

Helping Children Learn[®]

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School
Prince William County Schools



November 2025

Find out how your child is doing at a parent-teacher conference

A parent-teacher conference offers you something different from many other school activities for families: one-on-one time with the teacher. It is dedicated time to focus on your individual child's strengths and needs, and to discuss plans and expectations for the year ahead.



For the best results from your conference:

- **Chat with your child in advance.** Ask how school is going. Is there anything your child would like you to ask or tell the teacher?
- **Write down a list of things to tell the teacher.** You are the expert on your child and your family. Sharing information will make it easier for the teacher to meet your child's needs.
- **Make a note of questions to ask,** such as: *Is my child meeting expectations for reading and math skills? Does my child participate in class? Does my child interact with others appropriately and have friends?*
- **Arrive on time.** Teachers usually schedule conferences back to back.
- **Discuss next steps.** Ask the teacher how you can reinforce what your child is learning. Agree on a plan to address any issues.
- **Tell your child** about your meeting. Share praise, and explain plans you and the teacher agreed on.



Independent play is worth the time

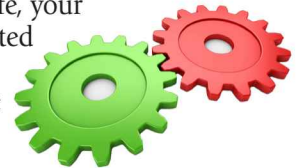
Research shows that playing independently can help children learn to solve problems and overcome fears—and ease stress at the same time. To help your child benefit from independent play:

- **Make time for it.** Balance structured activities in your child's day with unstructured play time.
- **Give your child** a variety of things to play with, such as cardboard boxes, blocks, art supplies and props for pretend play. Choose toys your child can use creatively, in many different ways. Items from nature like acorns and shells are also inspiring choices.
- **Support your child** in taking positive "risks," such as climbing a low playground rock wall, or balancing while walking on a fallen log. These experiences can boost confidence and willingness to try.
- **Let your child** decide what to play with and how.

Source: "All work, no independent play' cause of children's declining mental health," Florida Atlantic University.

Offer cooperation practice

In school and in life, your child will be expected to cooperate with others. To reinforce this skill at home, establish rules for sharing and taking turns fairly, such as "If one child chooses the game, the other gets the first turn." Have family members take turns making decisions for the whole family sometimes, such as what movie to watch or what vegetable to eat for dinner.



Support reading progress

Students read to learn. To be successful, they must continually develop and maintain their reading skills as they go through school. To encourage reading skill-building:

- **Make real-life connections.** Have your child read about historical events that happened near your home.
- **Help your child start a book club** with friends. They can meet up for book-related discussions and activities.
- **Read more advanced books aloud.** Listening lets your child enjoy more challenging stories and words.

Foster grateful feelings

Research links gratitude with increased motivation, engagement and achievement in school. To foster this feeling, take time often as a family to make and share lists of what you're thankful for. Be sure to mention school and any progress your child is making. Then, encourage your child to say "Thanks" to the people who are making school a positive experience.



Source: R.B. King and J.A.B. Datu, "Grateful students are motivated, engaged, and successful in school: Cross-sectional, longitudinal, and experimental evidence," *Journal of School Psychology*; Elsevier.



What can I do to boost my child's memory power?

Q: My child studies before tests, but often forgets the material by test time. How can I help my child remember things better?

A: Being able to recall and use information is an important part of learning. Here are a few strategies that can make it easier. Help your child practice using:

- **Personal connections.** Brainstorm together about ways to relate the material to your child's life. An important date in history might also be a relative's birthday, for example.
- **Grouping.** Divide long lists of facts into smaller groups that share a common characteristic. Instead of trying to remember all 50 states, your child can group them by region and focus on one region at a time.
- **Mnemonic devices,** such as *acronyms* or silly sentences. Your child can make a name, word or sentence out of the first letter of each word in a list of terms. The acronym ROY G. BIV is a classic way to recall the colors of the rainbow (Red, Orange, Yellow, Green, Blue, Indigo, Violet). "My Very Elegant Mother Just Served Us Noodles" is often used for the planets in order of their distance from the sun (Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune).
- **Mental images.** Your child can draw or imagine a picture of the material, then visualize the picture during the test to remember the information.



Are you showing how to tackle projects?

Long-term assignments let students explore topics in greater depth. They also usually involve multiple parts. Are you helping your child learn to manage these big projects? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

- ___ **1. Do you encourage** your child to get started as soon as the assignment is received?
- ___ **2. Do you ask** questions to help your child narrow down a broad topic to something specific and manageable?
- ___ **3. Do you help** your child break the project down into small steps and schedule time to do each on a calendar?
- ___ **4. Do you have** your child list all the supplies that will be needed, so you can avoid last-minute shopping trips?

- ___ **5. Do you help** your child locate credible books and online sources?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are showing your child how to plan and complete big projects. For each no, try that idea.

"One may walk over the highest mountain one step at a time."
—John Wanamaker

Share tools for learning

Math and science tools aren't always expensive and complicated. You probably have several at home (or on your phone). Using them with your child provides familiarity which pays off in school. Help your elementary schooler use a:

- **Magnifying glass** to observe items in nature like pine cones and anthills.
- **Tape measure** to find the *circumference* (distance around) of tree trunks.
- **Calculator** to play store or restaurant.
- **Compass** to find out what direction you are walking in.

Source: M.E. Ennes and others, "Children and Parents' Perception of Access to Science Tools at Home and Their Role in Science Self-efficacy," *Research in Science Education*, Springer.

Keep a family journal

Writing regularly helps your child strengthen literacy skills. To instill a writing habit, start a family journal. Each weekend, have your child jot down something special about the week. It doesn't need to be long; a couple of sentences will do. After your child's entry, add one yourself. Soon, you'll have a record of the year's highlights to enjoy reading and remembering together.



Does your child see clearly?

Poor vision can negatively affect your child's school performance. Having your student's eyesight tested yearly is an important way to prevent problems. To protect vision:

- **Limit screen use.** High levels have been linked to nearsightedness in kids.
- **Promote outdoor play.** An extra hour or two a day outside can help some children avoid nearsightedness.

Source: Anglia Ruskin University, "Screen time linked to risk of myopia in young people," *ScienceDaily*; "Outdoor activity and Myopia Progression in Children," *Ophthalmology*.

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