

Primary Grades Parent Guidebook

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*“There are two great things that you can give your children:
one is roots, the other is wings.” Hodding Carter, author*

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Provide Support at Home

Communicate with your child

In order to keep up with what's going on in your child's life, take the time to talk with your child every day. The following tips will help you and your child communicate effectively.

- ▶ Ask open-ended questions that require more than one-word answers. Instead of *"How was school?"* say *"Tell me about your day"* or *"What did you learn in school today?"*
- ▶ Be available when your child wants to talk. This may be right after your child gets home from school, or before your child goes to bed. Another good time to talk is when you and your child are driving in the car.
- ▶ Recognize the importance of nonverbal communication. Children aren't always able to put into words what they want or need their parents to know. It is, therefore, important to pay attention to body language, moods, eating habits, sleeping patterns, and school performance. These can be good indicators of how things are going at school and with friends.
- ▶ Regularly spend one-on-one time with your child doing things you both enjoy. Cooking, shopping, playing a game, taking a walk - these are all great ways to spend quality time with your child. They also provide opportunities for you to discuss issues and concerns in a safe, comfortable environment.
- ▶ Try to eat dinner as a family as often as possible. Research shows that students whose families eat dinner together do better in school. Turn off the television and talk about your day. It's a good time for families to reconnect.

Develop routines

Your child is learning new things at an amazing rate. Routines for sleep, meals, homework, chores, and play can provide real stability for young learners. What might seem like a simple routine to you may be a source of comfort and accomplishment to your child.

Elementary students are often given homework to do. Some children want to do their homework right after school. Others want to take a break and do their homework later. Help your child determine the best time to do homework and create a schedule that makes homework a part of your child's daily routine.

Establishing a good bedtime routine not only helps your child get to bed on time, it also helps things run more smoothly in the morning. As a part of your child's bedtime routine, have your child put everything that's needed for the next day in his/her backpack, and put the backpack in the same place each night.

Make homework time productive

Have a quiet, well-lit, comfortable place for your child to study. Equip this area with paper, pencils, pens, ruler, markers, etc. When your child is working on homework, try to limit distractions. Turn off the television, remove the video games, and make homework time a quiet time in your household.



Your child may ask for help with homework from time to time. If your child gets stuck or needs help, go over the assignment and try to explain anything that seems confusing. Also be available to help review for tests and quizzes, organize work, and listen to your child read aloud. You should never do your child's homework; however, you should look over your child's work on a regular basis to see if there are any areas that need additional work.

Encourage your child to use any free time during the school day to get started on homework. Children who use class time wisely have much less work to do at home. If homework seems excessive or if your child consistently struggles with homework, contact the teacher and express your concerns.

Promote active learning

Active learning involves problem solving, exploring personal interests, and asking and answering questions. Participating in team sports, visiting museums, and playing a musical instrument are all activities that support active learning. Here are a few ways that you can promote active learning at home.

- ▶ Spend time listening to and talking with your child. Involve your child in family discussions and ask for your child's input.
- ▶ Play games, involve your child in family projects, and turn daily activities such as meal preparation into learning experiences.
- ▶ Discuss current events, movies, music, and TV shows.

Active learning pursuits will help your child grow and develop intellectually. These activities will also help your child be more successful in school.

Encourage a healthy lifestyle

It's important that your child eat a balanced diet and develop healthy eating habits. Have nutritious foods at home and send healthy lunches to school.

Also, insist on a reasonable bedtime hour so that your child will be alert and well rested for school.

Elementary children need daily exercise. If your child is reluctant to engage in active play, look for alternate activities that require movement, such as dance or water sports. The important thing is that your child is off the couch and moving around.



Teach Internet safety

In the primary grades, children often use the Internet at school to do simple assignments, either as guided lessons or as supplementary research. Many children also use the Internet at home to connect with friends and family members. All children must be taught how to use the Internet safely, responsibly, and effectively.

The tips on the following page will help ensure that your child learns how to use the Internet responsibly.

Internet Tips

- ▶ Surf the Internet with your child. Show your child how to navigate websites, perform simple searches, and bookmark pages. If your child is proficient in using the Internet, let him/her do the navigating. Demonstrating this skill will give your child a sense of pride and accomplishment.
- ▶ Find some appropriate sites to visit, and then go through these sites together. Help your child find sites that relate to his/her interests and hobbies.
- ▶ Have your child show you a favorite website, and ask, “*What do you like about this site?*” Be careful when making judgments about the sites your child likes. Remember, you want to keep the lines of communication open.
- ▶ Keep your family computer in a common area of your home, such as the kitchen or dining room. Children are less likely to visit an inappropriate site if they know you may be watching.
- ▶ Set limits on screen time for your child. Surfing the Internet can consume a huge amount of time. Set a timer if you need to monitor the amount of time your child spends online.
- ▶ Take full advantage of parental filters, but remember that filters are not completely effective. Supervision and monitoring are the best deterrents to inappropriate behavior.
- ▶ Discuss the benefits and the drawbacks of the Internet. Make sure that your child knows to never give out personal information, such as name, address, phone number, school, or birthday.



For more information on Internet safety, go to www.socialsafety.org or www.wiredsafety.org



The Primary Grades Year by Year

Students in the primary grades grow and change a great deal from year to year. This section provides an overview of the key physical and emotional developments, along with the academic expectations, for each grade level. Keep in mind that children all develop differently.

Kindergarten



Is your child ready for kindergarten?

Most school districts require that certain skills be mastered before a child starts kindergarten. For instance, newly registered kindergartners are generally expected to be able to do the following:

- ▶ say their full name
- ▶ follow simple instructions
- ▶ recite some nursery rhymes
- ▶ retell a familiar event or story
- ▶ correctly identify colors
- ▶ identify some letters in the alphabet
- ▶ write their first name
- ▶ identify basic shapes such as star, circle, and square
- ▶ match objects (socks, shoes, mittens, gloves)
- ▶ notice what is the same about objects and what is different
- ▶ attempt to count to 10

Children entering kindergarten should also be able to:

- ▶ make choices
- ▶ take turns
- ▶ share with others
- ▶ help with chores at home

Know what to expect

Kindergarten is the beginning of a child's formal education. *It's important for children to have a positive experience and to get their education off to a good start.*



In kindergarten, children learn how to

- ▶ listen without interrupting
- ▶ make new friends and play with other children on the playground
- ▶ follow directions and work in groups

Kindergarteners learn

- ▶ numbers to 20, shapes, simple principles of time, and some understanding of money
- ▶ letter sounds, rhyming words, and how to write letters
- ▶ basic information about plants, animals, and the weather
- ▶ the days of the weeks and the months of the year

As the year progresses and kindergarteners develop new skills, they become more independent and self-confident.

Help your kindergartener succeed

- ▶ Try to keep your child's after school hours simple, especially at the beginning of the year when you're establishing a routine.
- ▶ Talk to your child about what's happening at school and be interested in what your child is learning.
- ▶ Read to your child. Look through picture books together and talk about what your child sees.
- ▶ Stimulate language development by discussing subjects of interest.
- ▶ To help your child develop social skills and independence, set up play dates with your child's friends and family members.

- ▶ While group activities are important, it's good for your child to also have some activities that can be done alone, such as drawing, shooting hoops, collecting baseball cards, rocks, or coins.
- ▶ Have your child help make dinner and perform simple tasks. Ask questions such as, "*How many eggs are in the refrigerator?*"
- ▶ The average five-year old can be energetic and fidgety. Give your child lots of attention and praise.

When imagination turns to lying

Children in kindergarten like to engage in imaginary play, but sometimes fantasy play can turn into lying. Your child might lie to cover the truth, to protect someone else, or to avoid an unpleasant task. Whatever the reason, you can encourage your child to be honest by creating an environment in which it's safe to tell the truth. If your child confesses to a "lapse in judgment," thank him/her for being honest and telling the truth. Then calmly apply fair, appropriate consequences for your child's actions.

Perhaps the best way to teach a child is to be a good role model. When children see their parents always telling the truth, they are more likely to do the same.

The summer after kindergarten

Children are very active at this age. Encourage your child to run, jump, climb, and swing. Since most children are beginning to develop a sense of rhythm, you may find that your child loves to march, dance, or clap to music. Children this age also have active imaginations and will often engage in imaginary play.

After a year in kindergarten, children are able to do much more for themselves. Encourage your child to become more independent and self-sufficient by asking him/her to make simple decisions (e.g., what to eat for lunch, what to wear, what game to play.)



To help develop eye-hand coordination, play catch in the backyard or put a puzzle together. Work on fine-motor skills by making a game of common activities, such as zipping and unzipping a jacket, buckling and unbuckling a belt, or using locks and keys. Drawing, painting, and coloring also strengthen fine-motor skills.

A child's development at this age is reflected in how easily the child picks up new vocabulary, such as the names of dinosaurs, animals, or flowers. Words such as "Tyrannosaurus Rex" are not only fun for your child to say, they also help your child learn to distinguish sounds. Visit the nearest library and get books, CDs, or videos on a subject your child is interested in, and help your child learn new vocabulary.

