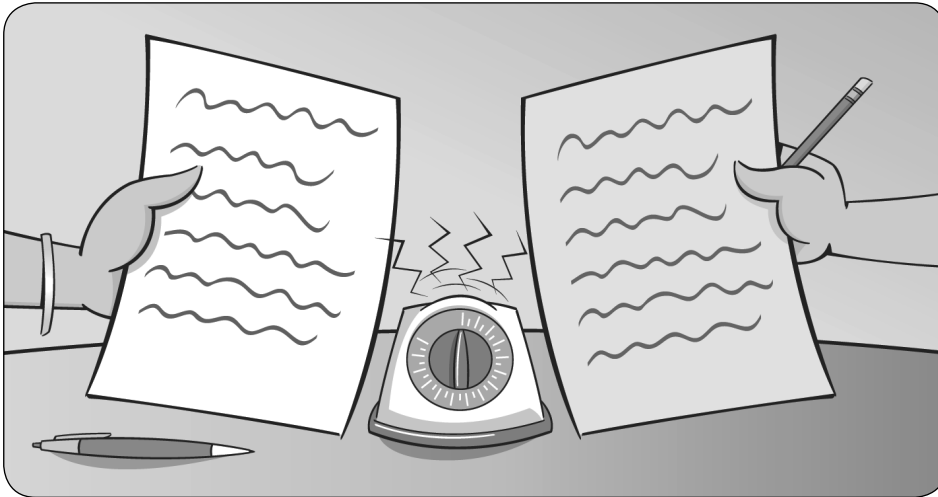


# Elementary School Parents<sup>®</sup>

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West Orange Elementary  
Jennifer Bourgeois, Ph.D., Principal

## make the difference!



## Turn writing into a game for your child with 'quick writes'

**W**riting can be hard work. But a *quick write* is a fun and easy way to encourage your child to get his ideas down on paper.

Quick writes are just what they sound like—writing that people do in short periods of time. Usually, a quick write is based on a question or an idea. You ask a challenging question and set the timer for five minutes. Then both you and your child write down everything you can before the timer beeps.

Once the quick write is finished, compare what each of you has written. The next time, let your child choose the quick-write topic.

Here are some quick-write ideas:

- **Would it be a good** or a bad idea if dogs could talk? Why?
- **The best birthday** I can imagine would be ...

- **If I were invisible**, I would ...
- **It was a stormy day**, so I decided I would ...
- **Zebras have stripes** because ...
- **Ten years from now**, I will be ...
- **I invented** the most amazing machine. It does ...
- **When I woke up** this morning, I was a different person. I was ...

Even kids who usually stare into space when it's time for a writing assignment may like a quick write. They are often surprised to discover just how much they know or have to say about a particular subject. Your child will gain confidence when he sees how much he can write in just a few minutes.

**Source:** L. Reif, *100 Quickwrites: Fast and Effective Freewriting Exercises that Build Students' Confidence, Develop Their Fluency, and Bring Out the Writer in Every Student*, Scholastic Books.

## Attendance is still important at year's end



You know that being in school is important. But this would be such a great time to take

a family trip. And, after all, your child is only in first grade. Surely a few days' absence won't matter, will it?

It will. In fact, research shows that young children don't have to miss much school before their learning suffers. In the early grades, kids are mastering reading and basic math skills. And research has shown that these are the skills most affected when children miss school. Being in school consistently is the only way kids can develop a strong foundation on which to build the rest of their learning.

Your child will not be the only one who pays a price. The entire class will be affected. When the teacher has to stop to meet the needs of a child who was out of school, everyone else's learning comes to a halt.

**Source:** H. Chang and M. Romero, *Present, Engaged, and Accounted For: The Critical Importance of Addressing Chronic Absence in the Early Grades*, National Center for Children in Poverty.

## It's not too late to become more connected to your child's school!



When parents and schools work together, the results can be incredible, including better grades, attitudes and behavior.

In today's busy world, however, the idea of parent involvement can be overwhelming. "What do I have to do?" you may wonder. "I'm already short on time!" Don't worry. Involvement doesn't need to be complicated or time consuming.

Even though the end of the school year is right around the corner, it isn't too late to get involved. Starting right now, you can:

- **Attend school events.** While at school, make an effort to connect with staff and other families.
- **Read materials.** Pay attention to school information sent home and posted online. Keep track of important dates, such as end-of-year tests and celebrations.

- **Volunteer.** Ask your child's teacher if there is anything you can do to help out. Perhaps you could prepare items for a craft, organize a class party, read to students or help in another way.
- **Join the parent-teacher group.** If you can't make it to meetings, take time to read the minutes from each meeting.
- **Ask the teacher questions.** "How can I help my child succeed?" "Should I correct homework mistakes with him?" "What are the most important school tasks for us to accomplish each day at home?"

**"At the end of the day, the most overwhelming key to a child's success is the positive involvement of parents."**

—Jane D. Hull

## Show your child the importance of following directions on tests



Sometimes, a child may know the answer to a test question—but still get it wrong. She underlined the answer, when the directions said to circle it. Or she chose the true answer when the directions asked for the one that was not true.

Helping your child learn to follow directions *exactly* is an important way to prepare her for test success. Try these things at home:

- **Help your child think** about one thing she knows how to do well—making a peanut butter sandwich, finding her way to school. Have her write step-by-step directions

on how to do it. Now follow her instructions *exactly*. Was anything missing?

- **Follow a recipe together.** Talk about what would happen if you left out one of the ingredients or didn't do things in order.
- **Create a treasure hunt.** Hide a small prize somewhere your child won't see it. Now write notes your child must follow. Each note tells her to look somewhere else. Only if she follows the directions exactly will she get the prize.

**Source:** G. Durham, *Teaching Test-Taking Skills: Proven Techniques to Boost Your Students' Scores*, Rowman & Littlefield Education.

## Do you find ways to encourage your child to read?



Sometimes, kids who *can* read just don't. Luckily, there are some things parents can do to encourage those nonreaders to pick up a book.

Are you doing all you can to encourage your child to enjoy reading? Answer *yes* or *no* to each question below to find out:

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you read aloud** to your child, even if she can read by herself?
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you encourage your child** to try books in a series? If she likes one, she might enjoy the others.
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you encourage your child** to turn off the TV? Do you keep the TV out of her bedroom?
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you let your child read** comic books? Do you sometimes read comic books to her?
- \_\_\_ **5. Do you look for books or** magazines about the things that interest your child?

**How well are you doing?**

Each *yes* means you are finding ways to help your child become a kid who will love reading. For *no* answers, try those ideas.

**Elementary School**  
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# Building your child's social skills can give learning a big boost



Students learn much more at school than reading, writing, math and other academic subjects. In every class, they practice an important skill—getting along with others.

Research shows that problems with social skills can interfere with learning. Without social skills, it's hard to succeed in school or in life.

Activities that reinforce social skills at home include:

- **Role modeling.** Children notice how parents interact with others. Do you introduce yourself to new people? Get together with friends? Support people you care about? Let your child see you being a good friend.
- **Reading stories.** There are countless books about friendship. Ask the librarian to help you find some that match your child's age and interests, such as *Lost and*

*Found*, by Oliver Jeffers. After reading, talk about the story.

- **Role-playing.** Kids need help practicing manners. Before going to the park, for example, you and your child might pretend you're meeting new people. "Hi, I'm Jacob. Nice to meet you!" Also focus on sharing and kindness.
- **Socializing.** Give your child opportunities to spend time with kids. Invite friends to play. Go to story time at the library. Visit busy playgrounds. Sign your child up for kids' programs at community centers, museums and elsewhere.
- **Relaxing.** Children don't need lots of friends. Just one good buddy is fine, as long as your child cooperates well with others. If you have any concerns, talk with his teacher and work together on solutions.

**Source:** K. Steedly, Ph.D. and others, "Social Skills and Academic Achievement," *Evidence of Education*, National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities.

## Three simple activities help kids develop thinking skills



In today's world, kids need to know how to be problem solvers. They must learn how to analyze and see things from another point of view. Here are ways to reinforce your child's thinking skills:

1. **Sort things.** Find something for your child to sort—buttons, pencils, coins or anything else in your house. Help her sort the items by size. Then mix everything up and have her sort them by color. This teaches your child that even though something is part of one group, it can be part of another group, too.

2. **Think about opposites.**

Suppose you have been talking about fairness. Ask your child, "What does *fairness* look like? What things show fairness in action?" Then ask her about the opposite. "What does *unfairness* look like?"

3. **Talk about points of view.**

What does your child think your house looks like from a cat's point of view? What does your child think the school bus driver thinks about the students who ride her bus? This activity will also help your child develop empathy by seeing things from others' points of view.

**Q:** My son wants a cell phone. Most of his friends have them. And to be honest, there are times when I'd really like to be able to reach him. How can I tell if he is old enough to have a phone? What advice do you have for parents before they get a phone for their child?

### Questions & Answers

**A:** You are the only one who can decide whether your son is old enough to handle a phone. If he is generally responsible about his belongings, he is likely to be able to keep track of a phone. And if he usually follows your rules on other issues, he'll probably be agreeable to limits you set on his cell phone.

And that's exactly what you need to do. Before you give your son a phone, set up a clear code of what will—and will not—be acceptable. Below are just a few of the things your child should be aware of:

- **He will need to stay within** the limit of talking and texting that you allow. It is a good idea to get an unlimited texting plan so there are no surprises when the phone bill comes. However, you can still set limits on your child's usage.
- **You will have the right** to look at any text messages he sends and receives.
- **If he uses the phone** in an inappropriate way, you will take it away.
- **He must follow** the school's rules about cell phone use.

If your son is agreeable to all of your limits, write up a parent-child contract outlining the details. Make sure both of you sign it.

# It Matters: Respect

## Be a respectful role model for your athlete!



It's natural to want to cheer for a young athlete. But when parents get too involved, kids say they would rather their parents just stay away.

Here are four things your young athlete wants you to know:

1. **He loves having you** on the sidelines—except when you go too far. Your child wants you to be supportive of his *entire* team, not just him. He doesn't want you to yell at the referee. And he doesn't want you to yell at the parents of the kids on the other team!
2. **He wants you to recognize** that the coach is in charge. Most youth coaches are volunteers. Most of them are trying to give children a chance to play a game. Even if you think you could do a better job (and then why aren't you the coach?), your child would like you to respect the coach's authority.
3. **He wants you to be happy** when his team wins. But he doesn't want winning to become so important that he doesn't enjoy just playing the game. It's fine to talk about the game when it's over. But don't go on and on about it for days.
4. **He wants you to be realistic.** If no one in your family is taller than 5'6", you are probably not raising a basketball star. Help your child learn to enjoy sports and find the one that's right for him.

**Source:** J. and J. Sundberg, *How to Win at Sports Parenting*, Waterbrook Press.

## Talk to your child about how to show respect with clothing

Chances are you and your child argue occasionally about what she wears to school. That's no surprise, considering that many popular children's clothes violate school dress codes (not to mention parents' values).

Parents aren't alone in this battle. When EducationWorld.com asked educators about the importance of student dress codes, the response was clear—79% said dress codes “help improve behavior and academic performance.”

To make mornings easier on you, your child and the school:

- **Review the school dress code.** Which clothes and shoes are not allowed? Some commonly prohibited items include flip flops, halter tops, low-hanging pants and spaghetti straps.



- **Talk with your child.** Discuss why there is a dress code. Which clothes or shoes might be distracting? Offensive? Unsafe? Inappropriate? This is a good time to discuss respect for self.
- **Post the rules.** If you and your child argue repeatedly about dress, consider posting the rules. Children are less likely to argue with a list (especially a school list) than with a parent.

## Teach your elementary schooler how to see beauty in diversity



Your child knows that no two people—or families—are exactly alike. But does he accept and appreciate this? To be a successful student and grown-up, he'll need to respect people's differences.

You can nurture your child's respect for diversity if you:

- **Are a positive role model.** Kids are naturally open minded. When parents show respect for others—through actions and words—children imitate them. Let your child know that while

people can be different from one another, they also have a lot in common.

- **Learn about other cultures** by leaving your “comfort zone.” Visit a new place, try a new food and read books about other ways of life.
- **Speak openly about diversity** issues. It's normal for your child to notice differences. They're fascinating and amazing! Correct any stereotyping with kid-friendly explanations.

**Source:** C. Metzler, Ph.D., “Teaching Children About Diversity,” PBS, [niswc.com/diversity](http://niswc.com/diversity).