

# Elementary School Parents<sup>®</sup>

Midview Local Schools  
Robert Maxwell

*make the difference!*



## Prepare to make the most of parent-teacher conferences

**T**eachers often schedule parent conferences in the fall, and if yours is coming up, you may be a little apprehensive. To make the most of this important one-on-one time with the teacher, you need to prepare. Plan to:

- **Touch base with your child.** What does she like about school? Is she struggling in any areas? Ask her if there is anything she'd like you to talk about with her teacher.
- **Take notes.** Write down the most important things you would like to discuss with the teacher. Plan to mention them first, since conferences are usually brief. Be sure to include any big changes in your child's life.
- **Be positive.** Start the meeting with a compliment, such as, "Jamie loves the word games you play

in class!" Then focus on sharing information, working as a team and finding solutions.

- **Wrap things up.** Make a plan and decide how to keep in touch. "So you'll explain division to Jamie one-on-one and send home detailed instructions. Then I'll supervise during homework time. We'll email in two weeks and see how things are going."
- **Talk with your child again.** Let her know, in upbeat terms, how the meeting went. "Your reading scores are excellent. And you've learned all your multiplication facts! To help with division, Mrs. Turner and I are going to review with you. That will make it much easier."

**Source:** "Making Parent-Teacher Conferences Work for Your Child," PTA, [www.pta.org/2532.htm](http://www.pta.org/2532.htm).

## Perseverance will help your child succeed



"These math problems are too hard," he says as he is doing his homework. Your

response should always be the same: "Everything is hard until it gets easy." Ask your child to think about when he learned to ride a bike (if he has). That was hard. But then he figured it out and now it's easy.

School is filled with lots of hard things, from reading challenging books to learning how to do complicated math problems. Here are things to say and do when your child says something is too hard:

- **Let your child know** that you believe he can do it.
- **Remind him** of other "hard" things that are now easy for him to do.
- **Break difficult tasks** into smaller pieces. If reading the whole book seems too hard, try starting with just one or two chapters.
- **Help your child see** the link between effort and success.

**Source:** Chip Heath and Dan Heath, *Switch: How to Change Things When Change is Hard*, ISBN: 9780-3855-2875-7, Broadway Business.

## Four things to do when your child is stuck on a writing assignment



The book report is due tomorrow. So far, she's written the title of the book—and nothing else.

All writers sometimes have trouble thinking about what to write. Here are some ways that you as a parent can help your struggling writer get “unstuck”:

- 1. Set a timer.** Have her write down as many words as she can think of that relate to the book. They can be character names, place names or other words that describe the action of the book. The idea is just to get something down on paper.
- 2. Ask a few questions.** What was the most surprising thing about the book? Have her tell you as specifically as she can. Once she's talked it out, she should be able to write down her thoughts.
- 3. Ask her about a part of the story.** It can be overwhelming to write about a whole book. So have her write about the main character.

What did she look like? What did she wear? The more specific your child can be, the better.

- 4. Teach her techniques** to keep the ideas flowing once she has written something. “I realized that ...” “This reminds me of ...” or “This is important because ...”

**Source:** Lucy Calkins, *A Quick Guide to Teaching Second-Grade Writers*, ISBN: 9780-3250-2677-0, FirstHand, a Division of Heinemann.

**“More than 30 years of research shows that schools, families, and communities can make a difference in a student’s learning experience—especially when they work together to raise student achievement.”**

—*Pennsylvania State Parent Advisory Council*

## Avoid over-scheduling your child with after-school activities



Some families seem to spend most of their “together” time in the minivan. Yesterday was ballet. Today is soccer.

Tomorrow is karate. Each of these activities, by itself, may be great. But when do they get to be too much of a good thing?

Look at your family's schedule. If you decide it's too crowded, don't be afraid to blow the whistle. Here are some tips:

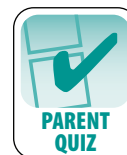
- **Set the rules of the game.** Many families set a limit of one sport or activity per child. Tell your child that family is the top priority.

School is second. Activities come third.

- **Focus on the fundamentals.** If your child can't do his math homework until 9:00 at night, you need to adjust his schedule. Athletics should never interfere with schoolwork.
- **Stay on the sidelines.** You know your child best. If he shows signs of stress, or he doesn't seem to be enjoying an activity, make an adjustment.

**Source:** “How to Help Your Child Juggle Sports, School, and Life,” *Sports Illustrated for Kids and Family Education*, <http://life.familyeducation.com/extracurricular-activities/responsibilities/36250.html?detoured=1>.

## Are you making fitness a priority in your family?



Today's kids sit too much and move too little. As a result, childhood obesity is a growing health problem. There are ways

parents can encourage children to be more active—and have fun at the same time. Are you doing what you can? Answer *yes* or *no* to each question:

- 1. Do you try** to make exercise part of everyday activities? If you can, do you walk or bike places?
- 2. Do you make time for fitness?** Do you block out some time when you can be active as a family?
- 3. Are you a good role model?** Do your children see you being active? Do you do some activities together?
- 4. Do you turn off the TV and the computer** at some times of the day?
- 5. Have you planned** some activities you can do regardless of the weather?

**How well are you doing?**

Each *yes* means you're helping your child be more active—and healthier. For each *no* answer, try that idea from the quiz.

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## Support your beginning reader with these proven strategies



You've read the same book every night for a week. Tonight, your child asks you to read the same book again. Can you help open your child to the world of reading—without losing your mind?

Relax. Wanting to read the same book over and over is a very normal part of learning to read. Reading books with predictable patterns (a phrase repeated over and over) is also a way kids learn.

But these aren't the only ways to help beginning readers. Here are some other tips for parents:

- **Play with a single word.** Have your child listen for beginning sounds. "Jackson, what sound

do you hear at the beginning of *snake*?" Then stretch out the beginning sound: "Ssssssssnake."

- **Stop when you're reading** and ask questions. Talk about what he thinks might come next. "What do you think he'll find when he opens the door?"
- **Have your child retell a story** in his own words after you finish reading a book.
- **Be enthusiastic** as your child learns to read. Learning to read is like learning to walk. Step by step, he'll get there.

**Source:** "Supporting Your Beginning Reader," International Reading Association, [www.reading.org/Libraries/Parents/pb1071\\_support.sflb.ashx](http://www.reading.org/Libraries/Parents/pb1071_support.sflb.ashx).

## Give your elementary schooler the tools needed for learning



A carpenter would never come to a job site without a box of tools. He 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 her best in school. She needs to show up with the right tools to do the job. Here are a few:

- **Enough sleep.** Doctors say that children between the ages of seven and 12 need 10 to 12 hours of sleep per day. Without proper rest, she won't be able to concentrate on the multiplication tables or her history lesson. So do some math yourself. When does your child need to leave for school in the morning? When does she need to get up to be ready at that time? Ten to 12 hours before that is when she needs to go to bed.

- **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 better grades and test scores. They are better able to focus. And they have fewer behavior problems. And don't worry if your child doesn't like "breakfast food." Peanut butter on a tortilla or a slice of pizza will give her a great start.
- **High expectations.** When you believe your child can do her best, she'll believe it, too. So send her off with a big smile and she'll have the confidence she needs to tackle another day.

**Sources:** WebMD, "How Much Sleep Do Children Need?" [www.webmd.com/parenting/guide/sleep-children](http://www.webmd.com/parenting/guide/sleep-children); Nutrition Explorations, "Breakfast at School: Fast and Healthy Food for Thought," [www.nutritionexplorations.org/educators/school-nutrition-breakfast.asp](http://www.nutritionexplorations.org/educators/school-nutrition-breakfast.asp).

**Q:** It's only October and my third grader has already missed the bus 10 times. That means I have to drop everything and drive him to school. On the days he does get the bus, he almost never has everything he needs. So I drive his book report, his science homework or his overdue library book to school. How can I get him to be more responsible?

### Questions & Answers

**A:** Kids learn to play the piano by playing the piano. They learn to be responsible by being responsible.

Right now, your son doesn't have to have any responsibilities. He knows that Super Mom is going to swoop in and rescue him every time he forgets something.

The truth is that it will never be easier for your son to make a few mistakes—and learn from them—than it is right now in elementary school. But first, he has to know that you're about to stop being his own personal Rescue Squad.

Here's what to do:

- **Talk with his teacher** and tell her what you are planning to do—you are going to stop rescuing your child. (She'll probably be glad.) Agree that he might not have a book or a report for the next week or so. Tell her you want him to live with the consequences.
- **Then help him learn** to get to school with what he needs. Make a checklist. Have him fill his backpack the night before and set it by the door. Set his alarm in plenty of time for him to get out the door.

Once he learns you won't be responsible for him, he'll start being responsible for himself.

—Kristen Amundson,  
The Parent Institute

# It Matters: Responsibility

## Get organized with your child for school success



A new school year is a fresh start for your child—and her backpack! It may be free of crinkled homework

and lost permission slips now, but it won't stay that way without some attention. To keep schoolwork and papers organized:

- **Use a system.** For example, designate one folder for homework and take-home papers. Label other folders with subject names. Each day after school, look through your child's homework/take-home folder together. What assignments does she have today? What papers should you read, sign or return?
- **File papers at home.** Some papers must be saved, such as study guides and fliers about upcoming events. The trick is to do this right away. Keep a folder at home for school-related paperwork. Look through it—and clean it out—at least weekly. Post items you use daily, such as lunch menus, on the fridge.
- **Keep a calendar.** Record test days, field trips and performance times. Put a calendar in or near your child's at-home school folder. Each day, add new dates and check for upcoming events. Encourage your child to review the calendar with you.
- **Check online.** Some important school messages come via email. Also check the school website regularly. You may catch details that didn't make it home—and even find missing forms, ready to print and return on time!

## Elementary schoolers must be responsible for belongings

It's one thing for your child to lose his belongings, such as a lunch or assignment, but it's another when something is borrowed, such as a library book. To keep track of all kinds of things:

- **Talk about responsibility.** Make your expectations clear. "I expect you to take care of things, whether they're yours or someone else's." Give examples, such as textbooks, library books, pens and pencils.
- **Put things in the same place every day.** Eyeglasses go on the nightstand. Library books go on a shelf. Textbooks go on a desk or in a backpack. This encourages organization and prevents loss and damage.



- **Ask before borrowing.** Many kids come home from school saying things like, "I borrowed my friend's book and now I can't find it!" Make sure children ask permission from each other—and caregivers—before borrowing or loaning items.

## Teach your child to consider consequences of decisions



Children may understand the advice "Look before you leap," but it's hard to follow.

Thinking about consequences takes patience and practice. With your child:

- **Review past decisions.** When has your child made good choices? Did she pick between two sports and end up happy? Did she tell the truth about something she did wrong?
- **Be a role model.** Think through dilemmas. Weigh the pros and cons. Decide carefully what's best. Tell stories about people who had the courage to do what was right.

- **Discuss new decisions.** Consider tough situations your child might face. What are her choices? What are possible consequences? How does she feel about them?
- **Use natural consequences.** If your child refuses to wear a jacket on a windy day, she might be uncomfortable, but she'll probably choose better next time.
- **Praise good decisions.** Peers may encourage your child to do wrong—or tease her for doing right. Overpower these influences by providing a positive, supportive environment that rewards well-made choices.

**Source:** Linda and Richard Eyre, *Teaching Your Children Responsibility*, ISBN-13: 978-0671887162, Fireside.