

# Helping Children Learn

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

Krys Croxall, Superintendent of Program  
Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board

December 2009

## ENCOURAGING WRITING

### Writing game shows verb choices

"He *dashed* for the exit." "He *galloped* around the bases." "He *jogged* up the path."

All three of those sentences mean more or less the same thing: Somebody ran. But the action words—*dashed*, *galloped* and *jogged*—are more interesting verb choices.

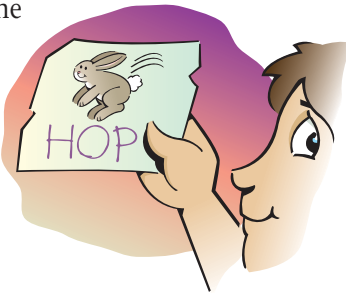
The "Name the Action" game is a fun way to help your child think about interesting verb choices. Here's how to play:

- **Gather** some small slips of paper.
- **Write** a verb that describes a precise action on each piece of paper. (For example: *skip*, *hop*, *stomp*, *tiptoe*, *limp*, *crawl*.) Everyone in the family can write down some verbs.
- **Have** one player draw a slip of paper and act out the word on it.
- **Have** the other players try to guess the word.

As kids get older, the words can get harder. How would you show that someone *strolled* into the room? How would they *burst* into the room?

The next time your child is revising a composition, have him circle all the verbs. Then have him think of a better word for each one. If the verb is *said*, he might use *whispered*, *sarled* or *shouted*. Choosing interesting verbs will help your child's writing come alive.

Source: Harvey S. Wiener, *Any Child Can Write*, ISBN: 0-195-15316-2 (Oxford University Press, www.oup.com).



## MOTIVATING YOUR CHILD

### Self-confidence improves through tasks

Some children have the confidence to take on any challenge. Others seem defeated before they ever start. To build your child's "I can do it" attitude:

- **Give her challenging, age-appropriate tasks.** A six-year-old can set the table or help make the salad. An older child can measure ingredients. As you are doing work around the house, ask yourself if your child could do some part of the task.
- **Show your child how to do a job.** Then help her do it. Finally, let her do it all by herself. Avoid jumping in and "fixing" it. A child who isn't afraid to tackle new tasks at home is more likely to have an "I can do it" approach to learning at school, too.

Source: Jacquelynne S. Eccles, "Families, Schools, and Developing Achievement-Related Motivations and Engagement," in Joan E. Grusec and Paul Hastings, *Handbook of Socialization*, ISBN: 1-593-85332-7 (Guilford Press, www.guilford.com).

## IMPORTANCE OF ATTENDANCE

### Support regular attendance

She woke up late and there's no way she's getting the bus. Would it really matter if she missed one day of school?

The answer is YES! Attendance makes a big difference. Kids who attend school regularly achieve at higher rates than students who are chronically absent.

Source: "School Attendance, the Impact of Behavior on Grades, and School Failure," Bureau of Educational Research, [http://education.illinois.edu/ber/webpages/School\\_Attendance.html](http://education.illinois.edu/ber/webpages/School_Attendance.html).

## ENCOURAGING READING

### Promote letter recognition in the kitchen during meals

Most kids love to hang out in the kitchen while a meal is being prepared. Take advantage of this natural time together to sharpen your child's language skills.



As you work, ask your child to find five words that begin with A, F or M. He can look on cans, cereal boxes or even the cat food. If he's ready for more of a challenge, use letter combinations (like BR or CH).

## YOUR CHILD AND YOU

### Holiday ads boost creativity

During December, mailboxes are usually filled with advertisements for holiday items. Before you recycle them, have your child use illustrations and photos to:

- **Make** her own holiday cards.
- **Illustrate** a story she writes.
- **Make** alphabet cards.
- **Decorate** counting pages (*one* candy cane, *two* turkeys, *three* mittens, etc.).



December 2009

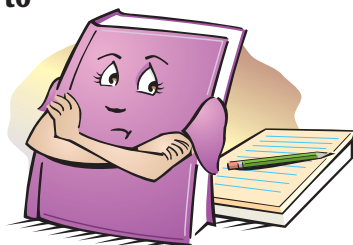
## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

### Routines end homework hassles

**Q: Every day I argue with my daughter about starting her homework. Often she says she doesn't understand how to do something. Or she'll say she has no homework. What can I do to avoid daily homework battles?**

**A:** Homework hassles can affect the whole family. To make homework time go more smoothly:

- **Establish a daily homework time.** Some kids work best right after school. Others do better if they have a break first.
- **Stick to the routine.** If she has no assignment, she can read ahead or do extra math problems for practice.
- **Talk about her assignments** as soon as she gets home—even if she'll take a break before starting. Have her estimate how long each task will take. Then have her make a to-do list putting the most difficult assignment first.
- **Eliminate distractions**—no TV, phone calls or computer games during homework time.
- **Expect others in the family** to respect "homework time." Ask everyone to work quietly while your daughter studies.
- **Contact her teacher** if she truly struggles with an assignment. For some kids it is easier to say "I hate homework," than to admit they don't understand.



## PARENT QUIZ

### Is your child organized for projects?

It's a fact of school life: The older the child, the bigger the project. Answer the following questions *yes* or *no* to see if you and your child will survive his next big project:

- \_\_\_ **1. Will you help** your child break down the big job into lots of little jobs to show him how to manage time?
- \_\_\_ **2. Will you have** your child write each job on his homework calendar? As he finishes each job, he can cross it off.
- \_\_\_ **3. Will you help** your child find a topic he can understand? (Most fifth graders can't understand the atom bomb!)
- \_\_\_ **4. Will you head** to the library together?
- \_\_\_ **5. Will you proofread** your child's paper but avoid writing it for him?

**How did you do?** Each yes answer will help you and your child get through the big project. For each no answer, try that idea from the quiz.

*"Don't agonize.  
Organize."  
—Florynce Kennedy*

## BUILDING SELF-ESTEEM

### Keep your praise genuine

Hearing praise can boost children's self-esteem and motivate them during tough times. But when children are struggling, it can be hard to come up with a compliment. Kids know when you're exaggerating, so make sure your praise is friendly but realistic. You might say, "That was a good try" or "The assignment is tough, but I know you can do it."

## GROWING UP

### Explain why responsibility is important to your family

Children know that being responsible is important, but they might not know why. Asking questions can help:

- **What happens when** chores aren't done?
  - **What happens when** they *are* done?
- Then answer the questions together. (For example, no one trips over toys when they're picked up.)

## BUILDING CHARACTER

### What makes a good citizen?

Good citizens think of other people's needs. They have empathy and compassion. Kids aren't born with these traits. They need role models and hands-on experiences to develop them. To nurture traits of good citizenship in your child:

- **Model caring and sharing.** Do a good deed for a neighbor. Volunteer to help with a school activity.
- **Play board games** with your child. Emphasize perseverance and treating opponents fairly.
- **Ask your librarian** to recommend books that celebrate good citizenship. Read them aloud with your child.



## Helping Children Learn<sup>®</sup>

Published in English and Spanish, September through May.

Publisher: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.

Editor: Jennifer McGovern.

Staff Editors: Erika Beasley & Rebecca Miyares.

Writer: Pat Hodgdon. Production Manager: Pat Carter.

Head of Translations: Michelle Beal-García.

Illustrations: Maher & Mignella, Cherry Hill, NJ.

Copyright © 2009, The Parent Institute<sup>®</sup>, a division of NIS Inc.

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

1-800-756-5525 • www.parent-institute.com • ISSN 1527-1013