ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Helping Children Learn®

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

February 2026

Defiance City Schools

Encourage your child to engage in more complex thinking

Memorizing a fact just scratches the surface of learning. To really understand something, students need to think about it in more complex ways—by evaluating, comparing and applying what they've learned. This helps them see how the material fits into the "bigger picture."

To give your child practice thinking in more depth:

- **Promote problem-solving.** If your student has forgotten how to do an assignment, ask, "How could you find out how to do it?" Could your child call a classmate? Look over work from class? Check a class website? Encourage your child to make a plan and put it into action.
- **Discuss issues and events in the news.** Have your child read an article on a topic with many sides, then talk about it at dinner. Find out what your child thinks about the issue and why. But don't stop there. After listening to your child, say, "I can see why you feel this way. But why do you think other people might think differently?"
- **Talk about the learning process.** After your child completes a big project for school, help your child consider how it went. Ask, "How difficult was this to finish? What did you learn about how to do projects that will help next time?

Keys for raising disciplined learners

Maintaining discipline and developing students' self-discipline contributes to a positive learning environment. Effective discipline helps children learn from poor choices and make better ones in the future.

These discipline strategies can help you teach positive behavior:

1. **Establish rules** and consequences you can consistently enforce. It won't take long for your child to learn whether you really intend to enforce rules. Give in just once and you'll likely face an argument every day.
2. **Speak calmly** when responding to misbehavior. Yelling teaches children that it is OK to lose control when feeling upset.
3. **Describe misbehavior,** rather than criticizing your child. Saying "It was your sister's turn to use the computer and you wouldn't stop your game," is more helpful than "Don't be so selfish." Then, offer a reminder of the rule ("We take fair turns") and the consequence ("No more games today.").

Model social interactions

Children who lack social skills can have trouble learning and succeeding in school. Be a social skills role model for your elementary schooler. Let your child see you introducing yourself, staying connected to friends, sharing and being kind to others. Read books about friendship and cooperation aloud. Then, talk about the stories together.

Source: K. Steedly, Ph.D. and others, "Social Skills and Academic Achievement, *Evidence for Education*, NICHCY.

Help with test preparation

Your child will have to do the studying for tests. But you can help your student be physically prepared to do well. To support test success, ensure that your child:

- **Sticks to a healthy sleep schedule.** Staying up late studying increases anxiety, which interferes with thinking.
- **Eats a nutritious breakfast.**
- **Dresses in comfortable layers,** so that clothes won't be a distraction.
- **Relaxes and knows you care.** Take deep breaths together and send your child out the door with a big hug.

Meaning boosts memory

When students link new information to something meaningful to them, they recall it better. To encourage this, help your child create a story that weaves new material into familiar situations and locations. For example, to recall the first three U.S. presidents in order, your child might say, "One day, George Washington went to the park. He met John Adams by the seesaw. Then, the two of them ran into Thomas Jefferson by the slide and all three played tag."

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Q&A What can I do to convince my child to speak in class?

Q: My second grader is outgoing at home but very shy at school. My child doesn't like answering questions in class for fear of being wrong. How can I help my student become more comfortable participating in the classroom?

A: First, talk with your child's teacher. What is the teacher's perspective on your child's reluctance to speak in class? Ask what the teacher does to encourage your child to participate. You can also ask if the teacher can give your child opportunities to speak up without pressure—in small group situations, for example. After mastering a skill, could your child "tutor" a classmate?

Next, talk with your child. Say that everyone makes mistakes—and your child probably will, too. But emphasize that mistakes are not the end of the world. What's more, they provide opportunities to learn from them and get smarter.

Don't make too much of this right now. Some children are hesitant to speak up in the early grades. As they gain confidence, they open up and join in class discussions. You say your child is outgoing at home. That's great. Feeling safe speaking up at home bolsters the confidence to do the same in school. And remember, some children are just shy by nature—and they often do just as well as their more outgoing peers in school.

Parent Quiz Do you make following directions easy?

When children follow instructions carefully they achieve better results—in the classroom, on schoolwork and at home. Are you helping your child practice this elementary skill? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

___**1. Do you ask** for your child's attention before giving instructions?

___**2. Do you divide** complex directions into steps your child can follow one by one?

___**3. Do you encourage** your child to reread or repeat directions before beginning a task?

___**4. Do you make** and post checklists of tasks your child can follow?

___**5. Do you praise** your child for following instructions carefully and completely?

How well are you doing?

More yes *answers mean you are teaching your child the importance of paying attention to instructions. For each* no, *try that idea.*

"Our instructions need to include both what to do and why it is important."
—Belinda Letchford

Spark interest in history

Does history seem lifeless and remote when your child reads about it in textbooks? Quality historical fiction offers a vivid view of the human side of history's facts, dates and statistics. To bring history to life for your child through reading:

- **Look for titles** that present events and details accurately. Check reviews or ask your child's teacher for suggestions.
- **Read books aloud** that are a little too challenging for your child to read alone.
- **Encourage your child to read** more than one book about the same era. Discuss the similarities and differences.

Source: E. Codell, *How to Get Your Child to Love Reading,* Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill.

Build a world of knowledge

It's a big world out there! Help your child discover it with these activities:

- **Collecting.** Suggest that your child collect objects from countries around the globe, such as stamps or postcards, and learn about where they come from.
- **Mapping.** Help your child find places where relatives live on a map. How many ways are there to get there from your home?
- **Sourcing.** Have your child read labels to find out where items in your home were made and locate the sources on a map.

Love and learn together

This Valentine's Day, share a love of learning with your child! As a family:

- **Read** tales of caring and love.
- **Estimate.** Fill a jar with red candies. Ask family members to estimate the number of pieces, then let your child count them.
- **Learn** to say "I love you" in several different languages.

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