

Elementary School Parents

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Thunder Bay Catholic Schools and the
Catholic Parent Involvement Committee

make the difference!



Six ways to help your child with a writing assignment

A writing assignment can seem like a tough challenge for many students. Good writing involves everything from understanding a subject to knowing how to organize thoughts to checking spelling and punctuation.

Here are six ways to offer your support with writing assignments:

1. **Help your child** “talk through” some ideas before starting. Clear writing starts with clear thinking. Talking with you can help your child clarify his thoughts.
2. **Encourage your child** to take notes and make an outline before he starts to write. This can help him organize his thoughts.
3. **Remind your child** that first drafts don’t have to be perfect.
4. **Offer plenty of praise.** Your praise can motivate your child to keep working. Be as specific as you can: “I really like the way you’ve described what led up to this event. I understand it better now.”
5. **Don’t over criticize.** It’s helpful to point out errors now and then, but if your child thinks you are always looking for what’s wrong, he will be less likely to share his writing with you.
6. **Be patient.** Good writing takes time. Your encouragement can help your child develop into a clear thinker and skilled writer.

Celebrate these February birthdays



February includes the birthdays of many famous people. Plan some fun activities to

help your child learn about these heroes, writers, inventors, scientists and artists:

- **February 4**—Rosa Parks. Learn more about this heroine of America’s civil rights movement.
- **February 8**—Jules Verne. Read one of his science fiction stories with your child.
- **February 11**—Thomas Edison. Ask your child what he would like to invent.
- **February 12**—Abraham Lincoln. Challenge your child to memorize the Gettysburg Address.
- **February 19**—Nicolaus Copernicus. Take a walk together and look at the stars.
- **February 22**—George Washington. Ask your child what she would do if she were president of the United States.
- **February 25**—Pierre-Auguste Renoir. Check out a book with reproductions of his paintings. Ask your child to paint one of her own.

Motivate your child to read by turning it into an adventure



When children like to read, they will do it more often—which boosts their reading skills and school success.

To make reading enjoyable for your child:

- **Celebrate.** Instead of simply checking out books at the library, make an event of it. Select interesting books, then choose a special place to read together.
- **Explore.** Help your child find an appealing book series. She may not be able to resist picking up book after book.
- **Investigate.** If she doesn't know what a word means, have your child take a guess. Look it up together and see if she is right.

- **Play.** Take something you read and turn it into a fun challenge: Ask your child to summarize a story using only three sentences. Or, ask her to use the characters from the story in a new story.
- **Experiment.** Try new kinds of books with your child. If she's used to reading fiction, have her try a biography or how-to book, for example.

“The best advice I ever got was that knowledge is power and to keep reading.”

—David Bailey

Simple activities can bring out the scientist in your child



Every day is filled with opportunities for parents to help children learn science.

And you don't have to have a background in science to do it—or expensive chemistry sets and books.

Just encourage your child to observe what goes on in the world around her. Together:

- **Keep a weather chart.** Keep track of the temperature and other weather conditions every day for an entire month.
- **Watch the moon** as it goes through its phases. Have your child record the changes she sees.
- **Watch a TV show** about science and discuss what you each learn.
- **Take a walk at night** and look at the stars. Can your child identify some constellations? If not, look for a book or a smart phone app to help.
- **Figure out** how the spin cycle of the washing machine gets the water out of the clothes.
- **Adopt a tree.** Every day, observe the changes in the tree. Are the leaves emerging? Are the branches growing?
- **Visit a nearby park** or nature preserve. Have your child record the animals you see. Classify them as mammals, birds, reptiles, etc.
- **Use a magnifying glass** to look closely at a flower, a bug or a hair from your child's head.
- **Begin a collection** of shells, rocks or leaves. Each time you and your child add something new, talk about how it compares with the other items you've gathered.

Are you making the most of your report card talks?



Maybe your child's report card is great. Maybe it's worse than you feared. Whatever the report card says, it provides a great chance to talk with your child about school and study habits.

Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to see if you are making the most of report card talks:

- ___ **1. Do you take your child's report card seriously and set aside time to talk about it?**
- ___ **2. Do you ask your child if he agrees with the grades and why or why not?**
- ___ **3. Do you remain calm and try not to make your child feel worse if he's already disappointed?**
- ___ **4. Do you help your child figure out a plan to improve or maintain his grades for the next grading period?**
- ___ **5. Do you contact the teacher if you have concerns?**

How well are you doing?

If most of your answers are *yes*, you're turning report card time into learning time. For each *no* answer, try that idea in the quiz.

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Research suggests parents give their children ‘food for thought’



Have you heard of the expression “food for thought”? Well, it turns out to be, quite literally, the truth.

Good nutrition really does feed the brain. And it starts with breakfast. Research shows that students who skip breakfast don’t do as well in school as students who do eat breakfast.

What can you do? Keep low-sugar, whole grain cereals and fruit on hand. And be prepared for a rushed morning with a healthy breakfast that your child can eat on the way out the door.

Whether you’re packing lunch or your child is eating a school lunch, encourage him to avoid high-

calorie and high-fat foods. When children eat a meal that is high in fat and sugar, their bodies tend to crash, and they become very tired—which makes it difficult to concentrate.

Children are typically hungry when they get home from school, so be sure to keep a variety of healthy snacks on hand—fruits and veggies, whole grain crackers, cheese and yogurt.

Remember: When you’re grocery shopping, buy only the food you want your child to eat. Your child can’t eat unhealthy food if it is not in the house.

Source: C. Carroll, MPH, RD, “Better Academic Performance: Is Nutrition the Missing Link?” *Today’s Dietitian*, Great Valley Publishing Company, Inc., niscw.com/elem_food.

Ask thought-provoking questions to build your child’s thinking skills



Talking with your child every day is a great way to build thinking skills—especially if you ask certain kinds of

questions. Experts recognize six categories of thinking skills and suggest you ask your child questions that involve:

- 1. Recalling knowledge.** Discuss facts your child knows. “Who is the president?” “What is the capital of Virginia?” Certain words will help with this, such as *who*, *when*, *what*, *where* and *list*.
- 2. Understanding.** When your child learns about things, check the depth of his comprehension. “Can you explain one cause of the Civil War?” Use words such as *explain*, *estimate* and *predict*.
- 3. Application.** In real-life situations, how will your child use what he

knows? “How would you apply what our country learned from the Civil War to life today?” Include words like *apply* and *experiment* in your questions.

- 4. Analysis.** Often things can be divided into groups, such as types of animals. Have your child compare and contrast things. “How are fish and humans different?” Talk about differences, similarities and comparisons.
- 6. Evaluating.** Ask what your child thinks about things. “How have smart phones changed our lives?” Some useful words are *how*, *why* and *what*.
- 5. Creating.** Ask your child if he can design his own way to solve a problem. Use words such as *invent* and *what if*.

Source: P. Armstrong, “Bloom’s Taxonomy,” Vanderbilt University, The Center for Teaching, niscw.com/elem_bloom.

Q: My daughter has no patience. If she wants something, she wants it immediately. Her teacher says her impatience is becoming a problem at school. What can I do to fix this?

Questions & Answers

A: In this era of on-demand entertainment and instant communication, it can be challenging for kids to learn to wait. However, patience is a vital ingredient for school success. It takes patience to wait one’s turn and keep from interrupting others when they’re talking.

A lack of patience may also affect school performance. In one well-known Stanford University study, researchers told preschoolers they could have one marshmallow right away or wait a few minutes and get two marshmallows. When these students graduated from high school, researchers found that the kids who chose to wait were more successful students. They even had higher SAT scores!

Here’s how to help your daughter develop more patience:

- **Explain that everyone** has to learn to wait, and that you’re going to help her with this skill.
- **Give her opportunities** to be patient. When she asks for something, say, “In a minute.” If you’re on the phone, develop a hand signal that means, “When I’m finished.”
- **Be patient yourself.** Stay calm when you’re stuck in traffic, for example. Say something like, “It looks like we’re going to be in the car for a while. Let’s use the time to play a game.”

With some practice, your child will learn the patience she needs to be successful in school—and in life.

It Matters: Discipline

Take five steps to address school misbehavior



It's great to have a sense of humor. But it's no laughing matter if a student constantly disrupts class with

jokes and rude body sounds.

If your child is misbehaving in school, take these steps:

1. **Look for what's behind the behavior.** Sometimes kids 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. If your child tends to act up after recess, for example, he may need help settling down. The teacher might help by assigning him a high-profile task like handing out worksheets.
3. **Talk to your child.** He might not understand when it's OK to be silly and when it's not. Help him see there's a time when being funny and "clever" is actually being disrespectful.
4. **Establish clear guidelines.** With the teacher's help, convey to your child what type of behavior you both expect from him.
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.

Try strategies from teachers to improve behavior at home

Can't get your child to complete homework? Pay attention? Respond to requests? Why not get help from those who get not just one—but 20 or more—kids to do what's expected? Teachers!

Here's what they suggest:

- **Teach what you want** your child to do. Focus on the tasks you want to be routine—like putting her backpack by the front door.
- **Post a schedule** for activities. Your child will know what to do and when to do it. And she'll feel more independent.
- **Avoid abrupt transitions.** Let your child know how many minutes she has left before she needs to switch gears and do something else.
- **Make the ordinary tasks fun.** Don't just tell your child to pick up her room. Challenge her to do it in rhythm to music.



- **Use silent signals.** Use a gentle touch on your child's shoulder to get her attention. Flick the lights off and on to give a five-minute warning before bedtime.
- **Provide meaningful things** for your child to do. Stash books that interest her around the house. In the grocery store, put your child in charge of the list.

Source: P. Kramer, "Teachers' Best Discipline Tricks," *Parents*, Gruner+Jahr USA Publishing.

Use 'if-then' statements for consistent, effective discipline



Here's an effective approach to getting your child to do what you want her to do:

Try using "if-then" statements. *If* your child does one thing, *then* something else will follow. The key is to make sure that you follow through with what you say.

Instead of reminding your child 15 times to turn off the TV, say, "Julia, if you don't turn off the TV, then I will turn it off and it will stay

off for the rest of the day." When you turn off the TV and keep it off, your child will learn that you mean what you say. Keep in mind that the *then* has to be something you will actually do. If you don't follow through with the consequence (even just once), your child won't take you seriously.

And remember that an "if-then" statement can be positive, too. "If you do your homework now, then we will have time to watch your favorite TV show after dinner."