get into a lot of trouble."

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

Building your child's character is easy if you have a lesson plan

It's great to know that teachers are there to help your child learn the capital of Brazil or how to do long division. But when it comes to teaching values, parents are the best teachers.

Still, like any teacher, you need a "lesson plan." So here are some teaching tips on how you can help build your child's character at home:

- **Think about the values** that are important to you. Talk about them openly with your child. Say things like, "Throwing trash on the street is not responsible."
- **Teach by example.** A parent's example is the most powerful teacher of all. Ask yourself, "If my child could watch my behavior all day, what lessons would he learn?"
- **Set high standards.** Expect your child to act responsibly, to be



kind to others and to tell the truth. Some families make it a point of family pride. "In the Smith family, we tell the truth."

- **Teach the Golden Rule.** Teaching your child, "Treat others as you want to be treated," will help him make good decisions. He can ask himself, "Would I want someone to talk to me that way?"

The holidays are the perfect time to give to the community



Working with your child on a community service project can be a great gift. You'll get the joy of helping others. You'll

also find that you and your child receive much more than you give.

Here are some ideas:

- **Be a secret pal.** Some children receive nothing for the holidays. If you can, take part in a program that provides gifts to these kids.
- **Spend a few hours visiting** someone you know. Is there an

elderly neighbor who will be alone during the holidays? Is someone unable to get out to do errands during the cold weather?

- **Collect canned goods** for a nearby food pantry.
- **Volunteer to help prepare** and serve meals at a soup kitchen.
- **Gather warm coats** and take them to a homeless shelter.
- **Collect used children's books** that are in good condition. Donate them to a hospital or a homeless shelter.