



Try new ways to celebrate your child's academic success

He did it! He raised his math grade this quarter. Or he finally finished reading that book series.

There is no better motivation for a child than setting a goal and reaching it. But sometimes, a major accomplishment also calls for a celebration. So when your child sets and reaches a challenging goal, try one of these fun ideas:

1. Take a picture. Get a picture of your child showing off his report card. Get a snapshot of him in his basketball uniform. Or ask your child to draw a picture of his accomplishment.

Frame it and put it by your child's bed. That way, every time he wakes up, he'll see an image of himself as an achiever.

2. Plan a special surprise. On one side of a piece of paper, write down a goal your child wants to achieve. On the other side of the paper, write down a small reward—such as having a friend over for a sleepover.

Now roll up the paper and put it into a balloon. Tell your child that when he reaches his goal, you'll pop the balloon together and he'll find out what he's earned!

3. Host a victory dinner. Set a "fancy" table and serve your child's favorite foods. Have a special family dinner to celebrate your child's success.

Source: M. Borba, Ed.D., *Parents Do Make a Difference: How to Raise Kids with Solid Character, Strong Minds, and Caring Hearts*, Jossey-Bass.

Start preparing your child for middle school



Long before your child enters middle school, her teachers will start preparing her for its challenges.

To support this effort at home, encourage your child to:

- **Manage time.** Show your child how to use short periods of time productively. She could study flash cards on the way to practice. Or she could finish a few math problems in the car.
- **Get organized.** Encourage your child to use a planner to keep track of assignments. Help her find ways to organize school papers and suggest she clean out her backpack once a week.
- **Take notes.** Your child may not practice this skill at school, but she can try it at home while reading. Help her write down key words and information. Then have her highlight essential points in her notes.
- **Plan ahead.** Encourage your child to divide studying into smaller tasks—take notes, review, do practice problems. Show her how to make a study schedule, and help her stick to it.

When elementary students miss school, they miss out on a lot



With winter break coming up, you may be planning to take your child out of school for an extra day or

two. You'll just ask the teacher for advance homework. Missing a few days won't really matter, will it?

Actually, those few days of absence can matter a lot. Think about the things your child may be missing that can't be made up.

The class discussion about the book everyone is reading can't be captured in homework. Neither can the science demonstration or the group project for history. In some subjects, like math, learning

builds on what students learned in the previous lesson.

Even doing extra homework will not make up for the things your child misses when she's out of school. So, instead of taking your child out of school, make an extra effort to improve her attendance this month.

“The habits we form from childhood make no small difference, but rather they make all the difference.”

—Aristotle

Show your elementary schooler how to be a scientific thinker



You don't have to be a rocket scientist to teach your child about science. Just do some simple things like these:

- **Encourage your child** to be a collector and to organize objects, such as seeds, rocks, shells and bottle caps.
- **Encourage investigation.** Give your child a magnifying glass. Ask him, “What things do you see?” “What’s similar and what’s different?”
- **Talk about the science** that happens in your home. For instance, which cereals get soggy? Why do foods in the refrigerator get moldy? Why do some plants need more water than others?
- **Include your child**—as an observer or, better yet, a helper—when you make household repairs or work on the family car.
- **Show an interest** in science together. Observe the stars. Weigh snow. Mix paints.
- **Nurture curiosity.** Ask your child questions like, “Why do you think ... ?” “What might happen if ... ?” and “How can we find out ... ?”
- **Go to the library.** Check out a few books on different science topics.
- **Give your child something** to take apart—a ball point pen, a flower, a candle, an old toy. Encourage him to figure out how it works.
- **Talk about the weather.** Have your child record the temperature each day for a month. Or use the temperature listed in your local newspaper. Note whether the day was sunny, cloudy or rainy. Which was the hottest day? How many rainy days were there?

Source: T. Bickart and others, *What Every Parent Needs To Know About 1st, 2nd and 3rd Grades*, Teaching Strategies, Inc.

Are you helping your child read with fluency?



Studies show that kids who read aloud with *fluency* are most likely to have a greater understanding of what they've read. Your child reads with fluency if he reads aloud quickly, smoothly and with expression. Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out if you are helping your child improve his reading fluency:

- ___ 1. Do you set aside time for your child to read to *you* in addition to the time you spend reading to him?
- ___ 2. Do you let your child pick what to read? Even if you think it's too easy, nothing succeeds like success.
- ___ 3. Do you try not to interrupt when your child reads a word incorrectly?
- ___ 4. Do you offer help if your child asks how to pronounce a word, and then encourage him to keep reading?
- ___ 5. Do you discuss a book after your child is finished reading?

How well are you doing?

If most of your answers are *yes*, you're helping your child learn to read aloud. For each *no* answer, try that idea.

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The Parent Institute®, 1-800-756-5525,
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Encourage your child to do more than the bare minimum



It was a windy evening when Juan took the recycling to the curb. Instead of leaving the papers to blow around

the neighborhood, he did something extra. He placed a rock on them so they would not become litter.

Juan had learned to do more than the bare minimum. It's a great lesson in responsibility—and it's something you can teach in your home.

For instance, you could ask your child to think about doing the following “extras” in the kitchen:

- **If he makes a snack** after school, does he leave the kitchen clean?
- **If he uses the last** of the peanut butter, does he tell someone to add it to the grocery list?

• **If he pours the rest** of the water out of a pitcher, does he refill it? Helping your child do more than the bare minimum will also help him be successful in school:

- **Instead of leaving** his backpack where someone could trip over it, he places it in his cubby.
- **Instead of turning in** a sloppy report, he takes the time to write it out neatly.
- **Instead of waiting** until the last minute to work on his project, he starts early and goes beyond what is expected. He includes an illustration in his essay. He adds a great cover to his report.

Source: S. Turansky and J. Miller, *Say Goodbye to Whining, Complaining, and Bad Attitudes In You and Your Kids!* WaterBrook Press.

Five strategies can help your child discover the joy of reading



Some kids seem to have their noses constantly in a book. But others haven't found the joy of reading yet. Here are

some fun things you can do with your child to encourage her to read:

1. **Ask your librarian** to recommend high-interest books. There are books that appeal to almost every child. Kids who enjoy adventure may find that they love the *Magic Tree House* series. Those who like to laugh may enjoy the *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* series.
2. **Go on a library scavenger hunt.** The next time you're in the library, make up a list of questions that require your child to use different reference books. Make these fun—the batting average of her favorite baseball player, the average temperature at Disney World.

When she finds the answers, give her a small reward.

3. **Keep track** of how many books your child reads. Paste a sticker on a chart for each book she completes. Or, encourage her to make a paper chain—one link for each book. Can she make a chain long enough to stretch around her entire room? The whole house?
4. **Look for audio books.** There are wonderful recordings of favorite books—many may be available in your public library. Sometimes just hearing the words to a book can encourage a child to go back and read it later.
5. **Read aloud.** It's one of the most traditional ways to get kids to read—and it really works! Choose a book you both enjoy, set aside 15 minutes for reading and invite your child to snuggle up with you.

Q: My first grader is very shy and has a difficult time making friends. I'm worried that this will affect her in school. What can I do to help her come out of her shell?

Questions & Answers

A: Some children have lots of self-confidence and others do not. While you can't change your child's personality, you can help her feel more confident when speaking and working with others.

To help your child make friends:

- **Role-play with her.** Shy children don't always know what to say to another child. Say, “Let's pretend you're at recess. Isobel and Jack are playing a game that you'd like to join. What could you say?” At first, you might have your child pretend to be the other children. You can pretend to be her. But then change roles and give her a chance to play herself.
- **Read books about friends** together. Talk about what good friends do—and don't do. As your daughter thinks about what makes a good friend, she may start to look for children in her class who might be her friend.
- **Build on your child's strengths.** Use these as a way for her to meet other children who share her interests. Does she like music? Perhaps she could sing in a children's choir. Is she athletic? She might want to play on a soccer team.
As your child practices the skills that she enjoys, she will develop self-confidence—which also may help her make friends!

It Matters: Building Character

What should you do if your child is caught cheating?



Your child has just come home with a note from the teacher that says he was caught cheating. Your first

instinct may be to ground him for the rest of his life.

Instead, experts suggest setting aside time to talk and really listen to your child. Ask him what happened and find out why he feels the need to cheat.

Does your child cheat because he:

- **Is afraid of what you will do** if he brings home a bad grade? Make sure your child knows that a low grade would not be the end of your love for him. You would be more concerned about the situation than angry at him.
- **Has high expectations** for his own academic achievement? Tell him not to put too much emphasis on grades. Grades don't reflect a person's worth or intelligence.
- **Thinks cheating is no big deal?** Tell him it is wrong. Cheaters rob themselves of learning the material and they are unfair to honest students.
- **Was asked to?** Tell your child that letting someone look at his test or copy his homework is wrong. A real friend would never ask him to do that.

Help him role-play turning down an invitation to cheat: "I'd like to help you, Josh, 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.

Use role models to highlight important character traits

Although you are the primary role model in your child's life, you don't have to be the only one. Here's how to draw upon people she knows to help instill positive character traits:

- **Talk about relatives**, friends or celebrities who show respect, responsibility, compassion or other desirable traits. Make it a point to say how much you admire them and why.
- **Share your heroes** with your child. Talk about people such as Anne Frank, Martin Luther King, Jr., Abraham Lincoln and Mother Teresa. Discuss the traits you admire in them.
- **Encourage your child** to find or draw pictures of people she admires and tell you why. Heroes can be fictional—from books,



movies or television—or people she knows, such as an uncle who volunteers with Habitat for Humanity or a grandmother who worked long hours to put a child through college.

Building your child's character is easy if you have a lesson plan



It's great to know that teachers are there to help your child learn the capital of Brazil or how to do long division.

But when it comes to teaching values, parents are the best teachers.

Still, like any teacher, you need a "lesson plan." Here are some steps for building your child's character:

1. **Think about the values** that are important to you. Talk about them openly with your child.
2. **Teach by example.** A parent's example is the most powerful teacher of all. Ask yourself,

"If my child could watch my behavior all day, what lessons would he learn?"

3. **Set high standards.** Expect your child to act responsibly, to be kind to others and to tell the truth. Some families make it a point of family pride. "In the Smith family, we tell the truth."
4. **Teach the Golden Rule.** Teaching your child, "Treat others as you would like to be treated," will help him make good decisions. He can ask himself, "Would I want someone to talk to me that way?"