

Parents and the Child's Brain-Grades K-2

The Top 10 Homework and Learning Tips

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Decorative flourish

Kids love a good fable—especially one that is about their parents making mistakes! Share a time that you made a mistake and learned a valuable lesson in the end. This will help them feel more at ease when they make mistakes.

Decorative flourish

1. Focus on process, not product. Research shows that when you focus on the process and the act of working through a challenge, this will decrease learned helplessness and increase internal motivation (Bronson & Merryman, 2009). Avoid praise such as “You’re smart!” Carol Dweck who performed a research study on kids and praise found that “...frequently-praised children [for being “smart”] get more competitive and more interested in tearing others down. Image-maintenance becomes their primary concern” (2009). Praising your child for their efforts is preferred and teaches persistence. Lastly, talk with your child’s teacher if you are worried about your child’s learning. Although you are the expert on your own child, over time, teachers have taught hundreds, if not thousands of students in your child’s developmental level. Take advantage of their insight!

2. Teach your child that his/her brain is a muscle. Tell your child that the brain is just like any other muscle that can be strengthened the more it is used and challenged. This gives them hope after a mistake and puts them back in the driver’s seat.

3. Link new information with the old. Use illustrations, examples, and analogies that they will understand. Help your child make connections and associations to the new learning based on what they already know. Think of it like a trapeze artist linking up with another trapeze artist. If information can link to familiar knowledge, the information will “stick” better and be remembered.



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Remove televisions and computers from children's bedrooms. Among other risks, this interrupts sleep. Kids ages 5-10 need 10-11 hours of sleep a night! Getting less may impact mood, thinking and reactions to daily stressors.

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4. **Try and help your child to make personal connections.** We remember things when they are meaningful to us. Same with your child-try and help him/her create a personal connection with the material. You can say “Remember we went fishing on your birthday? We caught salmon!” (If your child is studying salmon.)

5. **Dig a little deeper.** Kids this age will need your help to show other connections, common themes, and to organize the new learning. Responding to their questions with “Well, what do you think will happen?” & “What else did you learn at school today?” This will help them process and personalize the learning.

6. **This stage is the “five-to-seven shift”.** So many changes in the brain occur between the ages of 5-7! Your child literally sees things from a brand new perspective! Take advantage of their hunger for knowledge and challenge them (at their level) when you have the opportunity. This is also why 1st grade and 2nd grade is the perfect time to *explicitly* talk about race and cultural diversity. Children categorize everything from food, fads and friends and are forming their first conclusions about race around age 7. The developmental window is wide open to change attitudes or distortions about race or differences.

7. **Picture it and keep it real!** Help the child draw or act out the idea or new information. Pictures and diagrams help organize the new materials. Young children still need information presented with concrete, hands-on, and personal materials.

8. **Talk; then act.** Encourage eager learners to talk out a problem or activity before they do it. This gets their brain primed for learning new materials.

9. **Limit screen time.** Aim for less than 2 hours a day (if any). *Remove televisions and computers from the bedroom.* Research suggests having televisions and computers in children’s bedrooms lowers test scores, increases apathy, increases risk for substance use, and interrupts sleep.

10. **Sufficient sleep and exercise enhances connectivity in brains!** Kids are getting one hour of sleep less a night than they did thirty years ago (Bronson & Merryman, 2009). “Because children’s brains are a work in progress until the age of 21 [and beyond], and because much of that work is done while a child is asleep, this lost hour appears to have an exponential impact on children that it simply doesn’t have on adults” (2009). It is also recommended kids exercise at least 60 minutes a day. Exercise produces BDNF, which is a type of “miracle grow” for the brain (Medina, 2008). BDNF stands for brain-derived neurotrophic factor and is a protein that is released during exercise that activates stem cells to convert into new neurons.

Bronson, P & Merryman, A. (2009). *Nurture Shock-New thinking about children.* New York: Twelve.

Healy, J. (2004). *Your Child's Growing Mind* (3rd ed.). New York: Broadway Books.

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Medina, J. (2008). *Brain Rules.* Seattle: Pear Press.

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