

Elementary School Parents

October 2022
Vol. 34, No. 2

Alachua County School Board

make the difference!



A peaceful home environment promotes a sense of well-being

Today's students are facing high levels of stress and anxiety, as the aftermath of the pandemic continues to affect children's mental health.

Here are some simple things you can do at home to support your child's mental and emotional health:

- **Remember the big three:** good nutrition, adequate sleep and exercise. These are the keys to overall wellness.
- **Encourage laughter.** Laughter should be a part of each day. Have everyone share favorite funny shows, movies, jokes and stories.
- **Share good things.** Every day, have each family member report one good thing that happened. Try to do this during a family meal and

write down the responses in a family gratitude journal.

- **Share stress-relief strategies.** Teach your child to take deep breaths, go for a walk or turn on some relaxing music when feeling anxious or stressed.
- **Stay organized.** An organized, clutter-free home creates a more peaceful environment for everyone. It also teaches your child how to take care of belongings.
- **Stay connected.** Listen when your child shares concerns, and offer reassurance. If you become worried about your child, make an appointment with the pediatrician.

Source: R. Chatterjee, "Kids are back in school—and struggling with mental health issues," National Public Radio.

A good night's sleep is crucial for learning



When children don't get enough sleep, it's hard for them to learn in school.

That's because sleep affects a child's ability to:

- **Plan and organize.**
- **Solve problems.**
- **Control mood and behavior.**
- **Focus and pay attention.**
- **Retain information.**

To help your child get the recommended nine to 12 hours of sleep each night:

- **Stick to a schedule.** Enforce a regular bedtime and wake time. Establish times for meals, schoolwork and recreation.
- **Encourage physical activity.** Exercise and fresh air help children sleep better.
- **Set a technology curfew.** Kids should avoid bright screens for one hour before bedtime.
- **Follow a bedtime routine.** Your child could take a bath, enjoy a story and talk about the day. Then, it's lights out.
- **Make your child feel safe.** Put a night light in the room and say you'll peek in periodically.

Source: "Healthy Sleep Habits: How Many Hours Does Your Child Need?" American Academy of Pediatrics.

Talk to your child about the importance of showing respect



Respectful behavior is just as important at school as it is at home.

To contribute to a respectful learning environment, students should:

- **Address the teacher** by name. Encourage your child to smile, look the teacher in the eye and say, “Good morning, Mrs. Jones.”
- **Be courteous.** Your child should say *please*, *thank you* and *excuse me* to teachers and classmates.
- **Do what’s expected.** Everyone in school has a job to do. If the teacher doesn’t plan lessons, no one can learn anything. If students don’t do their jobs—assignments, listening to the teacher—it makes it harder for everyone to learn.
- **Raise their hands.** Imagine having 30 students in a class, each of whom

wants attention right now. When students wait for the teacher to call on them, they demonstrate self-control and respect for others.

- **Participate** in class discussions on a regular basis.
- **Accept feedback** from the teacher. Teachers want students to learn. That means they have to point out mistakes and areas where students can improve. Your child will be more successful in school by learning to accept constructive feedback in a positive way.

“Respect is one of the most important things you can teach a child.”

—Catherine Pulsifer

Brainstorming is the solution for your child’s writer’s block!



Some kids don’t like to write because they think it’s boring. Others find it too challenging.

They get frustrated trying to think of ideas.

You can’t force a child to *love* writing. But you can turn a reluctant writer around with brainstorming.

Brainstorming is fun and boosts creativity. It reduces stress and can help your child break through writer’s block.

Brainstorming also teaches other skills that help with writing. By creating lists, for example, your child learns to break down complex ideas into smaller components.

The next time your child can’t think of what to write about:

- **Make lists.** Here are a few topics to get started: *Things I love. My favorite animals, places, toys or food. Things I know a lot about. Scary characters. Things adults say.*
- **Imagine.** Ask your child some questions that will spark new ways to think about people, events and scenes. “What would it feel like to be a car, a house or a dog? What would life be like if you had four hands?”
- **Use visual images.** Have your child look at a picture and write down what it brings to mind. Or, find something in your house and ask what it makes your child think of.
- **Add action to ideas.** What will happen next? How quickly will it happen?

Are you teaching your child to bounce back?



Some parents want to wrap their children in a protective bubble so they never have to experience failure. Others know that

overcoming disappointments can teach valuable lessons.

Are you helping your child learn from setbacks? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

___1. **Do you give** your child a chance to solve problems rather than jumping in to help right away?

___2. **Do you encourage** your child to think about what to do differently the next time?

___3. **Are you** a good role model? When you fail at something or make a mistake, do you talk about it and about how to fix it?

___4. **Do you help** your child keep disappointments in perspective? “You didn’t ace your test, but you earned a higher grade than last time!”

___5. **Do you show** your child how to be a humble winner and a gracious loser?

How well are you doing?

If most of your answers are *yes*, you are helping your child learn resilience. For each *no*, try that idea in the quiz.

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

For subscription information call or write:
The Parent Institute, 1-800-756-5525,
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: Doris McLaughlin.
Publisher Emeritus: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.
Editor: Rebecca Hasty Miyares.

Everyday tasks can strengthen your child's math skills



Most people read and do math every day—although their children may not realize it. Show that math is an essential

part of life by involving your child when you:

- **Follow recipes.** When preparing meals, let your child help with weighing and measuring. Discuss sizes, shapes and fractions. Ask questions such as, “How could we double this recipe?” and “When we add $\frac{1}{4}$ cup to $\frac{1}{4}$ cup, what do we get?”
- **Go shopping.** Help your child use a calculator to keep a running tally of purchases. Use coupons to inspire math problems. “If we use this coupon, will the item cost less than other brands?” “Which of these items is really the best deal per pound?”
- **Save money.** Ask your child to choose a goal, such as saving for a toy. How much does your child need to save each week? How long will it take to reach the total? Track progress on a chart. Then have fun shopping together!
- **Take a trip.** Before leaving, measure the air pressure in your car or bike tires. Calculate how many miles you'll go. If you are driving, how much gas will you use? As you travel, say a number between 1 and 10. Who can find a license plate with numbers that add up to the number you called out?
- **Start a family project.** Planning to paint a bedroom? Involve your child in figuring out how much paint you will need to do the job.
- **Play games.** There are lots of fun math games you can play together. Try dominoes, Uno and Connect 4.

Here's how to make the most of your parent-teacher conference



Preparation is the key to a successful parent-teacher conference. Here's how to get the most benefit from your meeting:

Before the conference:

- **Make a list** of things you'd like to tell the teacher, such as your child's favorite subjects and activities, difficulties in school, medical needs and any sensitive issues.
- **Make a list** of things to ask the teacher about, such as your child's work habits, attitude, behavior, strengths and weaknesses.
- **Let your child know** you are having a conference. Ask if there's anything you and the teacher should discuss.

During the conference:

- **Be on time.** Teachers have many conferences, and a five-minute delay can throw off the schedule.
- **Listen carefully** and take notes about your child's progress.
- **Be positive.** Remember: You and your child's teacher both want what's best for your child.
- **Make a plan** with the teacher to address any concerns and schedule a time to follow up.

After the conference:

- **Let your child know** how the conference went.
- **Start with positive comments.** Then, talk about any suggestions the teacher made—and how you plan to help your child carry these out.

Q: My first grader is very shy and has a difficult time making friends. I'm worried that this will negatively affect my child in school. What can I do?

Questions & Answers

A: Some children have lots of self-confidence and others do not. While you can't change your child's personality, you can foster more confidence when speaking and working with others.

To strengthen social skills:

- **Role-play together.** Shy children don't always know what to say to another child. Say, “Let's pretend you're at recess. Juan and Megan are playing a fun game that you'd like to join. What could you say?” At first, you might have your child pretend to be one of the other children. You can pretend to be your child. But then change roles.
- **Read books about friends.** Talk about what good friends do—and don't do. Thinking about what makes a good friend may help your child identify someone in class who could be a friend.
- **Schedule a playdate** with a classmate. Some children feel more comfortable with just one other person than they do in a crowd.
- **Focus on your child's strengths.** Use these as a way for your student to meet other children with like interests. Does your child like art? Try an art class at a community center. Is your child athletic? Consider signing up for a youth sports team.
When children practice the skills that they enjoy, they develop self-confidence—which can also help them make friends!

It Matters: Reading

Reading aloud strengthens reading skills



Your child may know how to read independently, but reading aloud is still beneficial. When you read aloud,

you introduce ideas, concepts and vocabulary your child might not get otherwise. Each time you read together, you also add to your child's storehouse of knowledge—which helps with comprehension.

As you read aloud, focus on:

- **Vocabulary.** Define the words your child doesn't know. Together, think of words that have a similar or opposite meaning.
- From time to time, see if your child can figure out the meaning of an unknown word by how it's used in a sentence. Give examples of how the word might be used in other contexts. For example, note how the word *sign* can be a noun (Look at the stop *sign*) or a verb (Please *sign* your name here).
- **Listening and thinking skills.** After you've read a passage, have your child summarize it. Ask specific questions—What did the main character do? Where did he do it? How did it make his friends feel?
- **Memory.** Don't just start reading where you left off in a book the night before. First ask your child to recall what was happening in the story when you stopped.
- **Word recognition.** Stop reading periodically. Ask your child to read a sentence or two to you. Help your child sound out new words and read the sentences again.

Help your elementary schooler discover the joy of reading

Some children seem to have their noses constantly in a book. But others haven't discovered the joy of reading yet. To encourage reading:

- **Ask your librarian** to recommend high-interest books. There are books that appeal to almost every child. Kids who enjoy adventure may find that they love the *Percy Jackson and the Olympians* series. Those who like to laugh may enjoy the *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* series.
- **Keep track** of how many books your child reads. Paste a sticker on a chart for each book. Or, have your child make a paper chain—one link for each book. Can your child make a chain long enough to stretch around a room?
- **Have a fact scavenger hunt.** Make a list of questions that require your child to use different reference materials at the library (without going online). What is the



batting average of a famous baseball player? What is the average temperature at Disney World?

- **Suggest audiobooks.** There are wonderful recordings of favorite books—many may be available for free from your public library. Sometimes just hearing the words in a book can encourage a child to go back and read it later.

Make sure your child is on the road to reading success



Ask any educator to name the single most important thing parents can do at home to help children learn and do well in school and they will likely say, "Encourage your child to read!"

To make reading a priority:

- **Create a reading nook.** A cozy reading spot can make reading more appealing.
- **Take advantage of the library.** Each week, browse and let your child check out new books.

- **Start a family book club.** Set aside one night each week to talk about something you've all read. Better yet, do it during dinner—you'll get the benefit of one another's company and a good discussion.
- **Let your child see you reading.** Kids who see their parents read are more likely to want to read themselves.
- **Talk with the teacher.** Ask about your child's reading progress and strategies you can use at home to strengthen reading skills.