



Improving focus boosts your child's ability to learn

Everybody's mind wanders now and then. But when students regularly "zone out" during class, it affects their ability to learn and retain new information.

Studies show that younger students who can't focus tend to become older students who can't focus. And that can mean trouble for your child's education.

To help your elementary schooler strengthen attention skills:

- **Remove distractions.** Turn off the TV and other screens while your child does schoolwork. Keep noise to a minimum.
- **Break down large tasks** into more manageable steps. Students can be easily overwhelmed when facing complex assignments. Demonstrate how to divide the work into smaller

steps. "First, think about what you want to say. Next, make an outline of your points. Then, start writing."

- **Encourage breathers** during study time. Don't force your child to work for long periods of time. Instead, have your child set a timer for 20 minutes and take a five-minute break when it goes off. Frequent short breaks help students clear their heads.

Remind your child to do this during class, too. Even a 30-second break (maybe by looking into the distance and breathing deeply) can help your child buckle back down and refocus.

Source: A.J. Lundervold and others, "Parent Rated Symptoms of Inattention in Childhood Predict High School Academic Achievement Across Two Culturally and Diagnostically Diverse Samples," *Frontiers in Psychology*, Frontiers Communications.

Demonstrate respect with six strategies



When it comes to teaching kids about respect, the idea isn't to teach them at all. It's to show them.

When you demonstrate what respect looks like, you'll go a long way toward helping your child become respectful.

To demonstrate respect:

1. **Be polite.** Say *please*, *thank you* and *excuse me* when talking to your child. Knock before entering your child's room.
2. **Be kind**—especially when your child messes up. Everyone makes mistakes. Help your child learn from mishaps.
3. **Be compassionate.** Try not to embarrass your child, and avoid telling jokes at your child's expense.
4. **Be fair.** Don't pass judgment or punish your child before learning all the facts.
5. **Be dependable.** If you tell your child you'll do something, do it. And when you can't do something, be up front about it.
6. **Be honest.** "Little white lies" chip away at the respect your child feels—or doesn't feel—for you. Kids are always watching what adults do.

Promote a 'can-do' attitude to strengthen academic success



School is filled with all sorts of challenges—and success depends on how students respond to those challenges. Help your child understand that people can get smarter by trying, persisting and learning from mistakes.

Attitude determines how students think about problems. Suppose, for example, your child is having trouble understanding a science concept. Some children would throw up their hands and say, “I’m not good at science”—and quit trying. But other kids would take another view. “This is a challenge and I love a challenge.”

Children in the second group believe that even if they don’t understand something now, they will be

able to learn it in the future. They have a “can-do” attitude and are more likely to stick with problems—and solve them.

You can encourage this attitude by praising your child’s effort. “That was challenging, but you kept trying different things until you got it!”

Source: C. Romero, “What We Know About Growth Mindset from Scientific Research,” Mindset Scholars Network.

“Don’t worry about failure. Worry about the chances you miss when you don’t even try.”

—Sherman Finesilver

Show your child that reading is enjoyable and rewarding



Strong reading skills make it easier to learn every school subject. But experts say that to build reading abilities, children must *want* to read. Unfortunately, many kids just aren’t interested.

To inspire your child to read:

- **Listen to audiobooks together.** This is an effective way to show a reluctant reader how interesting books can be. You can download audiobooks from the library, or record yourself reading aloud. Encourage your child to follow along with the book while listening.
- **Follow current events.** Is there a developing news story that interests your child? Read the latest reports together each evening and have a discussion about them.
- **Sign your child up for a pen pal.** Children love receiving mail and learning about life in other countries. Ask your child’s teacher or a librarian about how to get involved.
- **Take a virtual field trip.** Challenge your child to research online about attractions in your area, such as museums and historic sites. Then, your child can guide you through the websites and share the new knowledge.
- **Give reading coupons.** Show your child that you think reading is special by giving reading coupons. Some might be for 30 minutes of reading with you. Others might be good for a new book. Reading coupons can also be used as gifts or to recognize good behavior.

Have you teamed up with your child’s teachers?



When families and teachers form a strong team, students are the real winners. They learn more and do better academically and socially.

Have you been doing everything you can to build a successful school-home team? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

- ___ **1. Have you met** your child’s classroom teacher?
- ___ **2. Do you talk** with your child about school each day and review information the school sends home?
- ___ **3. Do you monitor** schoolwork? If your child struggles with a subject, do you ask the teacher how you can help at home?
- ___ **4. Do you make sure** your child attends school each day and has everything needed for assignments?
- ___ **5. Have you reviewed** the school rules with your child, and said that it is important to follow them?

How well are you doing?

Each *yes* answer means you are helping build a strong family-school team. For each *no* answer, try that idea from the quiz.

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Research disproves common myths about student learning



Research shows that while people often believe they understand what “effective learning” looks like, they’re frequently mistaken.

Here are five common myths about learning, along with the research-based facts:

- **Myth #1:** Everyone has a specific learning style. **Fact:** Kids learn in all kinds of ways. In one situation, they may do better *hearing* new material. But in another? *Seeing* examples could be key.
- **Myth #2:** You’re either born smart or you’re not. **Fact:** Intelligence and abilities can increase over time—especially when kids are given access to books and learning opportunities.
- **Myth #3:** Long study sessions are the best way to prepare for a quiz or test.

Fact: Kids retain facts much better if they study it repeatedly over time. Studying a little each day is much more effective than trying to digest everything in one sitting.

- **Myth #4:** Reading material over and over is the best way to learn it. **Fact:** It’s more effective to practice recalling and restating key ideas.
- **Myth #5:** Right-brained students learn differently than left-brained ones. **Fact:** There’s no evidence that being left-brained (favoring logic and math) or right-brained (favoring art and emotions) has an impact on learning. Actually, there’s no proof that one side of the brain dominates at all.

Source: U. Boser, *Learn Better: Mastering the Skills for Success in Life, Business, and School, Or, How to Become an Expert in Just About Anything*, Rodale Books.

Teach your child to follow four steps to achieve any goal



Children feel good about themselves when they set goals and succeed in reaching them. Having goals also helps students overcome difficulties. When they’re frustrated or upset, they can keep a “picture” in mind of what they’re aiming for.

When your child sets a goal, suggest setting one that can be reached in a short time frame. Then, help your child follow four steps for reaching the goal:

1. **State the goal.** Make sure your child’s goal is specific, written down and posted where it will be seen regularly. “My goal is to learn my multiplication facts.”
2. **Plan how to meet the goal.** “I will make flash cards and study them for

15 minutes every night. I will ask Dad to quiz me on Fridays.”

3. **Talk about the goal** with others—including teachers. This builds accountability and gives others an opportunity to support your child’s efforts.
4. **Do each step in the plan**, one at a time. If problems come up, discuss possible solutions. Perhaps your child is too tired or busy certain evenings to review flash cards. Suggest studying them in the mornings while eating breakfast instead.

Don’t forget to praise your child’s effort each step of the way. “I am proud of you for studying your multiplication facts this morning.” And when your child achieves the goal, celebrate the way hard work paid off!

Q: My spouse has been deployed overseas and won’t be home for several months. The longer the absence, the harder it has been on our third grader—whose school-work is starting to suffer. What advice do you have to help us get through the next few months and also get our child back on track?

Questions & Answers

A: Being separated from a parent is always hard. Having that loved one be away for months at a time can be even harder. Here are some ways to help:

- **Let your child know** that it is OK to be sad. Say something like, “We love Mommy very much. Of course we’re going to miss her. Whenever you feel sad, you can talk with me.”
- **Talk to the teacher** about what’s happening at home so the school can offer support and understanding. Ask how you can help your child get back on track.
- **Maintain routines.** Sticking to consistent daily routines provides a sense of stability and predictability.
- **Help your child stay in touch** with your spouse as much as possible. Encourage phone calls, video messages and email.
- **Foster relationships** with friends, family and other military families who have had similar experiences. They can offer you and your child emotional support.
- **Use a visual countdown**, like a calendar or app, to help your child track when your spouse will return.
- **Look for ways** you and your child can help others. Charity work helps children put their own problems in perspective.

It Matters: Discipline

Research reveals discipline that actually works



Think about how you were raised. What discipline methods did your family use?

Studies show that even when adults don't agree with how they were disciplined as children, many use the same approaches themselves.

For example, adults who were yelled at as children were more likely to yell as parents—even if they thought yelling didn't work, according to one study.

In order to discipline effectively, consider what you believe *will* work. Experts say these methods tend to work best:

- **Plan ahead.** Talk with your child about discipline. Why is it helpful? How does it work? After considering your child's ideas, list basic rules and consequences. Then, follow through with consistency, fairness and respect.
- **Acknowledge good behavior.** What are the most important behaviors for your child to learn? When you see them, take notice. Say, "It was generous of you to lend your book to the new student in your class."
- **Use consequences** for misbehavior that are natural or logical, if possible. A natural consequence of forgetting to do an assignment, for example, is getting the lowest possible score. A logical consequence of losing an item is having to replace it.

Source: S. Barkin and others, "Determinants of Parental Discipline Practices: A National Sample From Primary Care Practices," *Clinical Pediatrics*, SAGE Publications.

Help your child understand why it's important to follow rules

Rules are established guidelines that teach kids how to behave in certain situations. However, following rules can be challenging for children if they don't understand why they are important.

In addition to explaining the reasons for specific rules, you can:

- **Play a game without rules.** After a while, stop and talk about how things are going. Then, play with rules and see which way is better.
- **Imagine a world without rules.** Talk about what would happen if people could steal ... if kids didn't have to go to school ... if people didn't wear seat belts. What would that be like?
- **Encourage your child** to be a leader. Being a student council member, for example, will give



your child experience making and enforcing rules.

- **Praise your child** for obeying rules. You might say, "Thanks for getting up on time. Now we can eat breakfast together."

Family meetings help promote cooperation and communication



Regular family meetings provide opportunities for families to connect and for children to learn discipline, responsibility, communication and cooperation.

To get the most out of meetings:

- **Meet regularly**—once every week or two. Allow family members to request a meeting if they have something important to discuss.
- **Make an agenda.** Before each meeting, ask family members what they would like to discuss. Schedule time to discuss each topic, keeping the meeting under one hour.
- **Put someone in charge.** The chairperson must stick to the agenda and give everyone a fair, uninterrupted say. Initially, the chairperson should be an adult.
- **Take turns.** After one person describes an idea or problem, everyone can take turns explaining how they feel about it. Brainstorm solutions, and give each person time to contribute.
- **Write down decisions.** As each decision is made, record it in a notebook. Plan to revisit certain decisions or solutions at future meetings to discuss whether or not they are working.