

Elementary School  
**Parents**<sup>®</sup>  
A Service of the Newton County Schools  
*make the difference!*

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## Turn writing into a game for your child with 'quick writes'

**W**riting can be hard work. But a "quick write" is a fun and easy way to encourage your child to get her ideas down on paper.

Quick writes are just what they sound like—a short period of time when a child writes quickly. Usually, a quick write is based on a question or an idea. You ask a challenging question and set the timer for five minutes. Then both you and your child write down everything you can before the timer beeps.

Even kids who usually stare into space when it's time for a writing assignment will like a quick write. They are often surprised to discover just how much they did know about a subject.

Your child will gain confidence when she sees how much she can write in just a few minutes. Once the

quick write is finished, compare what you've written. The next time, let your child choose the quick write topic.

Here are some ideas to use:

- **Would it be a good or a bad idea** if our pet could talk? Why?
- **If I were invisible**, I would ... .
- **The best birthday** I can imagine would be ... .
- **It was a stormy day**, so I decided I would ... .
- **Zebras have stripes because** ... .
- **Ten years from now**, I will be ... .
- **I invented** the most amazing machine. It does ... .
- **When I woke up** this morning, I was a different person. I was ... .

*Source:* Linda Reif, *100 Quickwrites: Fast and Effective Freewriting Exercises that Build Students' Confidence, Develop Their Fluency, and Bring Out the Writer in Every Student*, ISBN: 9780-4394-5877-1 (Scholastic Books, [www.scholastic.com](http://www.scholastic.com)).

## Maintain good attendance at end of the year



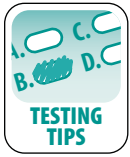
You know that being in school is important. But this would be such a great time to take a family trip. And, after all, your child is only in first grade. Surely a few days' absence won't matter, will it?

It will. In fact, research shows that young children don't have to miss much school before their learning suffers. In the early grades, kids are mastering reading and basic math skills. And research has found that these are the skills most affected when children miss school. Being in school consistently is the only way kids can develop a strong foundation on which the rest of their learning will build.

But your child will not be the only one who pays a price. The entire class will be affected. When the teacher has to stop to meet the needs of a child who was out of school, everyone else's learning comes to a halt.

*Source:* Hedy N. Chang and Marijosé Romero, *Present, Engaged, and Accounted For: The Critical Importance of Addressing Chronic Absence in the Early Grades* (National Center for Children in Poverty, [www.nccp.org/publications/pub\\_837.html](http://www.nccp.org/publications/pub_837.html)).

## Show your child the importance of following directions on tests



Sometimes, a child may know the answer to a test question—but still get it wrong. She *underlined* the answer, when the directions said *circle*. Or she chose the *true* answer when the directions asked for the one that was *not true*.

Helping your child learn to follow directions exactly is an important way to prepare her for test success. Try these things at home:

- **Follow a recipe together.** Talk about what would happen if you left out one of the ingredients or didn't do things in order.
- **Help your child think** about one thing she knows or does well—making a peanut butter sandwich, finding her way to school. Have her write step-by-step directions

on how to do it. Now follow the directions she has written exactly. Was anything missing?

- **Create a treasure hunt.** Hide a small prize somewhere your child won't see it. Now write notes your child must follow. Each note tells her to look somewhere else. Only if she follows the directions exactly will she get the prize.

Source: Guinevere Durham, *Teaching Test-Taking Skills: Proven Techniques to Boost Your Students' Scores*, ISBN: 1-5788-6573-5 (Rowman & Littlefield Education, www.rowmaneducation.com).

**“We shouldn't teach great books; we should teach a love of reading.”**

—B. F. Skinner

## Use fun games to teach thinking skills to your elementary schooler



In today's world, kids need to know how to be problem solvers. They must learn how to analyze and see things from another point of view. Here are some games to play at home to help:

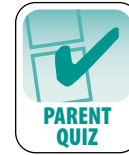
- **Find something** for your child to sort—buttons, pencils, coins or anything else in your house. Help him sort the items by size. Then mix everything up and have him sort them by color. This teaches your child to understand that just because something is part of one group, it doesn't *always* have to be part of that group.
- **Think about opposites.** Suppose you have been talking about

fairness. Have a conversation with your child: What does fairness look like? What things show fairness in action? Then think about the opposite—what would unfairness look like?

- **Talk about point of view.** What does your child think your house would look like from the cat's point of view? What does the school bus driver think about the students who ride on her bus every day? This activity will also help your child develop empathy by seeing things from their point of view.

Source: “Top 10 Ways to Start Teaching Thinking Skills Today,” 21st Century Thinking at Every Desk blog, www.21stcenturythinker.com/2009/04/top-10-ways-to-start-teaching-thinking.html.

## Are you helping your child learn spelling words?



By this time in the year, both students and parents may be getting bored with the same old spelling list routine. Are you motivating your child to learn spelling words? Answer *yes* or *no* to each question below:

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you set aside time** each day to review the week's spelling words?
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you look for creative ways** to study spelling words? Your child can write each word in a different color. Or you can turn out the lights and use a flashlight to “write” words.
- \_\_\_ **3. Does your child keep** a small notebook as his private dictionary, where he writes words he finds while reading?
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you record** spelling words on a voice recorder so your child can quiz himself?
- \_\_\_ **5. Do you break up** the list so your child can learn a few words each day?

**How well are you doing?**

Each *yes* means you are finding ways to help your child learn spelling words. For each *no*, try those ideas in the quiz.

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# Teach your child to recover from mistakes with humor, perspective



It's easy to build a child's self-esteem when she's winning the game or bringing home a great report card. It's tougher, but perhaps even more important, to boost self-esteem when things aren't going so well.

Here are some ways you can help your child keep her head up and recover from mistakes:

- **Choose your words carefully.** Saying, "You spilled the milk" doesn't hurt your child's self-esteem. Saying, "You're such a clumsy kid" will. Remember, the labels you put on your child today

are the things she will carry with her through life.

- **Help your child take the long view.** Yes, she failed a quiz. But that doesn't mean she'll fail fourth grade.
- **Help everyone in the family learn to laugh at their own mistakes.** Life doesn't always need to be serious. Sometimes, the milk spills. Show your child that it's possible to recover by laughing at mistakes.

**Source:** U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, "Your Child's Mental Health: Building Self-Esteem in Children," <http://mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/publications/allpubs/Ca-0048/default.asp>.

# Help your child experience the value and excitement of reading



By about fourth grade, students make the transition from "learning to read" to "reading to learn." The better they read, the easier it is to learn.

Unfortunately, many kids think reading is boring. This keeps them from practicing and building their skills. To help your child experience the fun and value of reading:

- **Choose carefully.** What subjects and formats does he love? Perhaps he'd like a how-to book about making paper airplanes or a comic about super heroes. Simple, age-appropriate materials are great for free-time reading.
- **Set goals.** Consider what's right for each of you. Your child might read 20 minutes a day, for example, or you might read one book a week. Plan how you'll track progress and celebrate success.

- **Use resources.** It can be a struggle to find interesting books for reluctant readers. Talk with librarians, teachers and employees at bookstores. Read reviews online and in print. Do your best to find appealing materials.
- **Read together.** Show your child that you enjoy reading. In addition to choosing books for yourself, read some that he picks. Check out two copies at the library and read at your child's pace, sharing opinions throughout the book.
- **Be creative.** Read aloud to your child with enthusiasm. You might feel silly "getting into character" at first, but it captures kids' attention and helps them understand the story. When you put the book down for the night, your child may pick it back up!

**Source:** Evelyn Porreca Vuko, *Teacher Says*, ISBN: 0-399-52997-7 (The Berkley Publishing Group, [www.penguin.com](http://www.penguin.com)).

**Q:** My child came home from school scratching his head. When I looked closely, I saw tiny nits. He has head lice! The school says he can't come back until his head is completely free of nits. But they're hard to get rid of. Is this really fair? After all, he must have caught the lice at school.

## Questions & Answers

**A:** Each year, millions of kids get head lice. Most of those who come down with head lice are children between the ages of three and 12. Here are a few facts about lice:

- **Head lice are tiny mites** that live on the scalp. The lice themselves are often invisible. What you can see are "nits"—small, white eggs that look like dandruff.
- **Head lice are very contagious.** They spread from person to person by direct contact. They also spread when children wear infested clothing—a hat, helmet, scarf or even a hair ribbon from someone with lice. Sharing combs and brushes is another way head lice are spread.
- **Head lice are not a signal** that your home is unsanitary, so you don't need to be embarrassed.

If your child has lice, contact your doctor. Ask about a shampoo or treatment to use on your child's hair and scalp.

Because lice spread so easily, most schools have rules about when students can come back to class. Many have a "no-nit" rule.

Talk with your child's teacher and make arrangements to get your child's homework and books from the school.

Good luck!

—Kristen Amundson,  
The Parent Institute

# It Matters: Respect

## Insist your child dress respectfully at home, school



Chances are you and your child argue occasionally—or often—about what she wears to school. That’s

no surprise, considering that many popular children’s clothes violate school dress codes (not to mention parents’ values).

Parents aren’t alone in this battle. When EducationWorld.com asked educators about the importance of student dress codes, the response was clear—79% said dress codes “help improve behavior and academic performance.”

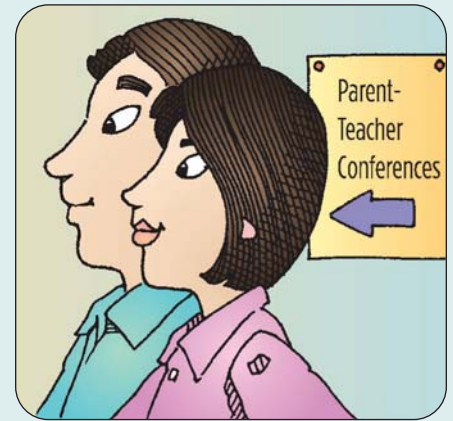
To make mornings easier on you, your child and the school:

- **Review the school dress code.** Which clothes and shoes are not allowed? Some common items include flip flops, halter tops, low-hanging pants and spaghetti straps.
- **Talk with your child.** Discuss why there is a dress code. Which clothes or shoes might be distracting? Offensive? Unsafe? Inappropriate? This is a good time to discuss respect for self and others.
- **Post the rules.** If you and your child argue repeatedly about dress, consider posting the rules. Children are less likely to argue with a list (especially a school list) than a parent.
- **Shop carefully.** Avoid items that are likely to spark disagreements. If your child will probably beg to wear “weekend shirts” on school days, think carefully about buying them.

## Build your child’s respect for school by remaining involved

**F**amily involvement not only teaches your child that school is important, but also helps him persevere and do his best. Research shows that when parents are involved in education, kids are more successful students. To build your child’s respect for school:

- **Attend school events.** Make parent-teacher conferences a priority. Put learning-related activities on the calendar, such as book fairs, parent workshops and class performances. Treat them like appointments. This shows your child that school is important to your family.
- **Be an advocate.** Experts say when parents support kids’ learning and speak up for them, kids do better in school and stay in school longer. They also have more confidence! It helps to set



high expectations for your child, supervise homework time, promote healthy habits and get involved at school.

- **Connect learning to life.** Help your child see how what he’s learning affects daily life.

Source: “Report: The Positive Relationship Between Family Involvement and Student Success,” PTA, [www.pta.org/2128.htm](http://www.pta.org/2128.htm).

## Banish bullying by teaching your child to respect others



Bullying is a serious problem that deserves your attention, even if your child is not bullied or a bully. Research

shows up to 30% of kids are bullied repeatedly, which means plenty of kids are at least *observing* bullying. Encourage your child to:

- **Respect others.** Teach respect through words and actions. Provide a warm home environment with good role models and effective discipline (not too strict or too lenient). Remember the importance of supervision, since

bullying often occurs when adults aren’t around.

- **Recognize bullying.** Bullying comes in many forms. It can be physical, verbal or written, such as in emails or text messages. It can also be silent, when a child is left out on purpose.
- **React to bullying.** If your child knows someone who is being bullied, he should inform you or a teacher about the situation.

Source: “What Family Members Can Do” and “Tip Sheets,” StopBullyingNow! [www.stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov/adults/parents-and-family/family-do.aspx](http://www.stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov/adults/parents-and-family/family-do.aspx) and [www.stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov/adults/tip-sheets/default.aspx](http://www.stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov/adults/tip-sheets/default.aspx).