

# Elementary School Parents<sup>®</sup>

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Walden Academy Charter School

## *make the difference!*



## Coach your child to academic success with four strategies

**A**n effective coach is someone who guides, encourages and inspires. When you play this role for your child, you provide motivation to persevere, problem-solve and find answers.

To be a positive academic coach:

1. **Act as a resource.** Expect your child to complete assignments independently. But be available to offer encouragement, answer questions and suggest places where your child can find additional information, such as a website or a particular reference book. This encourages resourcefulness and self-reliance.
2. **Focus on the learning process.** While grades are important, they are only a result of learning. Emphasize the process, not just the outcome.

Praise your child's hard work, persistence and steady progress.

3. **Be willing to say, "I don't know."**  
If your child asks a question about a topic you're not familiar with, simply say "I never learned that. Let's look it up together." This shows that not knowing something is the first step to finding the answer.
4. **Acknowledge strengths and weaknesses.** Every child is different. Some students never need help in English, but may struggle in math. Support and encourage your child in every subject, but do not demand the same level of performance in each one.

Source: K.T. Alvy, Ph.D., *The Positive Parent: Raising Healthy, Happy and Successful Children, Birth–Adolescence*, Teachers College Press.

## Teach your child how to achieve a goal



January is a customary time for setting goals. This year, teach your child how to achieve one. After

choosing a short-term goal, guide your child through four simple steps to reach it:

1. **State the goal.** "My goal is to learn my multiplication facts." Ask your child to write it down and hang it in a prominent spot.
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. **Discuss the goal with others.** This builds commitment to the goal. Your child should tell the teacher about the goal, too.
4. **Do each step in the plan,** one at a time. If problems come up, talk about possible solutions. Perhaps your child is too tired to review flash cards after a long day of school. It might work better to study them in the mornings while eating breakfast instead.

Notice effort and progress each step of the way—and celebrate together when the hard work pays off!

# Regular family meetings build skills and make life a bit easier



Weekly family meetings are a wonderful way to help elementary schoolers learn essential skills like cooperation, problem-solving and leadership. They also make life at home run more smoothly.

Try these strategies for productive family meetings:

- **Establish a schedule.** Meet at the same time every week. Keep meetings short—about fifteen minutes.
- **Set ground rules.** No devices or other distractions.
- **Plan an agenda.** During the week, let family members jot down issues they'd like to address.
- **Encourage participation.** Give each family member a chance to talk uninterrupted.

- **Brainstorm solutions** for concerns raised during the meeting.
  - **Discuss expectations** for the upcoming week and review goals.
  - **Coordinate schedules.** Review your family calendar and discuss who is doing what this week.
  - **End with a team-building activity.** Play a quick game, or make up a story or sing a song.
- After a few meetings, let your child take a turn leading.

**“Unity is strength ... when there is teamwork and collaboration, wonderful things can be achieved.”**

—Mattie Stepanek

# Brainstorming is the solution for your child's writer's block!



Writing can feel like a chore to some kids. They find it boring, while others get overwhelmed and frustrated trying to come up with ideas. You can't force your child to love writing. But you can overcome reluctance to write by practicing brainstorming.

Brainstorming is a low-stress way to spark creativity and break through writer's block. It's an easy process that teaches essential skills. When students brainstorm by making lists or drawing concept maps, they learn to break down big, complex ideas into smaller, manageable pieces. This not only makes writing less intimidating but also builds a foundation for stronger organizational skills.

The next time your child can't think of what to write about:

- **Make lists.** Here are a few topics to get your child started: *Things I love. My favorite animals, places, toys or food. Things I know a lot about. Scary characters. Things adults say.*
- **Imagine.** Ask your child some questions that will spark new ways to think about people, events and scenes. “What would it feel like to be a car, a house or a dog? What would life be like if you had four hands?”
- **Use visual images.** Have your child look at a picture and write down what it brings to mind. Or, find something in your house and ask what it makes your child think of.
- **Add action to ideas.** What will happen next? How quickly will it happen?

# Are you building a bridge between home and school?



Studies consistently show that when families and schools form a strong team, students are more likely to learn more and do better in school.

It's halfway through the school year and time to reflect on your working relationship with the school. Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

- \_\_\_ **1. Have you met** with your child's teacher at least once this year?
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you talk** with your child about school each day and review the 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 gets to school on time each day?
- \_\_\_ **5. Have you reviewed** the school handbook with your child? Do you tell your child to follow all school rules?

## How well are you doing?

If most of your answers were *yes*, you are establishing a strong school-family team. For each *no* answer, try that idea from the quiz.

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# What should you do if your child is caught cheating in school?



The teacher reports catching your child cheating. While your first instinct might be to impose a severe punishment, don't do anything while you are upset. Experts recommend having a calm conversation to understand why your child felt the need to cheat.

Here are four common reasons elementary school students cheat:

1. **They are afraid** of their families' reaction if they bring home a low grade. Make sure your child knows that a low grade would not affect your love. You would be concerned, not angry, about the situation.
2. **They have high expectations** for their own academic achievement.

Tell your child not to put too much emphasis on grades. What matters is what your child has learned.

3. **They think cheating is no big deal.** Explain that cheating is always wrong. Cheaters rob themselves of learning the material and they are unfair to honest students.
4. **They were asked to.** Tell your child that letting someone look at a test or copy an assignment is wrong. A real friend would never ask someone to do that. Help your child role-play turning down a request to cheat: "I'd like to help you, but I don't like cheating. Besides, we could get into a lot of trouble."

Source: J. Craig, Ph.D., *Parents on the Spot! What to Do When Kids Put You There*, Hearst Books.

**Q:** My fourth-grader does well on tests and quizzes, but doesn't always complete daily assignments. How can I get my child to take schoolwork more seriously?

## Questions & Answers

**A:** It's necessary for your child learn to take schoolwork seriously. Although quizzes and tests may have a larger impact on overall grades, it's classwork and assignments that reinforce knowledge on a daily basis.

To help your elementary schooler become a more responsible student:

- **Explain how you feel.** If you haven't spelled it out yet, do so now. "I've noticed that you blow off your assignments quite a bit. That's not OK, so let's figure out how to change the situation."
- **Enforce a daily work time.** Brainstorm with your child to find a time that works best—and make sure your child sticks to it. "Study time starts at five o'clock. No arguments." If there are no assignments, your child can use the time to review class notes, get started on a long-term project or read.
- **Tie schoolwork to privileges.** "After you have finished your work, you may relax and play until dinner." To show your child you're serious, be sure to check that the work was really completed.
- **Follow up at school.** If your home strategies don't work, get the teachers involved. Let your child know that you'll be checking with them each week to see whether your student is turning in completed assignments. Set appropriate consequences for not doing so.

# Bring geography to life with fun and educational activities



Learning about geography can make the entire world more relevant to your child. To spark curiosity about places near and far,

have your child:

- **Draw a map** of how to get from your house to school, the grocery store or a friend's house. Then, follow the map together.
- **Walk outside** and identify *north*, *south*, *east* and *west*, as well as *northeast*, *northwest*, *southeast* and *southwest*. Challenge your child to describe where things in your town are located. "My school is *northeast* of my house." "The library is *south* of the fire station."
- **Go through your house** and find out where various items came from by looking for labels on them. A calculator may have come from Taiwan. A box of cereal may have a Battle Creek, Michigan or Chicago, Illinois address. Locate the places on a map.
- **Look for street patterns.** In some towns, streets run north and south, while avenues run east and west. Or, street names may be alphabetical. Help your child recognize the patterns.
- **Start a collection** of objects from countries around the world. Stamps, postcards and coins are all easy items to collect, categorize and store.
- **Become a family history detective.** With your child, find the places your relatives have lived on a map. Then, have your child calculate how far those places are from your home today.
- **Plan a pretend trip.** Let your child choose any destination in the world. Have your child find the location on a map, and research the geography, climate and landmarks of the area.



# It Matters: Effective Discipline

## Take five steps to address clownish misbehavior



It's wonderful to have a good sense of humor. But it's no laughing matter when a student constantly disrupts

class with jokes and rude body sounds.

If your child is clowning around in school, take these steps:

1. **Look for what's behind the behavior.** Sometimes children need attention or want to impress their classmates. Often, they try to use humor to cover up academic shortcomings.
2. **Work with the teacher.** Together, try to identify when the problem behavior started and what might have triggered it. Acting up after recess, for example, may mean that your child needs help settling down. Perhaps the teacher could assign your child a high-profile task like handing out worksheets.
3. **Talk about it.** Your child might not understand when it's OK to be silly and when it's not. Explain that there's a time when being funny and "clever" is actually being disrespectful.
4. **Establish clear guidelines.** With the teacher's help, explain to your child what type of behavior you both expect.
5. **Set consequences** that you and the teacher will enforce if your child breaks the rules.

By following these five steps, you and the teacher should be able to get your child's behavior back on track!

Source: K. Levine, *What To Do ... When Your Child Has Trouble at School*, Reader's Digest Books.

## Improve your child's behavior with teacher-tested strategies

**S**truggling to get your child to focus on schoolwork, pay attention or follow instructions at home? You're not alone. What if you could get advice from people who successfully manage not just one child, but 20 or more at a time? Here's what teachers suggest:

- **Explain what you want** your child to do. Focus on the tasks you want to be routine—like putting items that go to school by the front door.
- **Post a schedule.** Your child will know what to do and when to do it—and will feel more independent.
- **Assign meaningful tasks.** Expect your child to contribute by doing chores that benefit the family.
- **Add excitement to ordinary tasks.** Challenge your child to clean up a mess in rhythm to music.
- **Use silent signals.** A gentle touch on the shoulder should get your



child's attention. Flick the lights off and on to give a five-minute warning before bedtime.

- **Avoid abrupt transitions.** Let your child know how many minutes are left before it's time to switch gears and do something else.

## Positive discipline is linked to better behavior at home & school



Research shows that physical punishment is ineffective and can actually worsen a child's behavior. The most effective approach to discipline is not punishment, but teaching correct behavior in a positive, calm and loving way. When disciplining, consider your:

- **Facial expression.** A relaxed look will encourage your child to cooperate. You don't need to look angry or upset.
- **Body language.** If possible, face your child and make eye contact.

Avoid intimidating gestures such as shaking a finger or putting your hands on your hips.

- **Words.** Tell your child exactly what you expect. "It's time to work on your assignment" is better than, "Aren't you supposed to be doing your assignment?"
- **Tone of voice.** Project a tone that is firm but not harsh. You want to sound confident and in control—communicating the expectation that your child will listen.

Source: A. Heilmann, Ph.D. and others, "Physical punishment and child outcomes: A narrative review of prospective studies," *The Lancet*, Elsevier.