



A reboot can help students get back on the right track

When you run into a problem on your laptop or phone, do you ever power it off and restart it? Rebooting a device can help it correct processing issues and work well.

If your child's school year is not going as well as you'd hoped, it may be time to for a reboot, too! Here are a few strategies to help your child get back on track:

- **Make change a family affair.** If you've decided that your child needs to spend more time doing schoolwork, make study time quiet time for the whole family. You can work on paperwork or read while your child works.
- **Replace bad habits.** Breaking a habit is hard. It's much easier to put a different habit in its place.

If your child is in the habit of playing video games right after school ends for the day, suggest pleasure reading for 30 minutes instead. Your child can still relax—and strengthen reading skills at the same time!

- **Get organized.** You should be able to find lots of great-looking calendars available on sale this month. Look for one your child will enjoy using. Then instill the habit of writing down responsibilities for home and school. That can help avoid a last-minute panic.
- **Celebrate successes.** Help your child see the link between the new habits and the results. "You practiced that math and got nine out of 10 correct on the test. That's great!"

Experts share ways to manage screen time



Children are spending more and more time on digital devices. One study found that eight- to 12-year-olds spend an average of 5 hours and 33 minutes a day on recreational screen time—going online, watching TV, playing video games.

While the American Academy of Pediatrics recommend families monitor and manage non-educational screen time, many elementary school students say there are no rules about technology in their homes.

Experts recommend families:

- **Set technology curfews.** Ask your child to turn off digital devices at least 30 minutes before bedtime.
- **Designate screen-free times,** such as during family meals and while in the car.
- **Offer alternatives.** Go on a winter walk. Play cards. Do a craft. Show that there are plenty of ways to have fun—and engage your child's brain—without sitting in front of a screen.

Source: S. Pappas, "What do we really know about kids and screens?" American Psychological Association.

Put an end to procrastination by doing the crummy job first



Your child has a math worksheet, a chapter to read and a writing assignment. If your child dislikes writing, recom-

mend doing that assignment first. Here's why:

- **Crummy jobs are a part of life.** We all have to do some things we don't like. Talk to your child about some of the jobs you don't enjoy doing, but have to do anyway. Doing the laundry and cleaning the bathrooms every week isn't fun, but it is necessary hygiene.
- **Putting off a difficult task** just makes it more difficult. Until that assignment is finished, it's going to occupy your child's mind.
- **Finishing a dreaded task** feels wonderful. Help your child learn to focus on how great it will feel when the job is finished—not

how crummy it will feel while doing it. Encourage your child to build in a small reward for finishing a challenging task, such as spending 10 minutes listening to music.

Sometimes, all it takes to get started on an unpleasant task is a little push. Set a timer for 15 minutes and say, "Work on your writing for 15 minutes. Then you can stop." After getting started, it probably won't be as painful as your child anticipated.

Source: R. Emmett, *The Procrastinating Child: A Handbook for Adults to Help Children Stop Putting Things Off*, Walker & Company.

"Procrastination makes easy things hard; hard things harder."

—Mason Cooley

Mild hearing loss can impact your child's ability to read



Does your child struggle with reading? The issue could be your child's hearing. In one study, up to 25 percent of younger school-

aged children with reading difficulties also had mild to moderate hearing loss. Unfortunately, issues with hearing often go undetected by families and teachers.

Children with hearing loss are more likely to experience learning difficulties, including reading comprehension. The degree of impairment need not be dramatic, either. Simply having multiple ear infections can be enough to damage your child's hearing.

Be aware of these signs of hearing impairment:

- **Favoring one ear.** When you talk, does your child turn one ear toward you? If so, it may mean that's your child's "good" ear.
- **Making things louder.** Does your child gradually turn up the volume when everyone else thinks the sound level is fine?
- **A loud speaking voice.** Does your child regularly speak more loudly than necessary?
- **An uneasy feeling.** If you have a hunch that something is wrong with your child's ears, ask the pediatrician how to proceed.

Source: J. Carroll and H. Breadmore, MD, *Morphological Processing in Children with Phonological Difficulties*, Coventry University and The University of Warwick.

Are you helping your child take school seriously?



Attending school every day improves your child's chances of academic success. Are you reinforcing the importance

of regular on-time attendance and encouraging your child to take school seriously? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

___1. **Do you say** that you expect your child to go to school every day? Show that attendance is important to you, and it will become important to your child.

___2. **Do you reinforce** healthy habits for sleep, nutrition and exercise that ensure your child is ready to learn?

___3. **Do you ignore** weak excuses for missing school? Not feeling like getting out of bed isn't an acceptable reason to miss part of school.

___4. **Do you try** to make medical appointments outside of school hours?

___5. **Do you set** the alarm clock earlier if your child has trouble getting up and ready for school on time?

How well are you doing?

Each *yes* means you are supporting your child's attendance. For each *no* answer, try that idea.

Elementary School
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Published monthly September through May.
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Publisher: Doris McLaughlin.
Publisher Emeritus: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.
Editor: Rebecca Hasty Miyares.

Reading for pleasure promotes healthy brain development



According to a recent study, regular pleasure reading at a young age is linked with stronger cognitive skills and better mental health.

To encourage your elementary schooler to read for fun:

- **Find reading role models** who can inspire your child. Ask relatives, family friends or neighbors who love reading to recommend books they enjoyed at your child's age.
- **Weave reading into daily routines.** At the breakfast table, encourage your child to read a book while you read the news. If your child gets stuck or restless working on a school assignment, suggest taking a break to read just for fun—your child is unlikely to say no!
- **Create a “book nook.”** Help your child make a special place in your

home to read. Include a basket of books, pillows or a bean bag chair, stuffed animals and a light.

- **Take books everywhere** you go and read with your child. For extra fun, have your child pick a book related to your destination. For example, read a book about the dentist together while waiting for a dental appointment.
- **Make a special visit** to the library to stock up on books before a family trip or vacation. Your child will discover that reading is a relaxing way to spend free time away from home.
- **Offer a monthly incentive** for finishing a certain number of books.

Source: Yun-Jun Sun, et al, “Early-initiated childhood reading for pleasure: Associations with better cognitive performance, mental well-being and brain structure in young adolescence,” *Psychological Medicine*, Cambridge University Press.

Q: My elementary schooler does not like to write. When there is a writing assignment, my child just stares at the blank piece of paper. Is there anything I can do to help?

Questions & Answers

A: Elementary schoolers are often reluctant writers. Many simply freeze with fear at the thought of writing. They worry that what they write won't be any good, or that they'll be made fun of.

To overcome writer's block:

- **Empathize with your child.** Say that professional writers have difficulty writing sometimes, too—and that's OK.
- **Recommend practice.** Have your child write about anything that comes to mind, no matter how silly. Or, suggest writing about a personal interest.
- **Talk through topic ideas** with your child. Encourage brainstorming, and ask your child to make a list of ideas.
- **Suggest your child write down** ideas just as they come. Later your child can edit for flow, grammar and spelling.
- **Encourage your child** to use a computer to write if possible. This makes revisions easier.
- **Be gentle when reviewing** your child's writing. Note what you like first and don't over-criticize. Focus on what your child is trying to say and not just the mechanics of writing.
- **Avoid fixing mistakes.** This will damage confidence and send the message that you don't think your child is capable of fixing them independently.
- **Be patient.** Allow your child to express frustration. It takes time and practice to become a good writer.

Accelerate your child's math learning with three strategies



Simple things families do at home can make a big difference in how well students perform in math. Use these three

strategies to boost your child's math learning:

1. **Family engagement.** Partnering with the teacher to support your child's math learning results in higher achievement. Look over math papers your child brings home, and talk about what your child is learning. Ask the teacher what else you can do at home to help your child with math.
2. **Math talk.** When your child solves a problem, ask, “How did you get your answer?” Children solve problems

more accurately in the long run when they regularly talk about their math thinking and explain their methods. While explaining, they clarify their thinking—and often catch their own mistakes.

3. **Motivation.** Children often do better at things they enjoy, so make math fun! When you play board games, appoint your child scorekeeper or banker. Put a math twist on games like hopscotch (write a problem in each square) and Simon Says (“Simon says add 18 plus 18”). In the car, challenge each other to solve problems using numbers on road signs. If the speed limit is 65, your child can solve $6 + 5$, $6 - 5$ or 6×5 .

It Matters: Building Character

Empathize with your child—up to a certain point



Is there such a thing as being too supportive when it comes to your child's negative emotions? Experts say yes.

One study showed that parents and caregivers who are overly sympathetic about their children's troubled feelings think their kids are more socially well-adjusted than others. Those same kids' teachers, however, rate them as being less well-adjusted than their peers.

Why the disconnect? It could be that when parents indulge every bad mood their child has, the child never stops to consider that there may be little justification for that mood.

This doesn't mean you should ignore your child's feelings. But rather than rush to agree every time your child feels wronged:

- **Ask for details.** If your child says a friend was mean, find out more before agreeing. Say, "Tell me what happened." This way, you're encouraging your child to open up but not automatically agreeing that your child was treated badly.
- **Challenge your child.** If your student is upset that about a quiz grade and says the quiz was really "unfair," ask questions. "Why wasn't it fair?" If the real story is that your child didn't study for it, then point that out. Your student was irresponsible, not mistreated. It's a difficult—but vital—lesson to learn.

Source: V.L. Castro and others, "Changing tides: Mothers' supportive emotion socialization relates negatively to third-grade children's social adjustment in school," *Social Development*, John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Helping others promotes confidence and build skills

Children want to feel like they play an important role in their community. Volunteering can help them build social skills and develop self-confidence—which also benefits them in school.

Find a volunteer or community service activity you and your child can do together. Here are some ideas:

- **Take part in a clothing drive.** Collect coats, gloves and hats and donate them to local shelters.
- **Bake something** for a senior citizen or a parent of a new baby.
- **Make sandwiches** for people who are homeless.
- **Help take care of a pet.** If a neighbor is going away for a few days, you and your child could offer to feed and walk the dog.



- **Start a fundraising campaign.** Help your child raise money for a family or community program in need of financial assistance.

Talk with your child about the importance of honesty



By the time children reach elementary school, most know the difference between being honest and lying. But that doesn't always make telling the truth easy for them.

To encourage honesty:

- **Talk about it.** Does your child believe that honesty is the best policy? Why or why not? When, if ever, does your child think it's OK to lie?
- **Discuss the consequences** of lying. Lying destroys trust. If your child makes a habit of lying to people, they won't believe what your child says—even when it's the truth.

- **Demonstrate honesty.** Children notice when family members tell the truth—and when they don't.
- **Create opportunities** for telling the truth. Say, "Why did you rip this book?" not, "Did you do this?"
- **React calmly** when your child lies. Express confidence that your child will make better choices in the future.
- **Reward trustworthiness.** If your child is truthful in a difficult situation, offer praise. But don't let your child off the hook. Follow through with consequences.

Source: V. Talwar and others, "Children's Evaluations of Tattles, Confessions, Prosocial and Antisocial Lies," *International Review of Pragmatics*, Brill.