

Fifth Grade — The Wonder Year!

Open to learning; open to doing

Important things to know about — Your child in the fifth grade

- What to expect from your fifth grader.
- Why families still matter and what they can do to help.
- Helping your children make the most of what they are learning.
- Preparing for the sixth grade and beyond.

What's so great about fifth graders?

Oh happy day, oh happy day ... in fact, oh happy year! Child specialists agree that age 10 is the “golden end of childhood.” Kids this age can use everything they have learned in the past nine years, **so they love to work on projects that show off their skills.** Whether it's board games, cards, handicrafts, cooking, or sports, kids this age love to show you their stuff! Give them lots of chances to **shine!**

Ten-year-olds are more open to factual knowledge than at any other age, whether it's the times-tables, rules of games, lists of presidents and state capitols, or the details on the backs of baseball cards. They soak up this kind of information like sponges. They are also learning to use their knowledge to solve problems. How many square feet of linoleum would we need to redo this kitchen floor? How much milk do we need if we double this recipe? What size wrench will work for this repair job? **Talk to your children as you work through practical problems in everyday life, involve them, show them how knowing things makes for easier living!**

Families are cool and why families rule

Children this age really seem to like their families — even siblings! Yes, they are starting to rely more on their friends, but we are still their role models, for

better or for worse. Teach them to respect others, act responsibly, do their chores, and be nice to others.

It's sad but true: a person's character often determines his or her life chances.

Fifth grade is also a very good time for families to teach children about the human body, childbirth, and child rearing. (Hey! All it takes is 24 hours of love a day for 18 years!) You may think they are too young for all this body, love, and sex stuff, but they can learn the facts much better now than later on when they are *so* much more self-conscious about their bodies that they won't hear a word you say. Kids are comfortable in their own bodies at this age, so it's a good time to talk about some of the facts of life.

So, enjoy, enjoy, enjoy. Get close; form tight bonds. Do as much with them as you can. The love and the learning you'll build up are like savings in the bank. All the skills and goodwill you invest now will help both you and your child in the more challenging years ahead.

Characteristics of a typical ten-year-old

Physical	Huge need to play and exercise as large muscles develop. Loves the out-of-doors. Comfortable in own body.
Mental	Enjoys memorizing facts. Likes rules and logic. Starts to collect things and order the world. Great age to teach scientific concepts. Expressive and talkative.
Emotional	Mind/body/emotions in good adjustment. Child seems comfortable within self and with others. Generally happy. Much more relaxed than at age 9.
Social	Enjoys family and friends. Cooperates and shares easily. Works well in groups. Likes club or team activities. Happy to be role model for younger children.

Based on *Your Ten- to Fourteen-Year-Old* by Louis Bates Ames, Ph.D., et al., Gesell Institute of Human Development, New York, 1988, and *Yardsticks: Children in the Classroom Ages 4 – 14* by Chip Woods, NE Foundation for Children, Turner Falls, MA, rev. ed. 2004.

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!