

Tips for succeeding in the fifth grade and beyond

Exploration, experimentation, and imagination are tremendously important for fifth graders. They will learn best when they are *actively* involved. Parents and other caring adults can help a lot by setting up opportunities for them to try new challenges and discover their own answers.

Praise your fifth graders for successes and good choices, and help them use past experiences to do even better in the future. “Last week you did your spelling worksheet every day without being reminded — that was super! But I did see that you had to hunt through a lot of loose paper in your backpack to find it. Do you have any ideas for how to keep your papers organized?”

Make opportunities for your fifth grader to make decisions and choices. Ask questions about the consequences of those choices, and give your fifth grader time to work out cause-and-effect. “I understand that you don’t want to do your homework. What do you think will happen during the quiz tomorrow if you don’t do the review questions tonight? What do you think will happen if you *do*?”

Make sure your fifth grader reads out loud to you half-an-hour every day — the sports section or tomorrow’s weather report, anything. And then talk to them about what they read.

Give them chances to write things — anything. Let your children write out the grocery list, addresses on envelopes, whatever it may be. Encourage them to write letters to relatives or to friends in the military.

Fifth grade is also a time of academic challenge, so it’s very important to make sure your children are confidently mastering the basic skills. Homework skills are more important than ever.

- Make sure your child has a regular time and place for doing homework. Help keep that place free from noise and distractions.
- Ask about the assignments and about what is going well and what is more challenging. Offer help but make sure your children do their own work. One way to review is to ask, “How would you teach a fourth grader how to do this problem?”

- Help your children work out reminder systems that will work for them, but don’t be a rescuer if (when?!) they forget to turn in an assignment.
- Be a role model. Read or practice a skill of your own while your child does homework.

Thinking ahead to middle school

Three good things to know about middle school:

- Middle school is “high school with training wheels.” In middle school, kids start taking charge of their day — moving from class to class on time, using a locker, changing clothes for gym. These are great chances to practice responsibility and independence.
- Middle schools are designed with this age group in mind. A good middle school is set up to meet your child’s physical, developmental, and social needs. The way the class schedule is set up, the subjects, and the activities are designed to appeal to curious and energetic students.
- Counselors will be ready to help. A good counselor can be a great resource for parents and can be your “eyes and ears” in middle school. If there’s a problem, the counselor can help plan ways to get back on track.

Three not-so-good things about middle school:

- Middle schools are larger than elementary schools, and that can be a major challenge.
- Communication between home and school will be more complicated because your child will have a number of teachers, not just one.
- Getting organized and taking responsibility take practice. We have to be ready to let our children struggle a bit as they learn to take charge of their schoolwork and activities.

So take some time during this golden fifth-grade year to get prepared for what comes next. Talk to your fifth grader about the ways middle school will be different. Get a combination lock for your child to practice with (many new middle schoolers worry about opening a locker). Help your children practice independence, for example, by packing their own backpacks or making their own lunches. Be upbeat and positive about the middle-school experience right around the corner. And get ready for your child to bloom with new skills and experiences!