

pin up the pictures, and Saturday afternoon we can cook and bake together.”

Put the steps into sequence. Then at each milestone, praise your enthusiastic eight-year-old for each step she has completed, and remind her how it fits into the big picture: “Your placemats are wonderful, and Grandma will like those bright colors when you put them on the table tomorrow night.”

If your child suddenly loses interest, that’s probably a signal that she has gotten overwhelmed. Words like “I’m bored” or “this is dumb” really mean “this feels like too much, this feels too hard for me.”

When that happens, help her re-focus by breaking the step into even smaller parts.

Third graders may seem to give up easily, but they will bounce back with that wonderful enthusiasm if you can show them how to break a big idea or big process into *short, small, step-by-step* bits.

How parents and families can help third graders thrive

Third grade is also a good time for parents to help their children practice making decisions — and then living with the results of those decisions. You can suggest two choices of action, explain what will happen as a result of each choice, then let your child decide. Keep the choices pretty simple and focused on the situation right at hand. And, of course, make sure that you follow through with the results you described. Setting up choices helps your children learn about cause-and-effect and also about how to make decisions on their own.

Your third grader will probably have a little more homework than you saw during first and second grade. This is a good year for practice, practice, practice in handwriting and drawing as well as in arithmetic skills. Respect that homework. Building good homework habits now will bring amazing benefits later on! Here are a few ways you can help:

- Make sure your child has a regular time and place to do homework, with few distractions.
- Breaking homework time into shorter chunks might help if your child gets frustrated.
- When your child is working on homework assignments, be a role model by reading or doing something constructive yourself.

- Ask about the assignments and praise what your child has accomplished: “Great, you finished the arithmetic worksheet! Can you show me how you worked those problems?”

Other skills you can help your child practice at home are using clocks and calendars, using common household measuring tools, and making charts to collect data. Keeping a chore chart, for example, helps your child practice responsibility, learn how to record and display information, and set and reach a goal that you can celebrate: “Good for you! You made your bed every day this week. That means we can read an extra story tonight!”

Again, the goals for parents and caring adults are to make opportunities for many small, step-by-step successes and to be the cheering section when the child achieves each step. And don’t forget to enjoy this wonderful whirlwind year!

Characteristics of a typical eight-year-old

Physical	Growth spurt is likely. A lot of restless energy but gets tired easily. Needs plenty of outdoor time. Can be a little clumsy. Fine-motor control is getting better – handwriting starts to improve: a good age for writing and drawing practice.
Mental / Academic	Trying a lot of different things at once — awareness of the world is expanding. Limited attention span and strong tendency to “bite off more than they can chew.” Big ideas, big plans. Very talkative, vocabulary is expanding rapidly. Needs help breaking tasks and activities into small parts for success and motivation.
Social	Likes to be in groups, mostly of own gender. Is productive and cooperative in group work. Starting to form larger friendship groups.
Emotional	Very energetic and enthusiastic. Little sense of limits and boundaries. Not much patience. May feel inadequate when something doesn’t come easily right away. Strong sense of fairness. “I’m bored” usually means “this is too hard, I’ll never get this right.”

Based on *Yardsticks: Children in the Classroom Ages 4 – 14* by Chip Woods, NE Foundation for Children, Turner Falls, MA, rev. ed. 2004.

Ask your child—

How long do you think it will take to do that?

What will you need to do first?

Discouraged? Let’s go look at your plan again.