

FIRST

FIRST GRADE

Parent Guidebook



Dear Parent

First grade is an exciting time for your child. First graders expand their skills in reading, writing, and math. And in social studies and science, students learn about the world in which we live.

But first grade is about more than academics. In first grade, students develop important social skills, and they become more responsible, independent, and self-sufficient.

As the parent of a first grader, there is a great deal you can do to help your child succeed in school. Read on to learn how you can support your child during this very important year.



We know that many children are being raised by grandparents or guardians. For the sake of simplicity, the term "parent" refers to any primary caregiver.

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Introduction

First grade is a year full of firsts. It's the year students start writing simple sentences, adding and subtracting, and even conducting small science experiments. Most importantly, it's the year that students develop and improve their reading skills. As you watch your child increase his/her knowledge and develop new skills, know that your guidance and support are key to your child's success!

This book walks you through the ways your child will learn and grow this year, physically, intellectually, and socially. And it discusses what your child might study and learn in reading, writing, math, science, and social studies. This book also provides simple things you can do at home to help your first grader be successful, both in and out of the classroom.



Let's make this a great year!

Children develop at different rates

While there are certain benchmarks most first graders should be able to meet, children develop at different rates, and there is a huge range of what "normal" looks like at this age. Schools recognize that children entering first grade have different skill levels, and teachers are prepared to work with children who have a wide variety of skills and learning preferences.

Growing Up: First Grade



Physical Development

As the year goes on, look for your child to improve his/her **fine motor skills**—skills needed to write, color, cut, and draw. Your child's **large motor skills** will also improve—skills needed for playing games, sports, and other physical activities.

To help your child improve his/her fine motor skills, put together puzzles, do art projects, and encourage your child to button and zip his/her own clothes. To help develop your child's large motor skills, do fun physical activities together, such as dancing, riding bikes, or playing catch.

Intellectual Development

Your child is becoming more and more curious about the world and how it works—and you may have noticed that he/she has lots of questions.

Be open to your child's questions, and encourage his/her curiosity by taking trips to museums, zoos, and nature centers. And if you ever feel overwhelmed by endless "why" questions, respond with another question, such as "What do you think?" or "Why do you think that is?"

Social Development

First graders enjoy being with friends and are often interested in helping others. Create opportunities for your child to get together with classmates and to participate in group and team activities. Social and group activities are not only fun for your child, they help boost your child's self-esteem and self-confidence.

First Grade Academics

The academics in first grade vary depending on the school and/or teacher. There are, however, certain skills that all first graders work on.

Reading

In kindergarten, children gain the necessary tools to learn to read. In first grade, they put those tools to use.

Here are some of the skills your first grader will work on this year:

- ▶ recognizing sight words without having to sound them out.
- ▶ using familiar words to decode unfamiliar words (e.g., figuring out “hit” because it contains the known word “it”).
- ▶ recognizing reading errors (e.g., knowing when he/she has misread or mispronounced a word).

Visit the library and look for reading books with labels such as “Level 1” and “Beginning Reading.”

Learn the Lingo

Sight words: These are commonly used words that reading specialists recommend students know by sight.

a	can	here	like	on	to
am	come	I	look	see	up
an	do	in	me	so	we
and	go	is	my	the	went
at	he	it	no	this	you

Help your child look for these words in books and in real life.



Read everywhere and often

As first graders get better at recognizing words and reading phrases and sentences, they'll likely be eager to show off their skills. Ask your child to read road signs and packages at the grocery store. To help your child make the connection between spoken and written words, turn on the captions for a favorite TV show.

Mix it up (but not too much)

Make reading fun by picking out new books at the library and bookstore. Encourage family members to give books for birthdays and holidays.

But don't forget about old books when your child gets new ones. While new books can be exciting (and give you a break from reading and hearing the same books over and over), reading the same books repeatedly can be very beneficial for your child. When your child is reading a favorite book and already knows the story, he/she can work on pronouncing words properly—and reading aloud in a more even tone.

Some frustration is normal

New readers often become frustrated if they can't figure out a word right away, or if a book feels "too hard" or "boring." They may lose interest, start goofing off, or just give up. This can be frustrating for both of you.

Don't let your frustration show, and don't make reading a chore or a punishment. Make reading fun by keeping your tone of voice bright and enthusiastic. Help your child figure out hard words, and keep him/her engaged by asking questions about the story, such as "What do you think is going to happen next?" and "How do you think that character feels?"



Writing

First graders' writing and spelling skills grow tremendously throughout the year, making it possible for them to write longer sentences about more diverse topics.

First graders' fine motor skills are improving as well, allowing them to write more clearly and neatly, which is a crucial first step toward using writing as a form of communication. And while first graders will work on improving spelling, your child will sometimes spell words how they sound, rather than how they are actually spelled. And that's okay.

Here are some ways you can help your first grader develop and practice his/her writing skills.

- ▶ Help your child write notes and letters. Writing thank you notes for gifts, letters to favorite relatives, and get well cards to sick friends are great ways for your child to practice writing with an audience in mind. Talk about how to use correct capitalization and punctuation as well.
- ▶ Use letter magnets to practice spelling out words and sentences.
- ▶ Ask your child to draw a picture and write a couple of sentences describing the picture.
- ▶ Take a break from paper. Keep a whiteboard or chalkboard for your child to use to practice writing.
- ▶ Give your child praise for any writing attempt.

Math

In first grade, children build on the math concepts they learned in kindergarten. Here are some of the skills your child might work on this year:

- ▶ counting and writing numbers from 20 to 100.
- ▶ using math symbols to understand addition and subtraction.
- ▶ working with shapes and segments of shapes.
- ▶ understanding the concept of whole, half, and quarter.
- ▶ telling time to the half hour.
- ▶ drawing simple graphs.

Increase your child's interest in math by showing how important numbers are in our daily lives, and by providing your child with fun opportunities to practice his/her math skills.

- ▶ Use drawings or small objects to practice adding and subtracting. For example, ask your child to draw two apples and six oranges. Then ask your child to count the total number of fruit.
- ▶ Provide small objects such as beads or cereal for your child to practice counting.
- ▶ Talk about terms such as less than, greater than, and equal.



Learn the Lingo

Manipulatives – Manipulatives include items such as beads, tiles, counters, and cubes. Manipulatives are fun and colorful, and are especially ideal for children who learn by touch or doing. Often used to teach math concepts, manipulatives also help young learners develop their fine motor skills.

Science

First grade science focuses on the natural world, from the life cycles of insects to weather patterns. Students may also learn about the planets and space.

- ▶ Have discussions with your child about features of the natural world and how they work. For example, during a storm, talk about how thunder and lightning are formed.
- ▶ Go for walks and observe the clouds in the sky. Talk about how some clouds look different than others.
- ▶ Help your child collect leaves, and have him/her draw pictures of the different shapes and colors of the leaves you find.



Social Studies

In social studies, children learn about families and how they live and work. Teachers may introduce the concept of “community,” and discuss how a community functions (e.g., what firefighters, police, doctors, nurses, and other professionals do).

- ▶ Point out (and perhaps visit) important places in your community – the police station, fire station, hospital, and public library.
- ▶ Talk to your child about neighborhoods, cities, states, countries, and continents, starting with the area in which you live. Look at pictures of other states and countries and talk about the places your child might like to visit when he/she gets older.



Work with Your School

Support and work with the teachers and principal(s) at your school.

Like you, they want your child to enjoy school and have a successful year.

Stay informed. Attend all parent programs, meetings, and parent-teacher conferences. Also, regularly check your school's website for news and updates.

- ▶ By your words and actions, show your child that doing well in school and getting a good education are very important.
- ▶ Make sure your student is in school every day, and insist that your child follow the school rules and treat everyone with respect.
- ▶ Make the most of parent-teacher conferences. Before each conference, make a list of the information you want to share, along with any questions or concerns you may have. Also, ask your child if there is anything you should discuss with the teacher.

Reach out to your child's teacher

If you have concerns about your child's progress, or if your child is having any problems in school, be sure to talk to your child's teacher.

Help Your Child Succeed

Now is the time to help your child develop habits that will promote success this year, and in the years to come. Here's what you can do.



Develop routines

Routines for sleep, meals, homework, chores, and play can provide stability for young learners. What might seem like a simple routine to you may be a source of comfort and accomplishment to your child. Having routines at home may also help your child get better at following routines at school.

Establish morning and nighttime routines and make sure your child gets to bed early enough to get 10-11 hours of sleep.

Make picking out clothes for the next day part of your child's bedtime routine. It will give your child a sense of control and accomplishment—and make the mornings easier.

Determine a time for homework

In many schools, first grade is the first year students have homework. 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. For instance, decide if the best time for homework is after school, before dinner, or early evening—and try to stick to that schedule.

Promote Active Learning

Active learning involves problem solving, exploring personal interests, and asking and answering questions. Playing a musical instrument, visiting museums, and participating in team sports are all activities that support active learning. Here are a few ways 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.

Make homework time productive

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



Social and Emotional Growth



First grade is an important year for developing confidence and self-esteem. Children who are confident and feel good about themselves perform better in school, make smarter choices, and are better able to take on new challenges.

Here are some things you can do to help your child develop a positive self-image and become more confident.

Help Develop Confidence

Here are some things you can do to help your first-grader become a more confident and independent learner.

- ▶ Give your child a small job to do each day, such as setting the table or putting clothes away. Make sure the task is completed—it's important for children to learn to finish what they start.
- ▶ Let your child make choices. Allow him/her to choose the bedtime book, which clothes to wear (with your help), or what game to play.
- ▶ Consider your child's interests and look for groups he/she might enjoy. Also look for social opportunities with family and friends.
- ▶ Praise your child for a job well done, and also for good effort.

Help develop your child's self-esteem

As a parent, you play a vital role in developing your child's self-esteem. The first step in doing this is to realize that your words and actions make a difference to your child.

Here's what you can do

Parents are often quick to express disapproval, but they don't always get around to complimenting their child's behavior. Be on the lookout for situations in which your child is doing a good job or displaying a positive character trait. For example, if you like the way your child completes a chore, then say something like, *"I really appreciate your help in the kitchen. You always remember to clean up any mess you make."* Give specifics to reinforce the behavior.

There will be times when you need to correct your child's behavior. Be constructive, and avoid criticism that's harsh or unnecessary, especially in front of others.

Children remember positive statements, so give your child some words of praise or encouragement every day.



In Closing

This will be a year of big changes. Your child will learn a great deal, and you will play a big part in his/her successes.

Be positive and supportive, show interest, and maintain a sense of humor. With your support and guidance, your child is sure to find success, not only in first grade, but for years to come.

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**Information, tips, and advice
for parents of first-grade students**

Linda O'Brien, MEd • Krystel Chenault, MA



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