

Home & School

Working Together for School Success

CONNECTION®

September 2020

SHORT NOTES



My handwashing poster

Ask your child to design a poster that reminds family members to frequently wash their hands. She could include a clever slogan (“Wanted: Clean hands!”) and write and illustrate instructions for washing properly. *Examples:* “Scrub for at least 20 seconds.” “Wash fronts and backs of hands, between fingers, and under nails.”

Natural rewards

Show your youngster that good behavior has its own rewards. For instance, point out that there’s time to play a board game because he put away his toys the first time you asked. He’ll be more apt to repeat the behavior next time.

Sort the foods

Sorting items into categories boosts your child’s thinking skills. After you make a grocery list, have her rewrite it in a way that will help you shop more efficiently. She could organize items by the aisle where they’re located (produce, frozen foods). Then, she could think of other ways to sort for fun, maybe by color or food group.

Worth quoting

“Use your smile to change the world; don’t let the world change your smile.” *Chinese proverb*

JUST FOR FUN

Q: You can see me in water, but I never get wet. What am I?



A: A reflection.

Confident about school

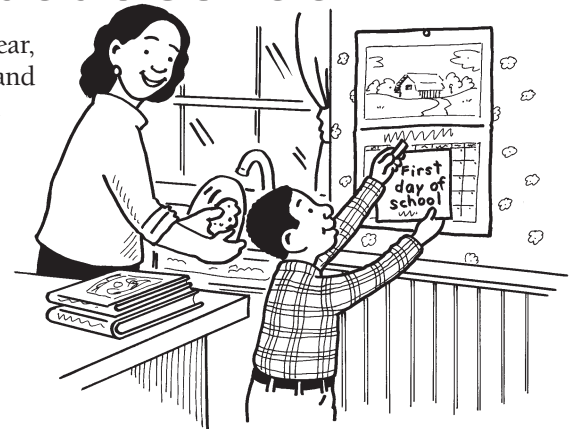
School may look different this year, but one thing is the same: Parents and teachers want to keep children safe and help them learn. Here are answers to questions you may have as the new school year gets underway.

Q: My child thinks school will be too hard this year since he hasn’t been in class for so long. What can I do?

A: Many students had a longer-than-normal summer break, and teachers are ready to help them catch up. So let your youngster know he’s not alone. If you discover he is struggling (say, stumbling over sight words or math facts he knew last year), contact his teacher so you can work as a team to get him on track.

Q: With all the changes COVID-19 has brought, my son seems anxious. Any ideas for making him feel better?

A: Youngsters feel less anxious when they know what to expect. If he’s adjusting to a new school schedule, post it on the refrigerator. At home, try to keep



things as much the same as possible. Eat meals together regularly, and plan weekend activities he can look forward to like hiking or playing backyard games.

Q: When my child works online, how much should I be involved?

A: Your youngster’s work is his responsibility, but you can offer support. To help him stay on task, make sure he has a quiet place to learn and the materials he needs. You might sit nearby and do your own work, or simply be available in case he has a question or a technical problem (like a dropped internet connection). Consider keeping a notepad handy so he can write his questions if you’re busy.♥

Get to know teachers

Now’s the time to open the lines of communication with your youngster’s teachers and set the stage for a successful year. Consider this advice:

- Attend events like back-to-school night and PTA or PTO meetings, whether they’re held virtually or in person. Introduce yourself to your child’s teacher, and try to meet specialists, too. The librarian, school counselor, and art, music, and PE teachers all play important roles in your youngster’s education.
- Send a note or an email to find out how teachers prefer to be contacted. Also, include a personal detail or two about your child, perhaps how she’s coping with the pandemic or a hobby she enjoys. You might also ask the teacher how he’s been doing during this time—he’ll appreciate your recognizing that it has been hard on everyone.♥



Reading adds up

Did you know that children who read for pleasure at least 20 minutes each day do better in school? Use these tips to fit more reading into your youngster's day.

Keep it front and center.

Your child will be more likely to read during her free time if materials are easily available. Stash kid-friendly magazines in the living room, and leave comics



on the breakfast table. When you know you might need to wait, such as at the dentist or vet, take books along or download e-books from the library to your phone or tablet.

Add it to other activities.

Bedtime is a natural opportunity to read. But so is playtime—and even chore time. If your youngster wants to pitch a tent in the backyard, suggest that she fill it with books and magazines to read while she hangs out inside. Also, audiobooks can

make reading hands-free, so you could listen to a story together while you do yard work or fold laundry.♥

ACTIVITY CORNER

Create a family yearbook

Encourage your child to preserve family memories, and practice writing, by starting this fun project he can work on all year long.

Together, look through old school yearbooks—his and yours—to find out what they contain. Your youngster will see individual and group portraits as well as pages dedicated to activities and special events. What will his homemade book include? He might create a binder with sections for birthdays, holidays, and accomplishments, for example.



Now your child can write up yearbook entries and take photos to go along with them. Maybe he'll begin with a page about himself learning to play the guitar and another dedicated to his sister's fall art exhibit. Have him add each page to the matching section in his binder, and keep his work-in-progress on the coffee table for everyone to leaf through.♥

PARENT TO PARENT

We're a cleaning team

When I stepped up our household cleaning routine because of the pandemic, I decided to get my sons involved. I told Nate and Seth that we're in this together and that we need to share responsibility for keeping the house clean—and keeping germs at bay.

Our boys came up with a great idea. They decided to make a "chore spinner." They divided a paper plate into sections labeled with chores like sweeping, mopping, vacuuming, and dusting. I added emptying trash cans and wiping down surfaces we touch a lot, such as doorknobs, TV remotes, banisters, and counters.

Now when it's chore time, Nate and Seth spin the wheel to see who does what. They're showing more responsibility for their chores than before—and they've even started calling themselves "The Clean Team."♥



Q & A

Screen time: Find a balance

Q: My daughter has had more screen time than usual in recent months. How can I help her cut back?

A: For many children, technology has been a valuable tool for learning and for staying in touch with friends and loved ones lately. So the amount of time spent in front of a screen isn't necessarily a problem—what matters is how your daughter uses technology.

Have your daughter make a chart with three columns labeled "Screen-free time," "Quality screen time," and "Other screen time."

The first column can include things like family meals, physical activity, and playing with toys. In column two, she might list schoolwork, video-chats with relatives, and educational videos. And the last column is for purely fun screen time like (parent-approved) video games and apps.

Explain that the goal is to spend most of her time on activities in columns one and two. For column-three items, set a time limit that works for your family.♥



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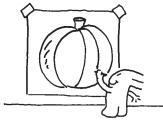
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Spot respect

Ask your youngster to write the word “R-E-S-P-E-C-T” across the top of a sheet of paper, with a column for each letter. Post the paper on the fridge, and let everyone write examples of respect that start with those letters. (“Return borrowed items in good condition.” “Express thanks for favors.”) Put a tally mark by each one someone does or notices this week.

Sprinkle in similes

Your child can use similes—comparisons with *like* or *as*—to write vivid descriptions. Try this: Pick something (say, the wind), and take turns describing it with a simile. Your youngster might say, “The wind tickled my ear *like* a whisper.” Or you could say, “The wind howled *as* loudly *as* a wolf.”

DID YOU KNOW?

The last speech sounds children typically master include *ch*, *sh*, and *th*. By age 8, your youngster should pronounce all sounds correctly in the beginning (*cheese*), middle (*seashell*), or end (*with*) of a word. If you’re concerned about his speech, contact his teacher. She may suggest an evaluation by the school speech therapist.

Worth quoting

“Start where you are. Use what you have. Do what you can.” *Arthur Ashe*

JUST FOR FUN

Q: What’s one question you can never answer with “Yes”?

A: What does n-o spell?



Homework success

Which homework assignment should your youngster tackle first? How can she make sure she follows the directions? Suggest these strategies that will help her do her best at homework time.

Start smart

Before your child digs into the day’s homework, have her rank her assignments from easiest to hardest. She may want to do the hardest work first while her mind is fresh. Or perhaps she’d prefer to get an easier assignment out of the way first to give her a sense of accomplishment.

Read the instructions

Paying careful attention to directions can help your youngster complete assignments correctly. For instance, the instructions might say to write explanations or draw pictures to show her thinking in solving math problems. Also, tell her that if she doesn’t understand the directions, it’s okay to ask for help. Offer to read them with her, or she could call a friend.

Share expectations

How you tell your child what you expect will go a long way toward turning your expectations into his reality. Consider these three techniques.

1. Show understanding. You might say, “I know you want to play, but it’s time to study for your test.”

2. Give choices. Your youngster may do what’s expected if he gets to decide when to do it. Ask him, “Do you plan to practice piano before or after dinner?”

3. Look to the future. Help your child tie your expectations to his goals. Does he want to become a race car mechanic? Try: “When you grow up, you’ll need to be organized to know exactly where all your tools are.”♥

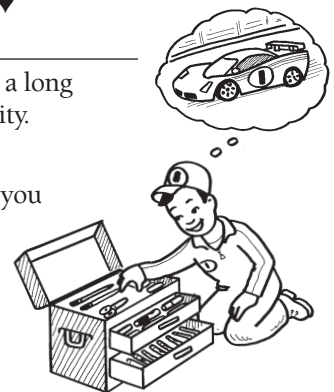


Take breaks

Short breaks will help your child stay focused. Between assignments or subjects, let her set a timer for 10 minutes. She can stretch, snuggle with the cat, or dance to music until the timer goes off, then get back to work.

Review work

As your youngster finishes each assignment, have her check it over before putting it away or sending it electronically. Is her name on her paper? Did she skip any parts? Do all answers make sense? Once she’s satisfied, she should put her paper in her backpack or hit “send.”♥



Count on courage

Children may believe that being brave means being fearless. But having courage really means taking action even when something feels scary—like learning to ride a bike or speaking out if something is wrong. Encourage your child's bravery with these tips.

Recognize it. Since courage often doesn't feel "brave" while it's happening, your youngster might not realize he is being brave. When he



shows courage, point it out to him. ("It was brave of you to meet the neighbor's dog. I know you're not comfortable around big dogs.") Or you could say, "It took a lot of courage to tell your friend to stop teasing that girl."

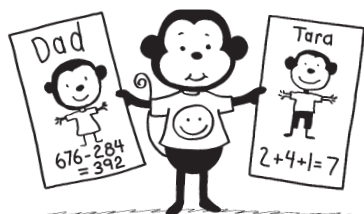
Control feelings. If your child is nervous or afraid, he may convince himself that something is too difficult. Help him develop ways to manage his feelings. He might take a few slow, deep breaths before he tries riding his bike without training wheels. Or he can give himself a pep talk before speaking up for himself. ("I know it's wrong to share answers. I'm doing the right thing.")♥

ACTIVITY CORNER

"I'm 3 x 3 years old!"

Age, shoe size, address ... your child's world is full of numbers. For a fun way to practice math facts, she can use those numbers to make up personalized math problems for everyone in your family.

Have each person write equations about herself or relatives. Your youngster might write " $2 + \text{my shoe size} + 1 = 7$ " (answer: size 4). And you could write " $676 - 284 = \text{our house number}$ " (answer: 392). More numbers to use in equations: age of our dog, Dad's birth year, number of people living in our home, year of grandparents' wedding.



Trade papers—can you solve each other's problems? Then, let your child display the math by drawing portraits of your family and writing the equations on each person's portrait.♥

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Strengthen bonds with family traditions

Traditions build a sense of security by giving your youngster something to count on. Try these ideas.

Talk about family traditions

Maybe you take a full-moon walk once a month or visit a pumpkin farm every October. Discussing these traditions will help your child recognize and treasure them as part of what makes your family special.

Make adjustments

Accept that some traditions may not work this year, such as hosting a World Series watch party or attending a neighborhood potluck. Then look for ways to adapt them. Perhaps you'll eat peanuts and popcorn with your family while watching baseball or classic sports on TV.

Tip: If you have a blended family, start new traditions together—and be sure to keep old ones, too. You'll build stronger bonds and a sense of a family identity.♥



Q & A Learning to brainstorm

Q: My son often has to brainstorm for school assignments, but instead of coming up with a lot of ideas, he gets stuck after one or two. How can he learn to generate more ideas on his own?

A: Brainstorming often stalls when kids spend too much time trying to think of "good" ideas. Remind your son that brainstorming has no wrong

answers, and a so-so idea might lead him to an ideal solution.

Practice brainstorming together. Each night, try to come up with a headline that describes your day, a new title for tonight's bedtime story, or a name for a stuffed animal. Your son can toss out the first idea, then take turns suggesting others until he has one he likes. Over time, he'll get more comfortable offering ideas without overthinking them.♥



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SHORT NOTES

Memory builder

Strengthen your

youngster's memory with this playful idea. Have her look away while you build a small block tower. Then, let her study it for 30 seconds and turn her back. Can she duplicate it from memory, using the same shapes, colors, and positions for her tower? Now let her build a structure for you to copy—and test *your* memory!

Prepared for conferences

You can make the most of parent-teacher conferences—whether yours is virtual or in person—by listing questions ahead of time that you'd like to ask. Here are three to include: "What does my child seem most interested in?" "What is hardest for him?" "How can I support him at home?"

A vote for good citizenship

Good citizens take an active role in selecting their leaders. Show your youngster how it's done. Talk about the candidates you prefer and what they stand for. Then, take her to the polls when you vote this month, or let her watch you fill out a mail-in ballot and put it in the mailbox.

Worth quoting

"The difference between winning and losing is most often not quitting."
Walt Disney

JUST FOR FUN

Q: If people count sheep to fall asleep, what do sheep count?



A: Nothing. Sheep can't count!

Learn to manage emotions

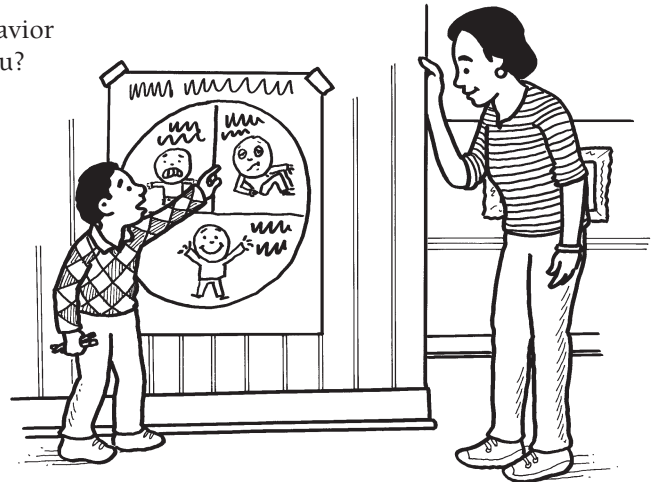
Is your youngster's behavior sometimes a mystery to you? Acting out can be a child's way of showing you he's angry or upset. Use this advice to help him express his feelings in more positive ways.

Make a chart

Together, brainstorm a list of emotions, such as happy, frustrated, excited, and bored. For each one, your child can draw and name a character (Happy Henry, Frustrated Fred). If he misbehaves (say, he yells at his sister for touching his toys), he could use the characters to talk about his feelings. ("Uh-oh, I'm acting like Angry Andy!")

Ask "why?"

Simply asking "Why do you think you feel that way?" and listening carefully to your child's answer helps in two ways. First, it allows him to recognize and describe how he's feeling. ("I'm frustrated because my project isn't turning out the way I wanted.") Second, he



will feel heard and cared about. As a result, he may be less apt to take out his frustration on others.

Find coping techniques

Equip your youngster with strategies for handling negative emotions. You might mention things you do when you feel the same way he does. ("If I'm worried about something, it helps me to put it in writing. That might help you, too.") With time and patience, he'll develop his own strategies for managing his feelings. ♥

Reviewing report cards

Look at your youngster's first report card of the school year as an opportunity to help her succeed going forward. Consider these tips:

- Start by reading the key that explains what the marks or grades mean. Do they indicate how well your child performed or how much progress she made—or both?
- Ask your youngster to tell you about her report card. She's a good judge of what's behind the grades. Also, put any low marks in perspective. Your child has probably adjusted to a lot of changes in this unusual year. Let her know you understand and that she has time to finish the year strong. ♥



Doorways to creative writing

Coming up with a good story idea is the first step toward writing a good story. Unleash your youngster's imagination and boost her writing skills with these two ideas for getting started.

1. Book titles. Suggest that your child use the title of a favorite book as inspiration for her own story. If she chooses *Cloudy With a Chance of Meatballs*

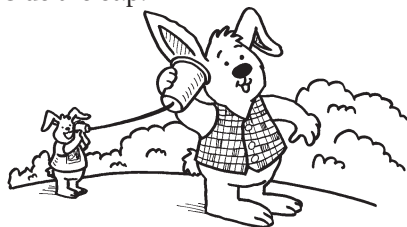
ACTIVITY CORNER

Paper-cup phone

This old-fashioned “phone” is a fun way for your child to explore sound waves.

Materials: pencil, two paper cups, scissors, string, two paper clips

Have your youngster use the pencil to poke a hole in the bottom of each cup and cut a piece of string about 50 feet long. Now he should put opposite ends of the string through the bottoms of the cups and tie each end to a paper clip inside the cup.



Time for a phone call! Each person holds a cup. Walk apart until the string is taut, and carry on a conversation, taking turns speaking into your cups. To listen, hold your cup to your ear.

Now talk at the same volume *without* the phone. Your child will notice your voice isn't as loud. That's because sound waves vibrate, and the vibrations travel better through a solid (the string) than through air.♥

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appearing unexpectedly and the family finding spy disguises like wigs and fake mustaches around the house.♥

(Judi Barrett), she might describe a rainy afternoon spent making spaghetti and meatballs with her grandma. Or for *Where the Wild Things Are* (Maurice Sendak), she could write about a hike in the forest—what wild animals will her character see?

2. Flashbacks. Instead of writing the beginning of her story first, your youngster can start at the end! She might open with, “And that’s how we discovered that our cat was a secret agent.” Then she could write the rest of the tale as a flashback, with the cat disappearing unexpectedly and the family finding spy disguises

PARENT TO PARENT

Tag ... you're out!

Our sons love our

local playground, but because of the pandemic, we don't go when it's crowded. So we look for creative ways to stay active outside. Recently, the boys started making up new versions of tag.

Brody invented Pizza Tag. When “It” tags you, you have to call out a pizza topping before “It” counts to 3. If you can't think of one, or you pick a topping another player already said, you're out. Then Ben came up with Sticker Tag. “It” tags you by putting a sticker on your back. If a player gets three stickers, he's out.

In all of our games, the last person out becomes “It” and decides which version of tag we'll play next—or invents a brand-new one. And all that running around means the boys get plenty of exercise!♥



Q & A

Develop stronger social skills

Q: My daughter seems to have trouble making and keeping friends. How can I help her learn better social skills?

A: Strong social skills will help your child become a good friend. Plus, knowing how to interact with others can also improve her academic achievement and her attitude toward school.

Discuss ways to show she cares about a friend's opinions or interests. Your daughter might ask questions (“What kind of dance class do you take?”) and follow

up to show she's listening (“What songs do you dance to?”). Friends also celebrate each others' accomplishments and strengths. Your child could tell a classmate that he used awesome graphics in his presentation, for instance.

Finally, encourage your daughter to stay in touch with friends and set up get-togethers to maintain strong relationships.

For example, they might have dance parties or sing-alongs via video chat.♥

