

TOP

tips on parenting



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Top 15 Parent Tips on How to Best Handle Upcoming Parent-Teacher Conferences

By Stacy DeBroff, best-selling parenting author of The Mom Book Goes to School: Insider Tips to Ensure Your Child Thrives in Elementary and Middle School and founder of www.MomCentral.com

~ Parental anxiety over parent-teacher conferences revolves around trepidation about how your child is doing. Don't let your anxiety cause the meeting to be unproductive. While, hopefully, you are entering parent-teacher conferences with a fairly accurate sense of how your child is doing, there is always the fear of unknown bad news.

~ Approach the meeting as an invaluable opportunity to discuss with a trained professional the developmental, academic, social, and other issues that your child faces at school. Your child's teacher sees him at work and at play, in large social groups and alone. Use parent-teacher conferences as a way to gain insights about your child's progress.

~ For many parents, the temptation is to dash in with a few questions or issues and let the teacher take charge of the rest of the meeting. Be prepared and bring your own agenda to ensure that you discuss the issues foremost in your mind.

~ Organize your thoughts and set goals ahead of time for what you need to communicate and learn during this meeting.

~ To prepare for a conference, set aside a sheet of paper for each child at the beginning of the school year and jot down notes about your concerns. Such issues may include your child's academic progress, family events, and your child's dynamics with particular classmates.

~ Arrange your worksheet in whatever format works best for you. Look through the information you have at home—report cards, homework, notes from the teacher, the parent handbook—to help frame your ideas.

~ Ask the teacher beforehand if she keeps a folder of your child's work and if you can see your child's before the conference. If she doesn't have work folders create your own by collecting your child's tests, notebooks, or papers to look over and gauge her progress.

~ Before going to any meeting at the school, always talk to your child about his experience at school. Ask if he has any specific questions or concerns you should bring up with the teacher.

"Be prepared and bring your own agenda."

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Top 15 Parent Tips ...

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~ Show up for conferences early. You'll have more time to talk to the teacher if the person before you fails to show or ends early or time to review your child's in-class portfolio while you wait in order to take a closer look at what your child has been doing in class. Moreover, your child's teacher may have conferences scheduled back-to-back, so by running late you deprive yourself of meeting time.

~ Start with a compliment. Talk about how much you appreciated a creative assignment or how impressed you are with your child's growth in reading. Be appreciative and thank her for taking the time to see you.

~ Bring paper to jot down notes during the conference so you won't forget comments, suggestions, action- and follow-up items. Taking notes on what the teacher tells you can be helpful, but if you do so, make sure you remember to look up and make eye contact as well.

~ Spend the beginning of the conference listening. Let the teacher direct the conversation. The information she shares may answer some of your questions.

~ Although teachers like to lead parent-teacher conferences, make sure that the questions you need answered get addressed.

~ Ask your most important questions first, just in case time runs out before you and the teacher have a chance to discuss everything. Avoid lengthy discussion on topics that are unrelated, storytelling, and long asides.

~ Don't be shy. Teachers will keep talking if you don't offer anything up. You are an expert on your child, and you've known her

longer and in more complex ways than a teacher ever can. Your insights are important, so share them.

PARENT-TEACHER-CHILD CONFERENCES

~ A growing trend in schools, especially in the later grades, is to have your child participate in conferences with you and his teacher. Schools have found that involving the child in these conferences is an effective way to give the student greater responsibility in his own learning process. By actively participating in the evaluation of classroom performance, fear of the behind-closed-doors discussion is replaced with motivation, insight, and open communication.

~ Student-led conferences build a sense that your child is in control of her education and is capable of deciding what is important enough for you to see. Teachers' questions guide students in deciding what the most interesting and important parts of her education are, and the ones you most need to know about. These questions encourage your child to be reflective, to articulate her strengths and weaknesses, and to describe what she has learned through her coursework instead of simply having these things pointed out to her. This allows your child to be an active participant in her own education, which, more often than not, will positively impact her academic performance.

~ Child-led conferences encourage your child to take ownership of his education. The old scenario is the concerned parent coming home from a parent-teacher conference to a child who just blames the teacher for his poor school performance. Instead of perpetuating *The Blame Game*, parent-teacher-child conferences are a productive, cooperative process.

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Book Review

Childhood Favorites

by Alicia M. Martin

Reading favorite books can bring back the warm, contented memories of childhood. Do you remember treasured books from your childhood? Share those books and memories with your children. Talk about who read to or with you when you were small. Express your love of reading. Then make wonderful new memories with favorite books and your children. Below are some of my favorite books from childhood. I hope that you enjoy reading them as much as I have!

Noisy Nora by Rosemary Wells

This small book with its short story tells about the antics of Nora, who feels that she is not getting enough attention from her parents. Jack, the baby, and little sister Kate are getting Mom's and Dad's attention and Nora feels left out. Her response to being ignored is to make a great deal of noise and get her family to pay attention. But her plan doesn't work. Nora still doesn't obtain the attention she craves. She must do something else Read this silly, rhyming book to find out how Nora gains the attention of her entire family.

The Tale of Mrs. Tiggy-Winkle by Beatrix Potter

Another small appealing book, this one tells the beloved tale of Lucy who has lost her pocket hanky. Lucy asks various barnyard animals if they have seen it, but to no avail. Continuing her search, Lucy encounters a little door in the side of a hill that overlooks the village. Inside is Mrs. Tiggy-Winkle, a lovely little woman. Mrs. Tiggy-Winkle

is doing the washing and ironing for the local animals and Lucy helps her finish. Does Lucy find her hanky? Who and what is Mrs. Tiggy-Winkle? Enjoy the beautifully detailed illustrations and find the answers to these questions as you and your child read this classic story together.

Each Peach Pear Plum by Janet and Allen Ahlberg

A wonderfully illustrated rhyming I-spy book! As you read the poem you can search for the fairytale characters in the illustrations. Can you find the three bears, Goldilocks, or the wicked witch? Where are Cinderella and Tom Thumb? Read and enjoy this book together as you search to find all the hidden characters.

The Story of Ferdinand by Munro Leaf

Ferdinand is a little bull who likes to sit in the shade of the cork tree and just smell the flowers. He doesn't want to run and jump and bump heads with other bulls. He doesn't care that men in funny hats have come to take a bull to the bullfights. He just sits in the shade of the cork tree and smells the flowers. However, as it happens, an unplanned event propels Ferdinand to the bullfight. What will he do? What will the men in the funny hats do? This classic story will be enjoyed by you and your little one as you read and delight in the detailed black and white illustrations while you discover what happens to Ferdinand.

Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs written by Judi Barrett and illustrated by Ron Barrett

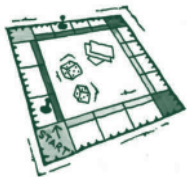
What would happen if it rained orange juice? What if hotdogs and eggs fell from the sky? What would you do if clouds were made of

mustard and the sun was made of Jello? This is the story of the town of Chewswallow and how the residents lived with weather patterns that were made of food. Things go fine in this little town, for a while. Then disaster strikes. House sized sliced bread falls from the sky. A gigantic pancake covers the school. What will the town do to solve this strange and dangerous problem? Use your imagination as you read this story together to learn what to do if enormous bits of food begins to fall in your town.

Resources

- Ahlberg, A. & Ahlberg, J. (1978). *Each peach pear plum*. Scholastic: New York.
- Barrett, J. (1978). *Cloudy with a chance of meatballs*. Aladdin Paperbacks: New York.
- Leaf, M. (1936). *The story of Ferdinand*. Puffin Books, The Penguin Group: New York.
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~Alicia M. Martin was an elementary classroom teacher for seven years and has taught K-5th grades. She has a master's degree in Education and is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction at Utah State University.



Math Mania

By Ann Douglas

Who ever said that math was boring? Here are six (count 'em, six!) ways to make math feel like fun for your kids.

1. Encourage your kids to start a collection. It doesn't matter whether it's buttons, bugs, bottle caps, baseball cards, or something else entirely. Starting a collection allows your child to practice all kinds of important skills that will serve him well in the math trenches—skills like sorting, classifying, and—of course—counting.
2. Get your kid hooked on cooking. Cooking is sheer magic to your average kid: you pour a bunch of ingredients together, pop everything into the oven, and—voila!—you end up with a batch of cookies or something equally yummy a short time later. Parents also recognize its magical powers: it's an activity that keeps kids happy and entertained and that gives kids' math and reading skills a workout at the same time. So if you're eager to give your child a chance to practice her measuring skills (yet another important mathematical building block), plan to hit the kitchen with your kid on a regular basis.
3. Plan a family games night. Board games like Monopoly® and Dominoes and card games like Crazy Eights and Go Fish may seem like too much fun to be educational, but you're actually giving your kids an important opportunity to give their math skills a workout when you're charging them rent for landing on Boardwalk or telling them to "Go fish." So why not schedule a family games night sometime soon?
4. Play with patterns. Kids who learn to recognize and manipulate patterns find it a lot easier to master the basics of mathematics than their less pattern-savvy peers, which is why working with patterns is an important part of most preschool curriculums. You can encourage pattern play by giving your child a chance to experiment with patterns: for example, making necklaces out of wooden or plastic beads or pointing out the patterns that we encounter in everyday life.
5. Make models. Whether your child decides to build a bridge out of popsicle sticks, a tower of toothpicks, or a house of LEGO®, he'll give his math skills a workout by practicing his model-making skills. Older kids may enjoy drawing up some rough blueprints for more complex model first—yet another activity that's terrific for developing your child's math brain.

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question corner

"What should I do to help my 3-year-old child learn to read?"
--Pang in CA

If you want to help your child to read and to love reading, the best thing to do is to spend time reading to your child every day. Start a reading routine right before bedtime. Pick a couple of stories that are appropriate for the child's age and attention span. Your child will ask you to read his or her favorite story over and over again. This repetition is important for the child to comprehend the story, but it also may help the child memorize the book and begin to connect the spoken word to the written word on the page. As you are reading with your child, ask questions such as "What do you think will happen next?" "Did you ever feel that way?" Also, discuss experiences that are related to the story. For example, "Remember when we went to the zoo? We saw an elephant just like the elephant in this book." You can also run your finger under each word as you read it out loud to help the child attend to the print in the book. Make reading exciting by using lots of expression and changing the tone, speed, and volume of your voice. Creating animal noises and talking about the pictures in the book can be fun, too. Ask your child questions about the pictures you see. Look for stories with repeated phrases and ask your child to join in on the repetition. You can also help your child become curious about reading, by pointing out print in the environment including signs, labels, and lists. A visit to the library is a great way to extend the learning into the community.



~Heidi Malloy, Ph.D., is an associate professor in the Department of Psychology at Metropolitan State University.

question corner features questions posed by parents to early childhood experts who provide brief responses in this newsletter. If you have any questions you would like answered, please send an e-mail to eejcenter@cc.usu.edu or mail to EEJ Center for Early Childhood Education, Utah State University, 6705 Old Main Hill, Logan, UT 84322-6705.



10 Time-Crunching Tips for Moms

By Christine Louise Hahlbaum

Laundry is plentiful. Time is not. For most moms today, multitasking has become a must just to keep up. In this fast-paced world, saving a few minutes here and there can make all the difference in the world.

1. Make a plan. Instead of swinging by the grocery store multiple times a week, limit it to once or twice. Use a grocery list and stick to it. Avoid food shopping when you are hungry to prevent impulse purchases.
2. Delegate. Children live in the house, too. Institute a few ground rules. "If you break it, fix it. If you make a mess, clean it up. Put things back where you found them." Follow these rules yourself. Encourage your children with praise and gentle reminders if they become wayward and conveniently "forgetful." Your job is not to clean up after them, but to show them how they can do it themselves.
3. Place baskets on the stairs. To reduce the number of times you have to run up and down the stairs, collect things in a basket to carry to the next floor. It will save you time and energy.
4. Limit TV viewing. According to a recent AARP magazine article, the average American spends 11% of his lifetime in front of the tube. If the average lifespan is 75, that's 8.25 years you could save doing something else.
5. Integrate exercise into your lifestyle. Instead of wondering when you can squeeze in an hour at the gym, coordinate a family activity with your exercise regime. Take a family hike or bike ride. You will teach your children the value of movement while getting enough yourself.
6. Use a timer. Distraction is a big time-waster. Give yourself a set amount of time to fulfill a task. If you need to clean out the kitchen drawers, allow yourself just enough time to complete the job before moving on. It will raise your awareness of the task at hand.
7. Say "NO!" Practice it in front of the mirror. Society does not encourage mothers to use the term very often. If your children's school or social group wants your help, agree to it only if you truly have the time. Extracurricular commitments can be all-consuming. Be aware of what is involved before saying "Yes."
8. Coordinate schedules. Instead of racing to the dentist for three different appointments, try to go to your 6-month dental check-up when your children do.

9. Hire a babysitter. If you are pressed to finish a certain project, get the help you need. There is nothing shameful about hiring someone to assist you, even if you just need the day off.
10. Take a break. The benefits of napping have been vastly documented. A 15-30 minute power snooze leaves you refreshed and more productive than those who go full out all day.

You don't need to be in the rat race to lead a productive, fulfilling life. So snatch a few minutes, shift down a gear or two, and take a load off. You, and ultimately your family, will be happy that you did.

~Christine Louise Hohlbaum, stay-at-home mom expert and author of *Diary of a Mother* and *SAHM I Am: Tales of a Stay-at-Home Mom in Europe*, lives near Munich, Germany, with her husband and two children. Her popular parenting ezine takes a zany look at motherhood through the lens of an American expat. To subscribe: <http://www.diaryofamother.com>

Math Mania

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6. Take a hike—literally. Take your kids on a "math walk" and point out examples of bridges, skyscrapers, and other architectural feats that were accomplished thanks to math.

Then make a pit stop at the library or a bookstore so that you can pick up a book that explains how bridges and skyscrapers

are constructed—the perfect bedtime reading after a day of math adventuring!

~Ann Douglas is the author of numerous books about parenting and pregnancy, including *The Mother of All Parenting Books*. Visit her online at www.parentingwriter.com.



7 Simple Secrets to Help the Kiddies Get Along, Curb Their Bickering, and Still Have Fun at Your House

By Michele Borba, Ed. D.

Author of *Nobody Likes Me, Everybody Hates Me: The Top 25 Friendship Problems and How to Solve Them* (Wiley, 2005)

So the neighborhood kids have chosen your home as the “cool” place to hang out. Great, eh? But you know the reality: Whenever kids get together, blissful, happy times are not always the outcome. If you’re at your wits end from hearing kid-battles and are tired of refereeing or playing “negotiator,” have faith. There really is a way to curb kid bickering, tattling, and tears, and save your sanity. Here are a few secrets that teach your kids how to get along, tattle less, and solve their problems without you. The result: happier kids, more peaceful homes, and a saner you. What could be better?



1. Enforce a “No Tattling” rule. What kid wants to be around a pal who always wants to snitch? So nix tattling, pronto. Lay down one law: unless the report is intended to keep the accused out of trouble or harm, you won’t listen. The rule could be as simple as: “Is this helpful or unhelpful news?” And then consistently enforce the policy every time your kid, or his friend, tattles.
2. Buy an egg timer. A frequent reason for bickering is when one kid dominates others or doesn’t allow the same time on a task. So teach your kids to use an egg timer (or stopwatch

or sand timer) to make things fair. They first must agree on a set amount of time—usually only a few minutes—for using an item. When the time’s up, their turn is over. And everyone stays happy (including you).

3. Put away the good stuff. There are certain possessions that are very special to your child—as well as to other family members. So put those items away before a guest arrives. It actually minimizes potential conflicts. Then say, “Anything you leave out are things you have to share.”
4. Teach decision-makers. Rock, paper, scissors; drawing straws; picking a number; flipping a coin—these are old-time favorites that come in handy when kids can’t decide on rules, who gets to choose what to do, or who goes first. Teach them to your children so they can use them with their pals to help reduce those squabbles on their own.



5. Create activity bins. To minimize conflicts (and those “there’s nothing to do” complaints), create a few “activity bins” (baskets, boxes, or plastic bins) stocked with a few toys and age-appropriate activities: Play-Doh, and cookie cutters, bubble blowers, art supplies, a craft set, and a pack of cards. These are great to help kids unwind or give them qui-

eter play moments even away from one another. A brand new video, coloring or comic books is great to keep tucked away for those “when all else fails” moment. Plop the kids down, hand them a comic book, and give yourself a five-minute breather.



6. Forget odd numbers. There’s truth to that old saying: “Two’s company, but three’s a crowd.” An even number of kids playing together usually is better than an odd number, simply because there’s less likelihood that one kid will be left out. So if bickering continues with certain kid combinations, set a rule for “pairs” only—and refrain from a threesome.
7. Keep out of it. If you hear an argument brewing, stay within earshot, but jump in only when emotions are too high but before an argument escalates. Too much adult interference not only makes kids depend on you to solve their problems, but can actually escalate the squabble.



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activity corner

Fun with Measurement!

Measurement is a math concept that can be learned at an early age. You can help children learn mathematical concepts by providing them with concrete items and measurement tools. You do not need to stick with rulers and yard sticks. Children can begin understanding measurement by using blocks, cups, spoons, and yarn. They can even begin to measure with their own hands or feet.

Materials:

- Set of large wooden blocks
- Set of small blocks (e.g., unit blocks, Lego blocks)
- Assortment of measuring spoons and cups
- 1 strand of yarn



Directions:

Several measuring activities can be accomplished using this set of measuring tools. By providing children with a set of large wooden blocks, they can begin measuring the towers they build. You can ask children questions to encourage them to think about height. "How many blocks would it take to reach the top of this shelf?" "How many blocks would it take to reach the top of the table?" Wooden blocks or a set of small blocks can be used to measure the width or length of a rug or a book. "How many Lego blocks would it take to reach the other side of the carpet?"

Additional estimations can be made using yarn. You can ask the children, "How much yarn will it take to reach across the table?" "How much yarn would it take to measure the length of your sister's body?" For this activity, ask one child to lie on the floor and the other child to measure the body of the child lying on the floor with a piece of yarn. Ask the children to change places so each one has a turn to measure the other's body. After the children have their piece of yarn the size of their body, ask the children to compare the yarn to each other or to different items in the room. "Wow, you are as tall as this chair!"

Another great way to involve children in measuring is to invite them to cook with you. As you and your child make your favorite recipe, ask your child to help you measure the ingredients. Perhaps you'll need a cup of milk or a teaspoon of salt. Measuring can be fun!

7 Simple Secrets

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~Michele Borba, Ed.D. is an internationally recognized educational consultant who has presented workshops to over one million participants. She is an award-winning author of 20 books including *Nobody Likes Me, Everybody Hates Me* and *No More Mis-behavin'*, and is recognized for her practical, solution-based strategies to strengthen children's character, behavior, and social development. She has appeared on talk shows including, *Today*, *The Early Show*, *Canada AM*, *The View*, *Fox & Friends*, *MSNBC*, and *Talk of the Nation* and is an advisory board member for *Parents* magazine. For more about Dr. Borba's work see: www.behaviormakeovers.com



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