



Ask six types of questions to strengthen thinking skills

Engaging in conversations with your child is a powerful way to cultivate strong thinking skills—especially when you know what kinds of questions to ask. Experts have identified six key categories of thinking skills. By asking targeted questions, you can help your child:

- 1. Recall knowledge.** Ask about facts your child knows. “Who was the main character in the book we finished yesterday?” Words that will help with this include *who*, *when*, *what*, *where* and even *list*.
- 2. Explain ideas or concepts.** When your child learns new things, check the depth of comprehension. “How would you illustrate the water cycle?”
- 3. Apply knowledge.** How will your child use information in new

situations? “You learned about different types of energy in science. How could we use solar energy to power something in our house?”

- 4. Analyze.** Many things can be divided into groups, such as types of animals. Have your child compare and contrast groups of things. “How are fish and humans different? How are they alike?”
- 5. Evaluate.** Ask for your child’s opinion about things. “How have smartphones changed our lives?” “Why do you think Benjamin Franklin is so famous?”
- 6. Create.** Ask your child to create a solution to a problem. Use words such as *invent* and *what if*.

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

A good night’s sleep is crucial for learning



When children don’t get enough sleep, it’s hard for them to learn in school. That’s because sleep

affects a child’s ability to:

- **Plan and organize.**
- **Solve problems.**
- **Control mood and behavior.**
- **Focus and pay attention.**
- **Retain information.**

To help your child get the recommended nine to 12 hours of sleep each night:

- **Stick to a schedule.** Enforce a regular bedtime and wake time. Establish times for meals, schoolwork and recreation.
- **Encourage physical activity.** Exercise and fresh air help children sleep better.
- **Set a technology curfew.** Kids should avoid bright screens for one hour before bedtime.
- **Follow a bedtime routine.** Your child could take a bath, enjoy a story and talk about the day. Then, it’s lights out.
- **Make your child feel safe.** Allow a night light in the room. Say you’ll peek in periodically.

Source: “Healthy Sleep Habits: How Many Hours Does Your Child Need?” American Academy of Pediatrics.

Set expectations that motivate your child to succeed in school



Your child's progress through school is a journey, and your expectations can be a driving force. When families hold high, yet achievable, expectations for their children, those children are more likely to reach their full potential.

To help your elementary schooler succeed in the classroom and beyond:

- **Don't act surprised** by success. Did your child just bring home a B+ on a super-hard science test? Instead of acting shocked, act like you never had any doubt. "That's awesome! I knew all of your extra studying this week would pay off!"
- **Be supportive.** Failure happens to everyone sometimes. Love and accept your child, and treat mistakes as learning opportunities. Always be your child's "safe place."

- **Discourage "victim mode."** When unfortunate things happen, don't chalk them up to bad luck or a mean teacher. That will make your elementary schooler feel like a victim who has no control over situations. Instead, empower your child to take action. When something goes wrong, help your child think about how to handle similar situations in the future.

Source: Y. and S.D. Holloway, "Parental Expectations and Children's Academic Performance in Sociocultural Context," *Educational Psychology Review*, Springer.

"Success is how high you bounce when you hit bottom."

—George S. Patton

November is a great month to teach and learn with your child



Education doesn't just happen at school—it happens everywhere! And November is a month full of learning

opportunities:

- **Nov. 4**—King Tut Day. With your child, check out a book or go online to learn more about the discovery of King Tutankhamen's tomb.
- **Nov. 4**—Election Day. Talk to your child about rights, responsibilities and why it is important to vote.
- **Nov. 11**—Veterans Day. Talk about the sacrifices military people have made for our freedom. Make cards for a veteran you know or to send to the troops.
- **Nov. 13**—World Kindness Day. Encourage your child to perform acts of kindness throughout the day. Discuss how small acts can make a big difference.
- **Nov. 16**—International Day of Tolerance. Talk with your child about the importance of behaving respectfully toward people whose beliefs differ from yours.
- **Nov. 17-21**—American Education Week. Try to visit the school one day this week to show your support for education.
- **Nov. 23-29**—National Family Week. Spend extra time as a family this week. Play games, cook meals and read together!
- **Nov. 27**—American Thanksgiving. Have family members make a list of all the people and things they are thankful for.

Are you making the most of your report card talks?



A report card, no matter the grades, is a perfect chance to connect with your child to discuss school and study habits.

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

- ___ **1. Do you take** your child's report card seriously and set aside time to review and discuss it together?
- ___ **2. Do you ask** if your child agrees with the grades, and why or why not? This opens the door for your child to share experiences and feelings.
- ___ **3. Do you remain** calm and encouraging, even if your child's grades are disappointing?
- ___ **4. Do you help** your child plan ways to improve or maintain grades for the next grading period?
- ___ **5. Do you contact** the teacher if you or your child have concerns or questions?

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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Offer support when your child has a writing assignment



A writing assignment can seem like a tough challenge for many elementary schoolers.

Strong writing involves everything from understanding a subject to knowing how to organize thoughts to checking spelling and punctuation.

To make the process easier:

- **Suggest “talking through”** ideas before your child starts to write. Clear writing starts with clear thinking.
- **Encourage your child** to take notes and make an outline before starting to write. Organized thoughts will make the writing clearer.
- **Remind your child** that first drafts aren’t supposed to be perfect.

Students should focus on what to say first—and edit the paper for spelling and grammar later.

- **Offer plenty of praise** to 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 much better now.”
- **Stay positive.** It’s helpful to point out errors now and then, but if you are always looking for what’s wrong, your child will be less likely to ask for help in the future.
- **Be patient.** Writing well takes time. Your patience and support can help your elementary schooler develop into a clear thinker and skilled writer.

Strengthen your child’s math skills with simple daily tasks



Most adults read and do math every day—although their children may not realize it.

Demonstrate how math is an essential part of life by involving your child when you:

- **Follow recipes.** When preparing meals, let your child help with weighing and measuring. Discuss sizes, shapes and fractions. Ask questions such as, “How could we double this recipe?” and “When we add $\frac{1}{4}$ cup to $\frac{1}{4}$ cup, what do we get?”
- **Go shopping.** Help your child use a calculator to keep a running tally of purchases. Use coupons to inspire math problems. “If we use this coupon, will the item cost less than other brands?” “Which of these items is really the best deal per pound?”

- **Save money.** Ask your child to choose a goal, such as saving for a toy. How much does your child need to save each week? How long will it take to reach the total? Track progress on a chart. Then, have fun shopping together!
- **Take a trip.** Before leaving, measure the air pressure in your car or bike tires. Calculate how many miles you’ll go. If you are driving, how much gas will you use? As you travel, say a number between 1 and 10. Who can find a license plate with numbers that add up to the number you called out?
- **Start a family project.** Planning to paint a bedroom? Involve your child in figuring out how much paint you will need to do the job.
- **Play games.** There are lots of fun math games you can play together. Try dominoes, Uno and Connect 4.

Q: When my eight-year-old gets angry or frustrated, it often results in a tantrum. This is happening at home and at school—and the teacher is asking for my help. How can I teach my child self-control?

Questions & Answers

A: Elementary-age children have strong reactions to stress. When they don’t have the skills to cope with big emotions, they may resort to toddler-style outbursts and crying fits.

However, success in school and in relationships depends on your child’s ability to maintain self-control.

To minimize temper tantrums, first try to figure out what triggers them. Keep a record of your child’s behavior for one week. What happens just before a tantrum begins? Do you notice patterns? Then, help your child avoid some of the situations that lead to stress.

Next, share strategies that can help your child manage behavior. When you sense a meltdown, show your child how to:

- **Take a time out.** Have your child walk away from the situation for a five-minute breather. Tell your child, “You may return once you are able to talk calmly.”
- **Use calming techniques,** such as breathing deeply while slowly counting to 10. Encourage your child to say, “I can work through this.”
- **Throw it out.** Have your child write or draw the angry feelings on paper and then wad the paper up and toss it away.
- **Talk it out.** Help your child become more self-aware. When things aren’t going well, assist your child in recognizing and naming feelings.

It Matters: Reading

Reading aloud strengthens important skills



Even if your child can read independently, reading aloud together is still beneficial! It's an effective way to

introduce new ideas, concepts and vocabulary your child might not encounter otherwise. Plus, every time you read together, you're building your child's knowledge base, which supports reading comprehension.

As you read aloud, focus on:

- **Vocabulary.** Define words your child doesn't know. Together, think of words that have a similar or opposite meaning. From time to time, see if your child can figure out the meaning of an unknown word by how it's used in a sentence. Give examples of how the word might be used in other contexts. For example, note how the word *sign* can be a noun (Look at the stop *sign*) or a verb (Please *sign* your name here).
- **Listening and thinking skills.** After you've read a passage, have your child summarize it. Ask specific questions—*What did the main character do? Where did he do it? How did it make his friends feel?*
- **Memory.** Before you pick up where you left off in a book the night before, ask your child to recall what was happening in the story when you stopped.
- **Word recognition.** Every so often, ask your child to read a sentence or two to you. Help your child sound out new words and read the sentences again.

Regular reading is essential for your child's academic success

When you ask teachers for their top tip on helping children learn and succeed in school, there's one answer you'll hear again and again: "Encourage your child to read!"

To make reading a family priority:

- **Create a reading nook.** A cozy reading spot can make reading more appealing.
- **Take advantage of the library.** Each week, browse and let your child check out new books.
- **Start a family book club.** Set aside one night each week to talk about something you've all read. Better yet, do it during dinner—you'll get the benefit of one another's company and a good discussion.
- **Let your child see you reading.** Kids who see family members read



are more likely to want to read themselves.

- **Talk with the teacher.** Ask about your child's reading progress and strategies you can use at home to strengthen reading skills.

Help your elementary schooler discover the joy of reading



Some children seem to have their noses constantly in a book.

But others haven't discovered the joy of

reading yet. To encourage reading:

- **Ask a teacher** or 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 *Percy Jackson and the Olympians* series. Those who like to laugh may enjoy the *The Terrible Two* series.
- **Celebrate reading achievements.** Paste a sticker on a chart for each book read. Or, have your child

make a paper chain—one link for each book. Can your child make a chain long enough to stretch around a room?

- **Have a fact scavenger hunt.** Make a list of questions that require your child to use different reference materials at the library (without going online). What is the batting average of a famous baseball player? What is the average temperature at Disney World?
- **Suggest audiobooks.** There are lots of free recordings of books available online or from your public library. Sometimes just hearing the words in a book can encourage a child to go back and read it later.