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Elementary School Parents[®]

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Avoid the common pitfalls of overprotective parents

When children are born, they really are helpless. And it's the job of parents to protect them in every way they can.

But as kids grow up, the need to protect them changes. Children become more capable and able to do things for themselves. Parents who continue to protect them from *everything* may actually smother their child's independence. That can lead to a child who isn't able to make decisions by herself.

Overprotective parents send a message to their kids that they aren't able to handle things by themselves. They also make it harder for kids to develop the perseverance that comes from getting knocked down and getting back up again.

To avoid a few of the common pitfalls of overprotective parents:

- **Don't ever do your child's work** for her. If she has forgotten about a big project, she will have to face the consequences.
 - **Don't try to negotiate** a better grade for your child. If you or your child are confused about a grade she receives, let your child talk to the teacher about it first.
 - **Don't call the parent** of a child your child is complaining about in school. Give your child a chance to work it out. If it is a serious problem, contact the school.
- Try to trust your child. Give her chances to do things for herself. Will she make mistakes? Probably. But she'll also develop responsibility to do things for herself.

Source: David Walsh, *No: Why Kids—of All Ages—Need to Hear It and Ways Parents Can Say It*, ISBN: 0-7432-8920-X (Free Press, 1-800-223-2336, www.simonsays.com).

Ask your child three questions after every test



Unless your child aces every test, there are probably things he can improve before he takes another exam. Here are three questions that will help him do better:

1. **What was my biggest problem on this test?** Look over the questions your child missed to see if there's a pattern. Perhaps he had trouble with the math word problems.
2. **What caused my problem?** Have your child look closely at the questions he missed. Did he make careless mistakes, like forgetting to check his math? Did he run out of time and have to leave some questions blank?
3. **What could I do differently next time?** Once your child figures out what to fix, help him plan for the next test. He might need to practice word problems. Or he might spend a few minutes checking for careless errors.

Source: Laurie Rozakis, *Super Study Skills*, ISBN: 0-439-21601-X (Scholastic Reference, 1-800-770-4662, www.scholastic.com).

Make studying for big tests easier with a giant study guide



Let's face it—studying for a big test isn't a whole lot of fun. Or is it? Reader **Sherri Gross, a Dayton, Ohio** mother of four, has

found a fun and creative way for her kids to study. She turns her kitchen table into a giant study guide.

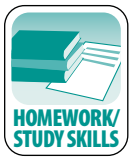
First, she covers the entire table with brown paper. You can use any paper that comes on a roll—even the

back side of wrapping paper would work.

Then she helps her child write the key facts all over the table. "Be sure to include some funny drawings!" she advises.

The best part is that the next morning her child can review while sitting at the table eating breakfast. Try it—your entire family may even learn a thing or two!

Help your child make paying attention to details a habit



Even the smartest kids can fail when they don't pay attention to details. They get a C-, D or F on an assignment due to

sloppy work or careless mistakes.

For good grades, children must develop the "detail habit." They must slow down. Proofread for errors in spelling and grammar. Double-check math answers. Rewrite essays to ensure they're legible.

To develop this habit, kids must link cause and effect. They must see that extra time and effort result in first-rate work they can take pride in. They must care about the outcome more than getting the assignment done as quickly as possible.

To help your child learn to self-monitor for details:

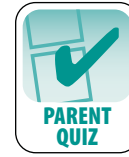
- **Don't lecture your child** when she gets a poor grade due to standard work.
- **Identify problem areas.** Ask your child's teachers to specify details your child habitually neglects.
- **Make an "Attention to Details" checklist** of detail-oriented activities. The checklist can include things like: submitted neat work,

completed assignment, followed instructions, checked spelling, etc. Have your child check items off.

- **Brainstorm with your child** how she might correct a chronic problem. Ask the teacher for ideas.
- **Play detail identifying games.** Write a short paragraph that has errors in spelling, grammar and punctuation. Have your child find the errors. Or write sloppily. Help your child rewrite your sentences to improve legibility.

Source: Lawrence J. Greene, *1001 Ways to Improve Your Child's Schoolwork*, ISBN: 0-440-50265-9 (Dell Publishing/Random House, 1-800-733-3000, www.randomhouse.com).

Do you set limits for your child and follow through?



Parents who set clear limits—and follow through when their children step outside them—actually have to do less disciplin-

ing. If everyone in the family knows the boundaries, your child is more likely to behave appropriately.

Are you setting effective limits? Do you follow through when your child steps outside of those limits? Answer *yes* or *no* to each of the statements:

___ **1. I have set clear limits** and have talked about them with my child.

___ **2. Our family has routines.**

There's a regular bedtime and study time. The more predictable things are, the less likely kids are to fight.

___ **3. I plan ahead.** A tired child is often a cranky child. I try to avoid a trip to the grocery store when my child is worn out from school.

___ **4. My child is aware** of the consequences when he breaks the rules. They are enforced *every* time.

___ **5. I reinforce good behavior.** I say things to my child such as, "I like it when you come to dinner without being called."

How well are you doing?

Each *yes* means you're setting clear limits and following through. For *no* answers, try those ideas in the quiz.

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Remind your child that respect and manners go hand in hand



Respect and manners go together. If your child respects others, his words and actions—his manners—show it.

Studies show that people respond positively to polite people. With good manners, your child will attract more friends and do better in school.

So remind your child:

- **Manners matter.** People feel good when your child treats them with respect. He'll earn their respect, too.
- **To follow the golden rule**—treat others as he'd like to be treated.

- **To say *please, thank you, you're welcome* and *excuse me*.** Prompt him to use these when he forgets.
- **To wait for a pause** in conversation rather than interrupt.
- **To recognize** when he's impolite. If he realizes he has been rude, he should apologize for his actions.

Above all, parents need to model good manners. Speak with respect about others—particularly your child's teacher.

Source: Michele Borba, *Parents Do Make a Difference: How To Raise Kids with Solid Character, Strong Minds, and Caring Hearts*, ISBN: 0-7879-4605-2 (Jossey-Bass, 1-888-378-2537, www.josseybass.com).

Work with the school to ensure success for your ADHD child



The doctor confirms what you suspected. Your child isn't just energetic and absent-minded. He has an attention disorder and hyperactivity.

Kids with ADHD can be challenging for both parents and teachers. But when you work as a team, you can help your child be successful.

Here are a few tips:

- **Talk to the teacher.** Sit down to talk about your child's ADHD. Let the teacher know that you want to work together. You'll need to know how things went at school. Perhaps there is some sort of daily report—a quick way for the teacher to let you know what went on. Choose four or five goals for your child to work on. The report can let you know how your child did. It should be quick and easy for the teacher to fill out.
- **Be informed about homework.** Kids with ADHD have a very hard time getting homework back and

forth. Work with the teacher to create a system that is as fail-safe as possible. Perhaps she could initial a notebook where your child has entered the homework for tomorrow.

- **Avoid punishment.** Focus on finding positive ways to help your child improve. Make a game out of learning spelling words. Praise your child for progress.

Source: Peter S. Jensen, *Making the System Work for Your Child with ADHD*, ISBN: 1-572-30870-2 (The Guilford Press, 1-800-356-7006, www.guilford.com).

“Avoid the temptation of doing an assignment for your child simply because you can do it faster or better. Remember that their pace may not be your pace and that their quality, especially at a young age, probably will not be your quality.”

—Ronald Dietel
Education Researcher

Q: My fifth grader was never a bubbly child. But in the last year, she has become even gloomier. Nothing is ever right. She doesn't like school. She doesn't like her teacher. Last week, I asked her to plan something special for the two of us to do. Later, she said it was “All right, I guess.” I'm losing patience.

Questions & Answers

A: It's normal for parents to want their kids to be happy. And it is draining to be around someone who is always down in the dumps. Here are some things to think about:

- **Listen to your daughter.** She may really have a reason to be unhappy. Ask her to tell you about things that get her down. If there is one issue (or person) that comes up over and over, you may have hit on the problem. For example, fifth-grade girls tend to form cliques that shut others out.
- **Let her complain.** It's okay to let her complain once in a while. If she whines about math, let her go for a minute or two. Then say, “Well, you still need to get those problems done before school tomorrow.” Try to be a model of the kind of attitude you'd like her to show. Remind her that we don't always get to do only the things we like!
- **Realize** that you aren't responsible for fixing everything in her life. Help her take responsibility where you can. It's a way of empowering her—and letting her feel good about herself. If you feel your daughter may be clinically depressed, make an appointment with her doctor.

—Kris Amundson
The Parent Institute

It Matters: Motivating Your Child

Encourage your child to teach you a thing or two



Research shows that children are more motivated to learn when they feel capable, connected and in control.

Letting your child teach you things nurtures these feelings.

Teaching you also helps a child understand assignments better. It reinforces what she knows and reveals gaps in understanding.

To have your child teach you:

- **Show an interest** in what she's learning in school. Have her show you, explain or read aloud to you.
- **Ask her to share stories** from a book she's reading.
- **Let her quiz you.** See if you can name the state capitals or presidents. Spell a vocabulary word or use it in a sentence. She can also test your knowledge of a science or math fact.
- **Ask your child to help you** solve a problem or create something. What does your child think you should you do first, second, next?
- **Seek your child's help** on the computer. How does she navigate the Web?
- **Ask her to teach you** how to play a game.
- **Let her keep you "in the know."** Ask what she can tell you about an event or people in the news.
- **Ask for your child's opinion** before solidifying your own.
- **Be impressed.** Compliment your child on what she knows!

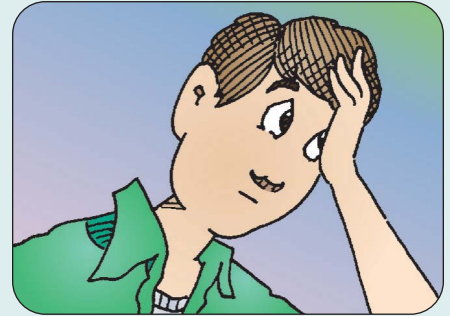
Source: Stacy DeBroff, *The Mom Book Goes to School: Insider Tips to Ensure Your Child Thrives in Elementary and Middle School*, ISBN: 0-73432-5754-1 (Free Press, 1-800-223-2336, www.simonsays.com).

Keep your child motivated when faced with struggles

Schoolwork gets more challenging from one grade level to the next. Children who can't keep up often feel like failures.

Talking alone won't convince your child he's not a failure. Sympathize with his feelings and then take these actions:

- **Put failure in perspective.** Tell your child, "You can't always succeed the first time. Our mistakes can help us learn."
- **Don't let your child blame others.** It's his effort that counts.
- **Plan small steps** to overcome obvious obstacles. Make targets realistic. Match goals to his age and experience, so he can experience success.
- **Create a study routine** to help your child stay on top of work.



- **Keep up-to-date** with what's happening at school. Don't let problems escalate.
- **Consider getting extra help** if needed in a particular subject. Talk to your child's teacher.
- **Don't compare your child** to others. Recognize his strengths.

Source: Roberta Israeloff, *What To Do ... About Your Child's Moods and Emotions*, ISBN: 0-7621-0100-8 (Reader's Digest Books, 914-238-1000, www.rdstore.com).

Get your child motivated in the morning, ready to attend school



Does your child dawdle in the mornings before school? Beg to stay home? Complain of a stomachache? Cry or throw a temper tantrum?

Sometimes children resist school to get attention. Sometimes they are just not motivated to move.

It helps to introduce a morning routine that requires your child to respond to your rules and to what you say.

For the routine:

- **Get your child up early.** Consider rising at least one hour before he needs to leave for school.

- **List each step** your child must take to get ready. Going to the bathroom. Eating breakfast. Brushing teeth. Dressing. Getting his backpack and lunch. Goodbyes.
- **Include extra time** to reward your child for being on time. Or he can use this time to read.
- **Follow the same routine** every weekday morning.
- **Have negative consequences** for not following the routine.

Source: Christopher A. Kearney, *Getting Your Child to Say "Yes" to School: A Guide for Parents of Youth With School Refusal Behavior*, ISBN: 978-0-19-530630-9 (Oxford University Press, 1-800-445-9714, www.oup.com).