

Elementary School Parents[®]

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Portsmouth Public Schools
Simonsdale Elementary

make the difference!



Teach your child how to achieve a goal in five steps

January is a time for taking stock and setting goals. Most people make some type of New Year's resolution. Then two weeks later, many realize that they haven't followed through.

Kids are no different. Why not make this the year that your child learns how to achieve the goals he sets for himself?

When your child sets a goal, help him choose one he can reach in a short time frame. Encourage him to be specific. For instance, "Be smart" is too broad. "Learn multiplication facts," however, can be observed and measured.

Then help your child follow these five steps for achieving the goal:

1. State the goal. "My goal is to learn my multiplication facts." He should write it down and post it where he will see it.

2. Plan how to meet the goal. "I will make flash cards and study them for 15 minutes every night. I will ask Mom to quiz me on Fridays."

3. Talk about the goal with others. This builds commitment to the goal. Your child should tell his teacher what he plans to do.

4. Do each step in the plan, one at a time. If problems come up, talk about possible solutions. Perhaps he is too tired after doing his homework each night to review his flash cards. Maybe he could study them in the mornings while he eats breakfast instead.

5. Motivate and celebrate. Praise your child for his effort each step of the way. "I am proud of you for studying your multiplication facts this morning." And when he achieves his goal, celebrate how his hard work paid off!

Start the new year with a family calendar



The start of the new calendar year is the perfect time to create a family calendar. To get the

most benefit from a paper or electronic calendar, use it to:

- **Schedule family time.** Let your child see that time together as a family is important enough to write on a calendar.
- **Keep track of everyone's schedule.** Use a different color for each member of your family. That way, you can tell at a glance who's where.
- **Plan homework time.** At the beginning of the week, sit down with your child and look at the calendar. Talk about her schedule and how she plans to use her time. This planning helps your child understand how to make the best use of time.
- **Record accomplishments.** Is your child trying to read a certain number of books? Use the calendar to keep a running record. Or, when a special event occurs, write it down on the calendar.

Six ways to improve your child's behavior at home and at school



Everyone wants children to be well-behaved in school. But today, parents and teachers are often concerned about a lack of self-discipline in students.

When classroom instruction is continually interrupted by students who misbehave, no learning can take place. Students need a quiet, orderly environment in which to grow and learn.

Good discipline begins at home. Here are some ways you can help your child develop self-control:

1. **Know the school rules and regulations.** Talk to your child about them and be sure to support them.
2. **Take an active interest** in your child's activities, both in and out of school.

3. **Talk to your child's teachers** about how she behaves in school.
4. **Talk to your child** about the importance of self-discipline at home and at school.
5. **Show respect** for your child and she will be more likely to respect herself and others.
6. **Encourage independence.** Give your child a chance to take part in making the decisions that affect her life.

“As much as we watch to see what our children do with their lives, they are watching to see what we do with ours.”

—Joyce Maynard

Research confirms importance of regular school attendance



Parents often wonder, “Is it okay to take my child out of school for an appointment or a vacation? Could this really affect his success?”

Research on students in kindergarten through third grade suggests “chronic absence” (missing 10% or more days in a school year) is linked to:

- **Low performance in school.** It's also connected to dropping out, substance abuse and more.
- **Lost learning time for kids who are at school.** When absent kids come back, teachers must help them catch up. Show your child that your family cares about learning by making sure he is

at school on time every day. Of course, if your child is sick, he should stay home.

To give your child's attendance a boost:

- **Enforce a regular bedtime** for your child.
- **Make sure your child is organized** so he can get out the door on time with what he needs.
- **Review your child's schedule.** If your child has lots of after-school activities, he has less time for reading, playing and studying. If activities leave your child too tired to do homework or to get up in the morning, it's time to cut back.

Source: H. Chang, “Early Intervention Matters: How Addressing Chronic Absence Can Reduce Dropout Rates,” *Attendance Works*, <http://tinyurl.com/q9w4bu8>.

Are you making homework time a good experience?



There aren't many children who *love* doing homework. But when parents find ways to make homework a positive experience, children will usually do it without a battle. How are you doing? Answer *yes* or *no* to each question below to find out:

- ___ 1. **Do you give your child choices**—such as which subject to study first? Whether to study right after school or before dinner?
- ___ 2. **Are you available** and nearby to offer support when your child studies?
- ___ 3. **Is homework time** a quiet time for your whole family? Do you turn off the TV and ask everyone to read, work or study?
- ___ 4. **Do you help your child** study by calling out spelling words or holding up flash cards?
- ___ 5. **Do you praise your child** for working hard? This gives her a sense of pride in her accomplishments.

How well are you doing?

Mostly *yes* answers indicate you are making homework a positive learning experience for your child. For *no* answers, try those ideas in the quiz.

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All children have the potential to develop leadership skills!



Some children seem to be born leaders. They have the self-confidence, helpfulness and friendliness 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 what makes people good leaders.
- **Be a leader yourself.** Elementary school children want to be like their parents. When you take a leadership role—whether it's in your school, your business or your community—tell your child about what you're doing and why.

"I volunteered to raise money for your school because I want your class to have more computers."

- **Teach your child** to see things from other people's point of view. Good leaders aren't bossy. They make people *want* to work together. Help your child put himself in other's shoes.
- **Find leadership opportunities.** Children can learn leadership skills in church, 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 carrying out family projects.
- **Don't push.** Pressuring a child beyond his abilities will destroy self-esteem, not build it. If your child seems stressed or unhappy, it's time to lighten up.

Source: L. Balter, *Child Psychology: A Handbook of Contemporary Issues*, Psychology Press.

Use the five-finger strategy to get your child talking to you



Are you tired of asking your child questions about school and getting little response? Then try the five-finger strategy with your child.

Instead of asking your child lots of questions when he gets home from school, tell him five things about your day first. For example:

1. *I've had such a busy day.*
2. *I went to the library this morning to get some books.*
3. *Then I met Grandma for lunch.*
4. *We went to buy Rachel a present.*
5. *It was good to get home.*

After you've finished, say "Tell me a little bit about your day." And don't ask questions that can be answered with a simple *yes* or *no*. Instead, say things like, "What was the best part of your day?" or "Tell me three things you learned today."

You can also use this five-finger strategy to discuss schoolwork. If your child brings home a picture from school, look at it and make five observations about what you see. Comment on the colors. Say what you like about it. Tell what it reminds you of, etc. Then ask your child, "What does it mean to you?"

Q: My daughter gets average grades, but I know she could do better. Some parents pay their children for good grades. Is this a good idea?

Questions & Answers

A: We all want our children to do their best in school, and parents are constantly looking for ways to motivate children to achieve. But most experts agree that paying kids for getting good grades is a bad idea. Here are three reasons why. Paying for grades:

1. **Doesn't allow your child** to gain enjoyment from the satisfaction of learning. Kids don't need bribes to *want* to learn. Children naturally love to learn. As they master new skills or memorize new facts, they gain self-esteem and self-confidence. When you pay your child for grades, you actually run the risk of *decreasing* your child's self-confidence.
2. **Doesn't recognize effort.** Your child should focus on doing her best. If she's tried her very hardest, neither she nor you should worry too much whether she earns an A or a B. What matters is the effort she's put in.
3. **Decreases motivation.** Kids who get paid for doing some things expect to get paid for doing everything. Pretty soon, your child will have her hand out every time you want her to do something around the house, from mowing the grass to taking out the trash to feeding the dog. So what can you do to get your child's grades up? Help her focus on what she is learning. Help her keep track of the new skills. And praise her for working hard and doing her best!

It Matters: Reading

Build interest in reading by being a role model



Children who see their parents reading usually grow up to be readers themselves. To show your child that reading

is important to you:

- **Let him see you** reading every day. Pick up a newspaper, book or magazine. Your child will see that reading is important to you, and will want to read, too.
- **Tell him why** you are reading—for information, to double-check something you think you know. Or you may be reading just for pure enjoyment.
- **Look up a word** in the dictionary if you come across one you are unsure of. Ask your child if he knows the meaning of the word.
- **Read aloud** to him. When you come across something you think your child might find interesting, read a small part of it to him. He may be motivated to finish reading the article himself.
- **Have your own library card** and use it. When you take your child to the library, find something to check out for yourself.
- **Join him.** When you see your child reading, pick up something to read yourself and make a snack to share.
- **Give books as gifts.** Show him that books are important to you by giving them as gifts. Encourage your child to give his friends books as gifts.
- **Encourage relatives** to be role models for his reading habits, too. Ask them to record themselves reading a book.

Did you know that talking can boost your child's reading skills?

The key to building reading skills is something you already do every day—talk with your child. Talking builds her vocabulary, language abilities and interest in reading.

Here are some things to discuss:

- **Everyday events.** Visit new places and use new words. You might say, “Look at all that *scaffolding!* I wonder what they are building.”
- **Books.** Ask your child about what she is reading. Tell her about books you love. When her friends stop by, start conversations about books.
- **Characters.** Do any of them remind your child of herself? What would she do in their shoes?
- **Questions.** Wonder aloud about things such as, “Why don't clouds fall out of the sky?”



Brainstorm, and then read to find the answer.

- **Stories.** Tell make-believe and true stories that interest your child. Relive memorable family events.
- **Life.** Look for opportunities to talk, such as in the car, on the bus and while waiting in line. Spend mealtimes discussing hopes, experiences and concerns—and books!

Show your child how reading is connected to everyday life



Help your child understand the value of reading and how it is connected to so many essential things, such as:

- **Communication.** Life without mail, email and notes would be difficult—and not as interesting. Encourage your child to exchange emails or letters with a long-distance friend or relative.
- **Business.** Let your child see contracts, memos and other important documents. Point

out that reading skills help with understanding the “fine print.”

- **Instructions.** Have your child read recipes as you cook. Read a manual with your child that explains how to use a gadget. Ask your child if he thinks he could have figured it out without reading the instructions.
- **Fun.** Your child can choose almost anything to learn about—and do it by reading! Help him find books that answer his questions.