

Helping Children Learn[®]

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



March 2026

Make a difference to your child by getting involved with school

Students are the winners when families and schools work together. Family engagement in education leads to increased academic achievement, improved attendance and better student attitudes and behavior.

If you haven't been involved much this year, it's not too late to become an active partner in your child's education. Engaging doesn't have to be complicated or time consuming.



There is plenty of time left in the year to:

- **Stay informed of issues, events and important dates** by regularly checking school communications sent home and posted online.
- **Take part in school events for families**, particularly those that involve your child. Make an effort to connect with staff and other families.
- **Reach out to your child's teachers.** Ask questions, such as "What school skills should I work with my child on before the end of the year? What strategies can we try?" Ask about opportunities to help the class.
- **Talk with your child every day** about school. Ask about classes and what your student is learning. Make it clear that education matters to you.
- **Join the parent-teacher group.** Learn about ways families are making a positive impact at school, and how you can help.



Add to your child's math vocabulary

Did you know that learning vocabulary is a key math skill? If students have to stop to think about the meaning of words like *product* or *quotient*, they can lose their focus on what they are doing and get confused.

To help with math vocabulary-building, encourage your child to:

- **Connect words and symbols.** Have your child make flash cards with a symbol on one side and the word it represents on the other.
- **Make a drawing** that shows the term doing the thing it represents. A *circumference*, for example, is the distance around the edge of a circle. Your child could draw a circle with the word *circumference* written around the rim.
- **Think about word parts.** Many math words share a common root. Noticing this can help your child connect new terms to familiar ones. If the new word is *centimeter*, for example, talk about how there are 100 *cents* in a dollar, 100 years in a *century*, and 100 *centimeters* in a meter.

Set expectations that fit

Keep two things in mind when setting expectations for your elementary schooler:

1. **Children generally live up** to family expectations for them, high or low. So set the bar high for your child.
2. **Effective expectations** are realistic and achievable—and geared to *your* child.

Praise your child's effort and progress, and encourage your child to take pride in both.

This writing is fast and fun

Quick Writes are an enjoyable way to help your child practice getting ideas down on paper. Set a timer for three minutes and present a writing prompt, such as:

- **When I woke up** I was a different person. I was
- **Something that's** important to know about me is
- **Something difficult** I have done and how I did it.
- **Something I'd like** to learn and why.

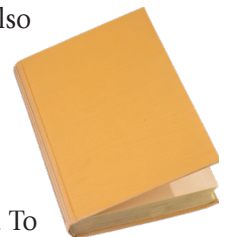


Then, each of you write everything you can about the prompt until the timer rings. Afterward, share and discuss what you wrote.

Siblings open reading doors

When kids see an older sibling reading for fun, they are more likely to want to read themselves. Siblings are also handy resources for suggesting, sharing and discussing books.

Get the ball rolling by planning a weekly family time for pleasure reading. To prepare, take your children to the library together. Let your younger child watch the big kids browsing and reading.



Source: M. Knoester and M. Plikuhn, "Influence of siblings on out-of-school reading practices," *Journal of Research in Reading*, John Wiley & Sons.



My child is feeling excluded. What should I do?

Q: My nine-year-old doesn't have many friends. One child who used to spend time with mine has moved on to another friend group. That group is teasing my child—who now doesn't want to go to school. Should I talk to the ex-friend's family? How else can I help?



A: Fourth grade social drama can have a big effect on a child's outlook on school. Since the teasing is affecting your child's willingness to go to school, you are right to get involved. But calling the other family is unlikely to help—and it could result in more heartache for your child. Instead:

- **Contact the teacher.** Explain the problem and ask for help making your child feel welcome and a part of classroom activities. Teasing and exclusion are forms of bullying, and the teacher will want to prevent it.
- **Find out about school-based activities** and organizations that might interest your child. Spending time with other students who also enjoy singing or chess can help your child find a friend group at school.
- **Look for organized after-school programs.** Sometimes, a structured setting makes it easier for kids to get along.

If the teasing or reluctance to go to school continue, make an appointment with the school counselor to learn more ways to support your child.



Are you setting a behavior example?

When it comes to learning behavior, children pay more attention to what adults do than what they say. Are you modeling the behavior you want your child to show at home and at school? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

- ___ **1. Do you show** respect for your child and others by treating them kindly and honestly?
- ___ **2. Do you admit** mistakes, apologize and try to make amends—and expect your child to do the same?
- ___ **3. Do you make** eye contact and listen attentively when your child speaks to you?
- ___ **4. Do you vent** strong feelings in healthy ways?
- ___ **5. Do you enforce** household rules and consequences fairly and consistently?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are demonstrating how to behave civilly toward others. For each no, try that idea.



Build test-taking confidence

When students doubt their ability to do well on tests, anxiety can affect their performance. To erase your child's self-doubt:

- **Encourage effective preparation.** Your child should begin studying several days in advance and focus on material not yet mastered.
- **Ease the pressure.** Tell your child tests just show what students have learned and what they may need help with.
- **Suggest self-talk** to address nervousness. Your child can repeat, "I know this material and I am prepared to do well."

Give science a fun spin

Here's an egg-cellent experiment you can do with your child right in your own kitchen:

- 1. Get two eggs** in their shells—one raw and one hard-boiled.
- 2. Place the eggs** on the table. Can your child identify which one is which without cracking them?



- 3. Have your child** place each egg on its side and spin it. The raw egg will wobble, while the hard-boiled egg will spin smoothly. Why? The yolk and white of the raw egg are liquid, so they shift when spun. This affects the egg's center of gravity and makes it wobbly.

Playtime has a purpose

Playing and having fun can reduce children's stress and boost their mental and physical well-being. For the most benefit:

- **Encourage active play** that gets your child's heart pumping.
- **Make playtime screen-free.**
- **Play with your child.** Family play is great for strengthening supportive bonds.

Helping Children Learn®

Published in English and Spanish, September through May.

Publisher: Doris McLaughlin.

Publisher Emeritus: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.

Editor: Alison McLean.

Translations Editor: Victoria Gaviola.

Copyright © 2026, The Parent Institute®, a division of PaperClip Media, Inc.

P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474

1-800-756-5525 • www.parent-institute.com