

# Helping Children Learn<sup>®</sup>

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

Catholic School Office  
Archdiocese of Cincinnati

April 2009

## MOTIVATING YOUR CHILD

### Be specific when praising your child's good behavior

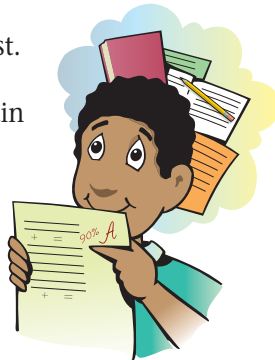
Your child studied hard and got a 90 on his math test. You're delighted and you want to praise his good behavior. But think carefully before you speak. Certain kinds of praise can actually make kids worry.

That's because sometimes parents overdo it. They say, "You're a genius!" or "You're the best at math!" to a child who earned one good grade. That's bound to make him anxious. "I'm no genius," he may think. "Olivia's the genius. She got a better grade without even studying."

Instead, try to describe your child's positive behavior. Say, "You studied hard for that test—and it really worked!" When your child hears his accomplishments praised accurately, he may compliment himself. "Gee. I *can* do well in math if I work at it."

It's much easier to toss out a quick comment like, "You're great." It's more difficult to look carefully at what your child does and then put it into words. But it's worthwhile. If your child begins thinking of himself in positive terms, he's more likely to work hard in the future. And that's a success in itself.

Source: Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish, *How to Talk So Kids Can Learn*, ISBN: 0-684-82472-8 (Scribner Paperbacks, published by Simon & Schuster, 1-800-223-2336, [www.simonsays.com](http://www.simonsays.com)).



## DISCIPLINE

### Consistency strengthens discipline

One evening a girl came to dinner with dirty hands. Her mother told her to wash her hands. She also said that if the girl came to dinner again without washing her hands she would get no dinner.

The next night the girl came to dinner with dirty hands. When the mother said the girl could have no dinner, the girl cried. The mother gave in and let the girl have her

dinner. The next night the girl came to dinner with dirty hands ...

This story teaches a lesson. If you don't enforce a rule, your child will remember. If you tell your child you will impose a consequence, you must impose it—*every* time. Teachers know the secret: Be consistent. Don't fall into the trap of negotiating with your child every day.

Source: Sal Severe, *How to Behave So Your Children Will, Too!* ISBN: 0-670-89153-3 (Viking, a division of the Penguin Putnam Group, 1-800-526-0275, [www.penguinputnam.com](http://www.penguinputnam.com)).

## REINFORCING LEARNING

### Find help around the corner

Are you looking for a great way to help your child succeed in school? You don't need to look far. Schedule time this week to take your child to your local library. Check out all the services available for you and your child. And if your child doesn't have one, help her get her very own library card.

## SCREEN TIME

### Celebrate TV Turnoff Week

April 20 – 26 is TV Turnoff Week. Challenge your family to participate. Together, come up with a list of fun things you can do with your child. Dig out that puzzle you've wanted to put together. Gather the ingredients to make a batch of cookies. Visit the library and stock up on great books to read. Or lace up your sneakers and take a walk through your neighborhood together.

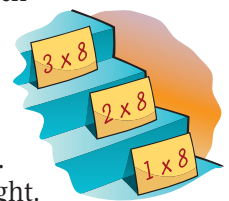


## BUILDING MATH SKILLS

### Multiply 'step by step'

If your child is having difficulty learning multiplication tables, try this idea:

- **Make index cards** of the tables that give him trouble, such as the 8's. Write the problem on one side (such as  $2 \times 8$ ). Put the answer on the other (16).
- **Place one card** on each step of a staircase—problem-side up. Then have your child walk up and down, reciting the equations. "One times eight is eight. Two times eight is 16," and so on. (Make sure he doesn't slip!)



- **Let him check** his answers as needed. The combination of movement and saying each item aloud can help the facts sink in.

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## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

### How can parents motivate kids?

**Q: My child just brought home a dreadful report card. Her teacher says she's very bright, but she just won't do her homework. I've tried everything, from bribes to battles. Nothing is working.**

**What can I do?**

**A:** Talk with your daughter. Tell her that:

- **Practice is important.** Even Tiger Woods spends time each day practicing his golf swing—and he's the best ever. Doing homework gives your child an opportunity to practice the skills she has learned in class.
- **You expect her to cooperate** with her teacher. If the teacher gives an assignment, then you expect her to complete it.
- **She should do the most difficult assignments first.** Making a list of her assignments and deciding which to do first will help your child take charge of her homework time.
- **Make an appointment** with your daughter's teacher. Bring some of your daughter's homework assignments. Ask the teacher if your child could handle more challenging work. Ask how you can work together to motivate your daughter.

Remember, if you have set consequences for your daughter if she doesn't do her homework, then you must enforce them *every* time. If you said, "No TV until homework is finished," then turn off the TV—and keep it off until the homework is completed.



## PARENT QUIZ

### Is homework your child's priority?

With all the focus on kids' activities these days, it can be hard to make sure homework gets the attention it deserves. Answer the following questions *yes* or *no* to see if your child is keeping homework the main thing:

1. **Is your child** sticking to his study schedule?
2. **Does your child** still study in a quiet, well-lit place? Spring can bring many distractions.
3. **Do you help** your child stay organized?
4. **Do you stay** in touch with your child's teacher so you know what is expected?
5. **Have you reviewed** your child's schedule? It's important to make sure he's not too busy for homework.

**How did you do?** Each *yes* answer means you're making sure homework is your child's priority. For each *no* answer, consider trying that idea from the quiz.

"The greatest remedy for anger is delay."  
—Marcus Annaeus Seneca

## MAKING TIME COUNT

### Practice spelling skills

Most families with kids spend lots of time in the car. Play some fun spelling games while driving around town, like:

1. **Plurals race.** Challenge your child to a contest. You'll look for words that form their plurals by adding an *s*. He'll look for words that form their plurals by adding *es*. Who can find the most words in a given period of time? (Switch often—it's more fun if you both win.)
2. **I spy.** Take turns looking for things you can see. Have your child say the word and the plural of that word. ("I spy a *seatbelt*. The plural is *seatbelts*.") Then he can spell the word. As time goes on, you'll find the challenge increases.

## BUILDING SOCIAL SKILLS

### Separate social time from listening time in school

Sometimes kids get in trouble for chatting in class. Remind your child that socializing isn't wrong. She just has to pick the right times to do it (such as at recess, during lunch or on the bus). She can listen in class, knowing that she'll have time to talk later.

## BUILDING SELF-ESTEEM

### Set up a brag board

Do you have an old bulletin board? Hang it up so family members can share successes. At any time, kids and parents can post things they're proud of, such as drawings and grades.



Start with some inspiring quotes and photos of your child succeeding.

Source: Michele Borba, Ed. D., *Parents Do Make a Difference*, ISBN: 0-7879-4605-2 (Jossey-Bass, a division of John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1-877-762-2974, [www.JosseyBass.com/WileyCDA](http://www.JosseyBass.com/WileyCDA)).

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