

Elementary School Parents[®] *make the difference!*

Newton County Schools



Keep learning alive for your child over the winter break

Your child looks at the calendar and imagines the joy of having free time for the whole winter school break. You look at the same blank squares on the calendar and have a mild moment of panic.

To keep from hearing “I’m bored” during your child’s time off from school, here are some activities that will keep her learning:

- **Make a list** of things your family can do together. With your child, look in the local paper or go online to find free events to attend and places to go. Are there museums in your area? Are there free concerts scheduled for this month? Does the public library have special story hours or performances?
- **Select a movie** that is based on a book. After you and your child finish

reading the book, watch the movie together. Discuss how the two are alike and how they are 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 cook a dish you’ve never tried.
- **Encourage your child** to learn more about the past and your family history by talking with grandparents, aunts, uncles—even you. Help her come up with a list of questions to ask, such as, “What was school like for you when you were my age?” and “What trends were popular?” She can record the conversations, write them down, or just listen.

Does your child have the right tools for school?



A carpenter 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 his best in school. He needs to show up with the right tools to do the job.

Here are a few essential ones:

- **Enough sleep.** A good night’s sleep is essential to your child’s health—and his success in school. Children between the ages of seven and 12 need 10 to 11 hours of sleep per day.
- **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.
- **High expectations.** When you believe your child can do his best, he’ll believe it, too. So send him off with an “I know you can do it!” and he’ll have the confidence he needs to tackle another day.

Try word games to strengthen your child's 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 activities 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 challenging! This illustrates how important punctuation is for a sentence's clarity. 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.

"The most difficult and complicated part of the writing process is the beginning."

—A.B. Yehoshua

To motivate your child, make sure expectations are realistic



Expectations can be tricky. Research shows that students generally live up to parent and teacher expectations,

whether the expectations are high or low. So, you want to set the bar high for your child.

But it's important to be realistic, too. Most students are not going to excel at everything. If you are only satisfied with near-perfection, your child may say to herself, "What's the point?" and stop trying altogether.

To make sure your expectations are realistic and effective:

- **Encourage your child** to do her best in all her pursuits.
- **Have unique expectations** for each of your children. Do not compare your child with her siblings, friends or classmates.

- **Let your child know** you are proud of her effort and hard work. Remind her that she should be proud of herself.
- **Remember that** your expectations are for your child, not for you. She is entitled to her own dreams. It is not fair to her if you simply want her to do what you wish you had done.
- **Learn about your child's interests.** When your child feels you value these, it can spur her to try to do better in all her pursuits.
- **Be a good role model.** Let your child see you give your best effort. Set expectations for yourself and talk to your child about how you plan to meet them.

Source: "Child Trends Databank: Parental Expectations for Their Children's Academic Attainment," Child Trends, nswc.com/elem_expectations.

Are you helping your child tackle that big project?



It's a fact of school life: The older the child, the bigger the project. Do you know how to support your child as he tackles a big

school project? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

- 1. Do you guide** your child if he needs to select a topic? Some students need help picking a topic they will understand.
- 2. Do you help** your child break down the project into lots of small steps? He can write each step on his homework calendar. As he finishes each step, he can cross it off.
- 3. Do you help** your child make a list of all the supplies he will need to avoid last-minute dashes to the store?
- 4. Do you take** your child to the library and encourage him to ask the librarian for resources that can help?
- 5. Do you review** your child's work, but avoid doing it for him?

How well are you doing?

Each *yes* means you are taking positive steps to help your child succeed on the big school project. For *no* answers, try those ideas from the quiz.

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

For subscription information call or write:
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P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474.
Fax: 1-800-216-3667.

Or visit: www.parent-institute.com.

Published monthly September through May.
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a division of PaperClip Media, Inc., an
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Publisher: L. Andrew McLaughlin.
Publisher Emeritus: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.
Editor: Rebecca Hasty Miyares.

Improve your child's recall by making facts meaningful



Drilling your child over and over isn't the most effective way to help him remember new facts.

Instead, try connecting what he's studying to something meaningful.

Studies show that when new information is linked to something memorable, it's easier to retain. For instance, when your child is learning new words, his brain can digest the information in two ways: by repeating the sound of the word, or by focusing on its meaning. Although both approaches may work, emphasizing meaning leads to better overall recall.

To help your child absorb new facts:

- **Create a story.** He might struggle to remember the first three U.S. presidents, but what if you turned the information into a wild tale?

"One day, George Washington went to the park. He met John Adams by the swings. And later, the two bumped into Thomas Jefferson going down the slide." Suddenly, the presidents are put in a context he'll understand—and their order is laid out for him.

- **Focus on the bigger picture.** Rather than having him simply repeat the fact that "Jupiter is the largest planet," help your child tie it to something broader. "Everything about our solar system's biggest planet is big. Jupiter's 'big red spot' is even bigger than Earth." Small facts stick better when they are illustrated in a wider way.

Source: J.A. Meltzer and others, "Electrophysiological signatures of phonological and semantic maintenance in sentence repetition," *NeuroImage*, Elsevier, nswc.com/elem_meaningful.

Expose your elementary schooler to other countries and cultures



Children don't always know much 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 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 on mail from other countries at your workplace. You can also look online.
- **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 the location of places mentioned.
- **Find a pen pal.** The best way for children to learn about other countries is for them to connect with kids from those places. Search online for free pen pal sites, such as www.studentsoftheworld.info.
- **Cook authentic recipes.** Pick a country and search online for a recipe to try. Prepare the dish with your child and enjoy it together!

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 daughter's grades are starting to suffer. What advice do you have to help me get through a difficult holiday season and also get my child 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 child know** that it is OK to miss her 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 her teacher.** Be sure her teacher understands what she's going through and how she's feeling. Sometimes, a child feels she has to be brave at home but will confide in a teacher. Ask the teacher how you can help support your child so she gets her 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 daughter.
- **Help your child stay in touch** with your husband as much as possible. Encourage him to call, send videos and email.
- **Look for ways** you and your daughter can help others. She may start to put her own problems in perspective when she sees that there are others who need help.

It Matters: Building Character

Empathize with your child—up to a certain point



Is there such a thing as being too supportive when it comes to your child's negative emotions? Experts say yes.

According to research, parents who are overly sympathetic about their children's troubled feelings think their kids are more socially well-adjusted than others. Those same kids' teachers, however, rate them as being less well-adjusted than their peers.

Why the disconnect? It could be that when parents indulge every bad mood their child has, the child never stops to consider that there may be little justification for that mood.

This doesn't mean you should ignore your child's feelings. But rather than rush to agree every time she feels she's been wronged:

- **Ask for details.** If your child says a classmate was mean to her, find out more before jumping to her defense. Say, "Tell me what happened." This way, you're encouraging her to open up but not automatically agreeing that she's a victim.
- **Challenge her.** Your child may be upset that she performed poorly on a math quiz, but was that quiz really "unfair," as she claims? Press her a bit. "Why wasn't it fair?" If the real story is that she didn't study for it, then point that out. She wasn't mistreated; she was irresponsible. It's a hard—but vital—lesson to learn.

Source: V.L. Castro and others, "Changing tides: Mothers' supportive emotion socialization relates negatively to third-grade children's social adjustment in school," *Social Development*, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., niswc.com/elem_negative.

Helping others promotes confidence and self-esteem

Children want to feel like they play an important role in their community. Volunteering can help your child build important social skills and develop self-confidence—which will also benefit him in school.

Find a volunteer or community service activity you and your child can do together. Here are some ideas:

- **Bake something** 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.
- **Take part in a clothing drive.** Collect coats, gloves and hats and donate them to local shelters.



- **Donate money he has earned.** It's nice when your child sees you give money to a charity. But he'll remember it longer if he gives away even a small sum of his own money to help others.

Talk to your child about the importance of honesty



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:

- **Talk about it.** Ask your child if she believes that honesty is the best policy. Does she want others to tell her the truth? When does she think it's OK to lie?
- **Discuss the consequences** of lying. Lying destroys trust. If your child makes a habit of lying to people, they won't believe what she says—even when she 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?"
- **React calmly.** When your child lies, don't label her a "liar." Express confidence that she will make better choices in the future.
- **Reward trustworthiness.** If your child is truthful in a difficult situation, compliment her!

Source: McGill University, "The truth about lying? Children's perceptions get more nuanced with age," *ScienceDaily*, niswc.com/elem_honesty.