

Parenting Pipeline

a newsletter for parents of **fourth grade** children



Self-Care: Is It Appropriate for Your Fourth Grader?

Is Your Child Ready to Stay Alone?

Readiness to stay home alone depends on more than your child's age, although readiness signs often appear from age 10 to 12. Readiness signs include:

- being agreeable to stay home alone
- not being easily frightened
- showing signs of accepting responsibility
- being aware of the needs of others
- being able to consider alternatives
- being able to make decisions independently
- being able to use unstructured time wisely

Some other readiness signs are being ready on time for school, completing homework and household chores without frequent prodding and letting you know where he or she is going and when he/she will return.

Consider Location of the Home

The location of your home may make a difference.

- Do you live in a remote area without close neighbors?
- Do you consider your neighborhood relatively safe?
- Is it possible for your child to reach you or another responsible adult to check in or report an emergency?
- How long will your child be alone?

- Will your child have limited opportunities to socialize with other children or take part in after-school or community activities because your home is isolated?

After considering some of these situations, you may decide your child should not stay alone even if he or she shows signs of readiness.

Families Are Different

Will your child be left at home with siblings? Some sibling care can be positive, but leaving siblings home together opens the possibility of physical or psychological abuse. Also, an older sibling's development can be harmed when he or she assumes much of the responsibility for younger siblings.

The circumstances in each family are different. What appears to work successfully in another family may not work for yours. Once you have made a decision that seems best for you and your family, try it for a few weeks. Monitor your situation and be flexible enough to make changes if needed.

Preparing Your Child for Self-Care

If you choose self-care, prepare your child as well as you can to make it a safe experience. Children who stay alone at home may need to react to a number of emergencies such as:

- being locked out of the house
- unwelcome strangers at the door or on the telephone
- a fire
- a storm
- a home accident
- arguments with siblings
- animal bite, bee sting
- becoming ill

Teach children telephone skills, personal safety skills and home safety skills so they are better prepared to handle emergency situations. Decide on guidelines to use when you are not home. Consider guidelines for:

- staying in the house or yard, other boundaries
- inviting friends over
- using the telephone — limitations and privileges

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- doing homework
- doing household tasks
- watching television — program choices and amount of viewing time
- snacking — kind and number of foods allowed
- using kitchen — use of appliances and cleanup responsibilities
- setting “off limits” — access to power tools, firearms, your personal items, etc.



It's usually best to work with your child over an extended period of time on self-care guidelines. Too much information at one time may be overwhelming. Information is usually remembered better if situations are acted out. An actual fire drill, an acted out telephone conversation, a response to a pretend storm or to a pretend stranger at the door may be good teaching devices.

Adapted for use in Iowa from *Parenting Pipeline*, North Dakota State University Extension Service, by Virginia Molgaard, specialist in human development and family life, Iowa State University Extension. Edited by Carol Ouverson, communication specialist, Iowa State University Extension.

File: Family life 8

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Giving Self-Care A Try

Once you have worked with your child and feel quite confident that he or she has adequate knowledge and skills to stay alone, you may want to set up a trial period. If your child knows it is a testing period, making needed changes may be easier. During the trial period make a special effort to talk frequently with your child about his or her feelings. Also review the guidelines and safety skills. If you feel comfortable with your arrangement, proceed with confidence but be flexible in making changes as needed.

Keep communication lines open with your child. Feelings about being home alone, house guidelines and safety skills are important to discuss even through the teen years.



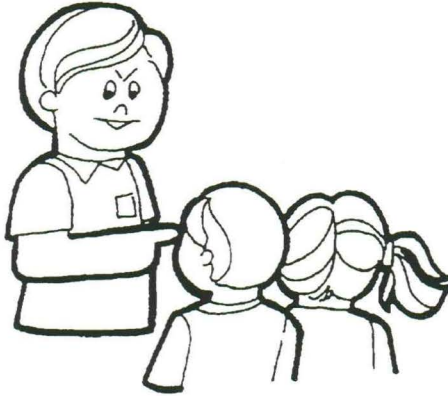
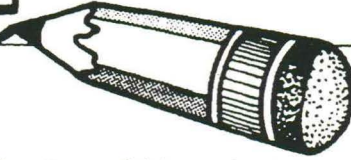
This Issue

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Discipline: Guiding Your Fourth Grader

Despite all our attempts to encourage positive behavior, children still misbehave at times. Isn't it interesting how much advice you get when your child does misbehave? Everyone has a solution for you and your child — sometimes even strangers! Rarely do we hear a remark such as, "My, you handled that so well yesterday when Barbara was teasing John about his new glasses."

Some level of misbehavior is normal. Misbehavior happens as a part of learning and each situation is best treated as an opportunity to teach appropriate behavior rather than to punish misbehavior. Punishment is used to penalize children for wrongdoing and results in no learning.

The goal of guidance and discipline by adults should be to help children develop self-control, self-direction and self-esteem. Promoting self-regulation is especially important for fourth graders, who, as they become older, are spending increasing amounts of time away from adult supervision. Changing children's misbehavior while trying to teach them self-control is one of the trickiest jobs for a parent or teacher.

An Alternative to Reward and Punishment

One way to discipline children is to reward them when they obey and punish them when they disobey.

The big disadvantage of this method — the disciplinary system in which most parents of today were reared — is that it denies children a chance to make decisions and to be responsible for their own behavior.

An alternative method, called "natural and logical consequences" requires children to be responsible for their own behavior. Natural consequences are those that permit the child to learn from what naturally happens. For example, the child who does not get up on time will be late for school and have work to make up. The parent, in this case, must not rush to help the child get on the school bus.

For the consequences to be effective, the child must see them as logically related to the misbehavior. The consequences must "fit" the behavior in a logical way. The following examples show the major differences between punishment and consequences:

1. Punishment expresses the power of the parent. Logical consequences express the reality of the situation. Don't say, "Jim, turn off that TV! Mom and I are trying to sleep!" Instead try saying, "Mom and I are trying to sleep. So, either turn the TV down or play outside. You decide which you'd rather do."
2. The punishment given is rarely related to misbehavior. Logical consequences are related to misbehavior. Don't say, "Susan, I've told you a thousand times to keep your room straightened up! I can't vacuum the carpet with all that mess on the floor, so you can forget about going to the movie Saturday night." Instead try saying, "Susan, I'm going to vacuum the carpet today. I can't vacuum in your room if there are toys and clothes lying around on the floor. So I'll put them in bags and put them in the basement if you decide not to pick them up."
3. Punishment tells the child he or she is bad. Logical consequences imply no element of moral judgment. Don't say, "You took my hammer without permission! Don't you know that's like stealing? And now you've lost it! Your allowance is cut off until the hammer is paid for!" Instead try focusing on the impersonal fact that the hammer must be replaced, and say, "How will you replace the hammer, Hugh?"

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4. Punishment focuses on what is past. Logical consequences are concerned with present and future behavior. Don't say, "Ralph, it's six o'clock and you agreed to be home at five. You're always late! How many times have we gone through this? You can just stay home for a week, and you can just forget about that bike we talked about." Instead, the next time Ralph asks to go out try saying, "I'm sorry, but you're not ready to take responsibility for coming home on time. We'll try again tomorrow."

5. Punishment is associated with a threat, either open or concealed. Logical consequences are based on good will, not on getting even. Don't say, "Charles, you didn't feed Champ, so you may not play with him today. Maybe this will teach you the value of being responsible for your pet." Instead use a friendly voice the next time Charles wants to play with Champ, and say, "No, Charles, you haven't taken the time to give him his food and water today. We'll try again tomorrow."

6. Punishment demands obedience. Logical consequences permit choice. Instead of breaking off a kicking match at the dinner table with a threat, try something different. Don't say, "You two knock it off right now or you'll go to bed without supper!" Instead try saying, "You may settle down or leave the table until you're ready to join us."

In applying consequences, include the following:

1. Provide choices and accept the child's decision. Use a friendly tone of voice that communicates your good will. "Michelle, we're trying to watch TV, you may settle down and watch the program with us or leave the room. You decide which you'd rather do."

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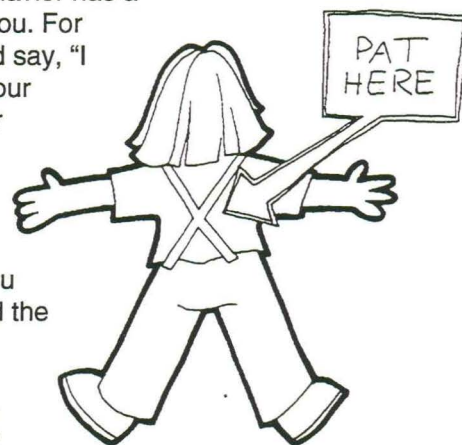
2. As you follow through with a consequence, assure children that they may try again later to take the responsible course of action. "I see that you have decided to leave the room. Feel free to come back when you are ready to settle down."

3. If the misbehavior is repeated, extend the time that must elapse before the child tries again. "I see that you're still not ready to settle down and have decided to leave the room. You may try again tomorrow night."

Consequences take time to be effective. When you are using consequences, you are changing from your typical responses. Your children may test the limits. Remember, patience plus practice equals progress.

Encourage Appropriate Behavior

Children also need to learn that positive consequences may be associated with positive behavior. Be sure to comment on any positive behavior you see. Be specific in your praise. For example, rather than say "You're really being good today," say "You are getting your homework done in plenty of time to watch some TV with us." Also, let children know how their behavior has a positive effect on you. For example, you could say, "I really appreciate your setting the table for supper. When we work together, we can get done faster and start eating sooner." You have just described the behavior and the positive consequences! This type of praise can boost your fourth grader's self-esteem.



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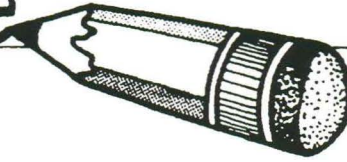
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Starting Early: Sexuality Education for Preteens

The fourth grade Pipeline has often referred to fourth grade as a year of major transitions. Early childhood (0-8) gives way to middle childhood and pre-adolescence (9-13). Transitions in how children think and relate to peers are evident. Physical development and sexuality also change.

During the preteen years, children continue to define and refine their values, beliefs and knowledge about sexuality. Your factual information and open discussion will help your child develop healthy and responsible sexual attitudes. Open communication means more than just one "talk." It's an on-going process of sharing information.

Some people say preteens take a "newspaper approach." They want to know about everything — what, when, where, why and how. View these questions as opportunities for you to pass your values and beliefs, as well as accurate information, to your child. If you don't, you can be sure your child will seek information from any source available. The information in magazines, movies, music, jokes and on bathroom walls is rarely the picture parents want their children to have.

Research indicates that parents are still more influential in passing values and beliefs than media and peers, IF parents are indeed doing the job. Purchasing

a few good resources and attending a class on becoming a woman or man are great places to begin. Here is a list of suggested resources. (This is just a partial list of the many excellent books available.)

For parents

Calderone, Mary and Eric Johnson, 1981. *The Family Book About Sexuality*. New York: Harper and Row.
Gordon, Sol and Judith Gordon, 1983. *Raising a Child Conservatively in a Sexually Permissive World*. New York: Simon and Schuster, Inc.

For preteens and/or parents

Betancourt, Jeanne, 1983. *Am I Normal? (For Boys)*. New York: Avon.
Betancourt, Jeanne, 1983. *Dear Diary (For Girls)*. New York: Avon
Gitchel, Sam and Lorri Foster, 1986. *Let's Talk About Sex: A Read and Discuss Guide for People 9 to 12 and Their Parents*. Santa Cruz, California: Network.
Maderas, Lynn, 1987. *The What's Happening to My Body? Book for Boys*. New York: Newmarket Press.
Maderas, Lynn, 1987. *The What's Happening to My Body? Book for Girls*. New York: Newmarket Press.
Rosenberg, Ellen, 1987. *Growing Up Feeling Good*. New York: Penguin Books.

Understanding Your Child's Concerns

Eight- to 12-year-olds are:

- Concerned about their own bodies — how they work and how they compare with their friends' bodies.
- Busy with social development. This is a time of increasing independence from parents and more sensitivity to peers. Children are concerned with how they fit in with their friends and what their peers think of them.
- Becoming aware of and interested in the opposite sex.
- Concerned with, "Am I normal?" The wide range of physical development among peers increases this concern.
- Developing interest in the importance of physical appearance and personal grooming.
- Interested in sexual anatomy, sexual vocabulary and sexual behavior.

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How Can Parents Help?

Parents may find that talking with their preteens about their sexuality is embarrassing or uncomfortable. Sexuality can be a difficult topic for many parents, but most parents want to communicate about sexuality. Here are some suggestions to help you talk to your child.

- It's OK to be uncomfortable talking about sex. You can feel better by practicing what you're going to say. Talk to yourself in front of a mirror, or discuss sexuality with your partner or friends.
- Being knowledgeable reduces discomfort. Read a reliable book about reproduction. If your child asks a question you don't know, you can look it up together.
- Use television as a springboard for discussion with your child. It may be easier for both of you to discuss issues involving television characters.
- Listen to your child's question. Then respond, "I'm glad you asked. What do you think?" This opens the door for discussion. You will discover what your child already knows, and you can correct any inaccurate information.
- Don't always wait for your child to ask. Look for ways to initiate a discussion or invite a question.
- Be prepared to discuss a topic more than once. As your child develops he or she will want to check out information with you.
- Encourage your child to come to you for information. You can encourage your child verbally and with the "body language" you use when listening to your child.
- Don't be afraid to say, "I'm just learning to be comfortable talking about this. My parents never did this."

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What Does Your Preadolescent Need to Know?

- Preteens need knowledge of what to expect during puberty. Both boys and girls need information about how boys' and girls' bodies develop and the timing of these changes.
- They need reassurance that they are normal — that young people develop at different times and rates.
- Young adolescents need to know about reproduction. They are intensely interested in how pregnancy occurs, in the birth process, in twins, and in many other topics
- Both girls and boys need to know about major changes they will experience: menstruation and nocturnal emissions (or wet dreams). Girls need positive, detailed explanations of what to expect during menstruation, and how menstruation relates to pregnancy. Boys need reassurance that wet dreams are normal.
- Many children are concerned about masturbation. You may want to explain that some children masturbate and some do not. This is personal choice, but masturbation is not harmful.

Your child needs to know that he or she is valued and can come to you for information and to talk about concerns and feelings.

When you communicate about sexuality with your child, you are teaching him or her that:

- information is valued,
- each person is important,
- sexual behavior entails responsibility, consideration and decision-making,
- communication is important.

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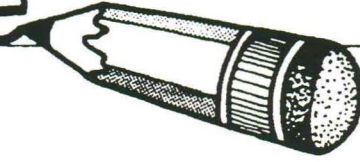
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Listen To Me!

Parents say that their children just don't listen to them. Likewise, children often complain that their parents don't listen to them. The key to meeting family needs is communication, which includes both the parent and the child learning how to listen.

Reacting Versus Responding

Most people react instead of responding helpfully. Reacting means that we judge the situation based on our own feelings and experiences. Responding means that we make an effort to hear the other person's feelings. That is, responding means sensing the emotion behind another's words, and allowing the other person to tell his or her story without feeling it is being judged. Here are examples of reacting and responding.

Reacting (negative feedback)

John comes home and throws his math book on the table as he says, "I hate math. I'll never be able to do division!" Here are some possible parent reactions. "Oh yes you will, just keep trying." "Now it can't be that bad." "I was always good in math and you will be too — you're just not trying hard enough." "You shouldn't hate math, it's important."

John feels frustrated and thinks that nobody cares or understands. John's parents mean well as they try to convey their message, but they have not really listened to John's point of view.

Responding (positive feedback)

John comes home and throws his math book on the table as he says, "I hate math. I'll never be able to do division!" You respond by saying, "You sound angry. What happened?" or "Division can be frustrating to learn — tell me about your day."

These responses reflect the feeling behind John's words. This invites him to continue explaining his story, and lets him know you will listen. If John continues to speak of how he hates it, you may want to suggest that he wait until he has calmed down before doing more of his assignment.

Most children simply need to air their feelings. When they have finished, you will be able to find a direction to follow, such as one of these responses: "I'd be happy to help you with your division problems." "Would you like to see about some extra help from your teacher in the morning?" "Let's plan how we can reach your goal of learning division. Then we can take it one step at a time."

Continue to reflect feelings and respond positively. If you think the situation is beyond you and your child's problem solving skills, don't hesitate to ask the teacher or school counselor for assistance in getting over the hurdle.

The following techniques have been taken from the book *How To Talk So Kids Will Listen And Listen So Kids Will Talk* by Faber and Mazlish. It's an excellent book for improving communication skills.

Listen with full attention

The child is discouraged by a parent who gives only lip service to listening. A parent reading the paper and saying, "I'm listening" is not giving full attention. It is much easier for a child to tell his or her troubles if a parent looks at the child, listens carefully and is not distracted by TV or the newspaper.

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Acknowledge with a word

"Oh...Mmm...I see"

It's difficult for a child to think clearly when the parent is questioning, blaming or advising. Words or phrases such as "Oh," "Umm," "I see," along with a caring attitude are invitations for a child to explore his or her own thoughts and feelings. As a result the child may come up with solutions.

Give the feeling a name

When we urge children to push bad feelings away, they get more upset. Parents often fear that discussing a bad feeling or experience may make things worse, but the opposite is true. The child who hears the words for what he or she is experiencing is comforted. Someone has acknowledged that inner experience. The child can organize these feelings and thoughts and begin to understand.

Give a child his or her wishes in fantasy

When children want something they can't have, parents often respond with logical explanations of why they can't have it. Often the harder parents explain, the more children protest. Having a parent understand how much you want something makes reality easier to bear.

For example, if a child's friend is going to Disneyland, the child may want to go. A parent may state, "It's out of the question since we don't have enough money." This reaction may be true and logical, but the child is trying to express an intense desire to go. As a result, the logical reaction will make it seem as though the parent doesn't care or doesn't understand. Parents might get better results by acknowledging the desire first. Give your child in fantasy what he or she cannot

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have in reality. Try saying, "I hear how much you want to go. It would be so much fun for our family to go along. I wish I could do magic and we'd be there right now! What would we be doing if we were there?"

All of these responses allow the child to be heard. After some discussion, you might want to end the conversation with, "It would be great fun to go, and it's fun to imagine the trip even though you know we can't afford it." You may, however, begin to save money for such a trip someday, if you believe it's appropriate. Children usually understand that there are many things we would like but can't have.

Active Listening

Active listening is sensitive attention to a child's verbal and nonverbal messages, and reflects back the child's message with interest and concern.

Are you an active listener? To test your ability, recall or tape record interactions between you and your child. Listen for four things:

1. Who does most of the talking?
2. How do you respond to your child's messages? Do you use "feeling messages" (responding) or do you use "feeling stoppers" (judgment or denial)?
3. Are you quietly attentive, or do you respond to your child's messages with caring and understanding?
4. How would you feel if your messages were handled the way you treated your child's?

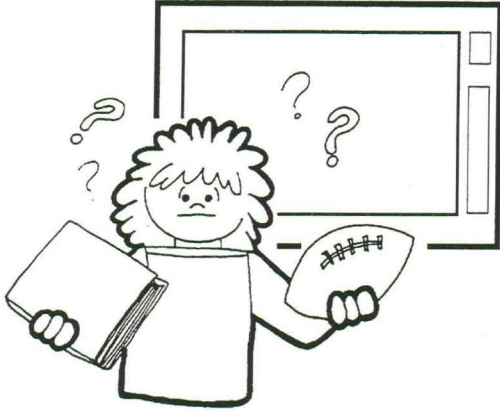
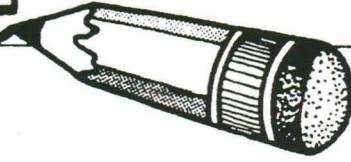
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Children and TV

TV makes an impact on children. It has been called the third parent. Here's a glance at the importance of TV in our children's lives.

- Almost all homes today (98 percent) have at least one TV set.
- The average TV set is in operation for over seven hours a day.
- Children as young as nine months of age already are watching TV as much as 90 minutes a day.
- By age four, children average four hours a day watching TV.
- Children remember and recite fairly complicated slogans, jingles and songs from commercials.
- More than half the food ads on children's TV are for heavily sugared foods such as presweetened cereals and snack foods.
- Less than four percent of the food ads directed to children are for meat, bread, fruits, vegetables or dairy products.
- By the time young people graduate from high school, they will have spent more time watching TV than on any other activity except sleeping.

Help Your Child Become a Good Consumer of TV

The time that your child spends watching TV can, if structured appropriately, be a positive experience. The following suggestions can help.

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Make TV time family time. Identify TV programs that the family can watch together. Spend time talking about what happened on a show. What feelings do family members have about a character or the way a show/movie ended? How would your child change the show/movie? These types of questions can lead to an evening of sharing that can strengthen your relationship with your child.

Interact physically with your child while watching TV. Many children, even at the fourth grade level, enjoy being held or cuddled while they watch television with their parents. Physically expressing affection with hugs and pats on the back sends a special message to your child.

Discuss family values. Ask your child to identify the ways in which a family on a TV program is different from your own family. Discuss why your family has its own values, beliefs and home rules.

Check your child's level of understanding of a program. Is your child able to tell the difference between the stunts used on TV programs and reality? Be sure to explain that the stunts shown in TV may be dangerous and that they should not be attempted at home.

Plan follow-up activities to watching TV. Trips to the library, zoo, museum, lake or even the backyard can expand the meaning of the many TV programs that deal with animal and plant life, math, music and most any subject area.

Challenge your child to be a good consumer. Spend time listing products shown in TV commercials and decide with your child which of these products to sample. Compare the products with their TV commercials. This activity works best, and is least expensive, for TV food commercials.

Discuss with your children your reasons for purchasing a particular product. Teach your children what you look for. You also can talk back to your television when your child is around. Point out flaws in reasoning or photographic techniques that make a product appear better than it really is.

Identify TV snack foods. Many parents worry about the junk food that children choose to eat while watching TV. Work with your child to identify a list of "approved TV snacks." Post this list on the refrigerator door. Although you may not always be able to enforce the list, its presence on the refrigerator door will remind your child of the family agreement regarding TV snacks.

Plan alternative activities to watching TV. As a family, plan one night a week to do something other than watch TV. Board games, family council meetings, field trips, gardening or exercising are possibilities.

Alternatives to TV

As summer vacation approaches, the quantity of TV viewing tends to increase. Parents can help tame the TV habit by posting a list of activities available to their



children beyond TV/movie time. Help your child identify these activities and monitor their time to include a balance or variety of activities. Examples of alternative activities might include group play (swimming, ball teams, clubs); lessons (gymnastics, dance, pottery, archery, photogra-

phy); simple food preparation (pizza, punch, cookies); arts and crafts (drawing, painting, models, kits); and reading and writing (fiction or non-fiction). Writing to a pen-pal or relatives develops writing skills.

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Books to Read Together

Reading together is an activity parents often do with younger children. When children reach fourth grade, many parents assume the child can read so they rarely read together. Educators recommend taking time to read a few pages or a chapter together as often as possible.



Reading together can be a highlight for both a child and parent. Happy memories can surround a variety of books. Public libraries are very willing to share titles or recommend books for fourth graders. The partial list included below contains some of the most often checked-out books for fourth graders:

Recommended Books:

- Blume, Judy, *Freckle Juice*
- Blume, Judy, *Superfudge*
- Cleary, Beverly, *Ramona the Pest*
- Conford, Molly, *Hail, Hail Camp Timberwood*
- Dahl, Roald, *James and the Giant Peach*
- Martin, Ann M., *The Babysitters Club*
- Rockwell, Thomas, *How To Eat Fried Worms*
- Silverstein, Shel, *Where the Sidewalk Ends*
- Sobol, Donald, *Encyclopedia Brown: Boy Detective*
- Warner, Gertrude, *The Boxcar Children*
- Wilder, Laura Ingalls, *Little House in the Big Woods*

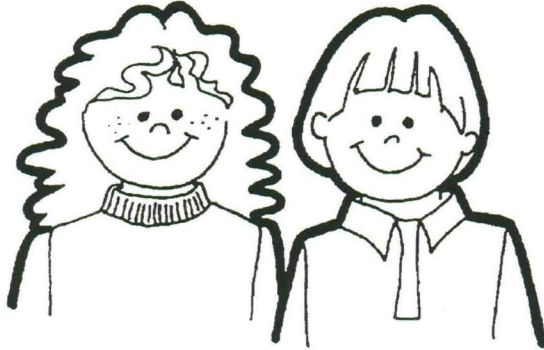
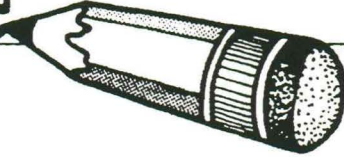
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Welcome to the intermediate grades!

Two words describe the major difference between primary and intermediate grades: responsibility and independence. Course work includes more and longer daily assignments. Your child will bring home from 20 to 30 minutes of homework most days. It is the child's responsibility to complete daily assignments and homework on time. Homework assignments help your child learn to work and think independently, a major development for children this age.

In the primary grades your child was learning to read. In the intermediate grades your child is reading to learn. Children will learn about such subjects as social science, health and science. As parents, we can continue to encourage reading for enjoyment by reading to and with our children at home.

Settling into a structured school day can be difficult for children after a carefree summer. Parents can help make this transition easier by seeing that their fourth grader rests and eats a nutritious diet. Also add a little extra nurturing.

Supporting Your Fourth Grader

Parents play a crucial role in providing their children with the values and skills essential to success in school and in later life. To motivate children to do their best, parents can do the following.

- **Relate** personal experiences and family stories that reinforce the message that effort, persistence and good character count.
- **Give** children responsibilities at home to foster self-reliance, industriousness, resourcefulness.
- **Teach** children to plan ahead by requiring them to put schoolwork and household chores before play.
- **Recognize and encourage** positive behavior, efforts and performance.
- **Encourage** children to work to the best of their abilities in school and to make the effort needed to succeed in their studies.
- **Establish** family rules (by such things as setting curfews and restricting activities during the school week) that provide youngsters with structure and a guide to their actions.
- **Expect** to see homework assignments each day. Parents should question their children and school authorities if homework appears to be the exception, not the rule.
- **Make** effective use of leisure time at home. This includes talking to children about their experiences to help them find meaning in events. This skill is important for success at school. Also restrict TV viewing. Limit the amount of time children watch TV and monitor their choice of programs.
- **Show support for the school** and their children's teachers by (1) helping children get organized so they can get to school on time with needed school work and supplies, (2) supporting school disciplinary measures and working with the school to meet the child's needs, (3) getting to know their children's teachers, attending school meetings and contacting the school when they have a concern.
- **Learn** about the school's expectations and practices by talking directly with the principal and teachers and visiting the classroom.
- **Join** with other parents to improve the school.

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Understanding Your Fourth Grader

Your fourth grader is a unique individual and has specific characteristics common to this age. The following list of traits will help you get acquainted with the developmental stage your child has entered.

Nine-Year-Old Traits

- learns to take responsibility for own actions
- plays to the point of fatigue
- shows signs of being more responsible, inner directed, and independent
- plans and organizes
- has inconsistent appetite and sleep patterns
- has poor posture
- loses some interest in fantasy, shows more interest in real world
- appreciates being trusted
- wants to please, overly concerned with performance
- boys may enjoy looking sloppy; girls show concern about their appearance
- conforms to peers in dressing
- sets high standards and gets down on self when standards not met
- is easily upset
- begins hero worship of older member of same sex
- shows lots of habitual physical movements; fingers in hair, slouching, picking at nails
- is concerned about right and wrong, being fair

Helping Children Solve Their Problems

Children of all ages experience problems that require the guidance of an adult. One of the greatest gifts we can give our children is the ability to recognize, solve and cope with their problems.

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For more information, contact:

A fourth-grader may have had problems in previous grades, such as lack of friends or inability to manage homework. Many children feel overwhelmed by their problems. Using the following guide, you can teach your child that those big problems can be handled by working together. The process takes time and effort.

Problem-Solving Steps

Note: The adult's job is to help the child remain focused on the problem-solving process.

Gather data.

Collect information about events and feelings. Avoid blaming. Ask "What happened?" "How did you feel?" "What happened next?"

State the problem clearly.

It's easier to solve a problem if your child has a clear understanding of it. Examples: "You want to _____ and your friend wants to _____." "What can you do so you both will be happy?"

Generate ideas.

Go for quantity. List as many as possible. Encourage all ideas, silly and practical. Avoid criticizing ideas. Review problem often to generate thought.

Evaluate ideas.

Consider all ideas. Help your child tell the difference between good and poor ideas. Examine consequences of each by using "What might happen if you _____?" or "How will Mary feel if you _____?"

Ask for a decision and help children plan.

Look at the list of alternatives and ask for a decision. Next ask "What do you need to do first?" Plan time to evaluate. If the solution is not working, try again. Congratulate your child for his or her efforts and for working toward a solution. Avoid "fixing" things for your child.

Adapted for use in Iowa from *Parenting Pipeline*, North Dakota State University Extension Service, by Virginia Molgaard, specialist in human development and family life, Iowa State University Extension. Edited by Carol Ouverson, communication specialist, Iowa State University Extension.

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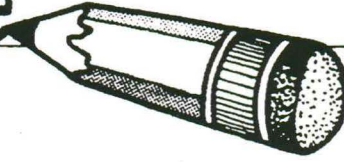
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Helping Your Fourth Grader With Homework

Well-designed homework assignments relate directly to classwork and extend your child's learning beyond the classroom.

Help your child develop a routine. Children can take time to unwind when they first get home from school or the child care provider. Sometimes after-school activities keep homework from being done until after the dinner hour. You and your child can determine when to set "homework time." Here are some ways to help your child make homework a habit.

- Review your child's day.
- Review the assignments with your child and estimate the time needed to complete each subject.
- Break large jobs into small steps. Have your child do three math problems first before tackling the rest of the math assignment.
- Show your child how to do things, rather than do it for him or her.
- Answer questions.
- Offer help only after your child has tried alone.
- Allow time for breaks.
- Establish a study area or place to do homework.
- Set a time for doing homework (perhaps after school on Mondays and Wednesdays, after dinner on Tuesdays, after dance class on Thursdays).

Homework Survival Kit

It is helpful if homework supplies are located in a specific area such as a desk or hall closet. Here is a homework survival kit for fourth through sixth graders. Place the contents in a box or storage container that can be placed on a desk, table or floor.

assignment book	glue or paste	colored pencils
construction paper	hole punch	crayons
folders	paper clips, stapler	markers
index cards	pencil sharpener	pencils
notebook paper	scissors	pens
pocket dictionary	tape	erasers

Learning Styles

How your child learns best is determined by his or her natural learning style. Some children may be neat and orderly. Others may "talk out" the solution to a problem aloud. Others work well with external noise. Your child learns by using one main learning style or a combination of styles.

Children learn best when material is presented in a variety of ways. For example, if new spelling words are presented by calling out the letters, visual learners would not be able to "picture" the word. If, however, they are printed on a blackboard in addition to being said aloud, visual learners would see the way the word looks and remember it more easily. Some learners might have to use blocks with letters and "make" the word before they could remember it.

Visual Learning

Subjects such as spelling and math often come easily for visual learners because they can see or picture the word or problem. They are generally neat and care about how things look. They learn by watching and will call up images from the past when trying to remember. Help these learners make pictures in their heads and use words to describe shape, form, color or size. Visual learners enjoy movies, museums, charts, maps or graphs. Encourage them to imagine what things look like. This will increase their ability to remember.

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Auditory Learning

Auditory learners often spell a word the way it sounds rather than as they saw it in print. They may have trouble with reading because they do not visualize well. They learn best by listening. Some auditory learners have conversations aloud with themselves or others. They like to talk things over, and they do well when people contribute verbally either in small or large groups (debates, plays). This type of learner enjoys imagining how things will sound and remembers facts best when they are presented in a poem or song.

Kinesthetic Learning

A motto for the kinesthetic learner is "learn by doing." They learn best through movement and manipulation. They like to find out how things work and are very successful in the practical arts. When given a choice of assignments, such as writing a book report or making a scene from a book, they will make the scene.

Most kinesthetic learners move around a lot (rock in chair, tap feet) and have trouble sitting for long periods of time. Learners of this type like to dance, participate in sports and use their hands. They may even like the feel of fabric and may like to study on a carpet or textured bedspread. Although it might appear distracting, they may have to walk around while doing their homework assignment.



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Here's What Parents Can Do To Help

Children learn best by seeing, hearing or moving and doing. Most children have one best learning style or a combination of styles. Each child in your family will have his or her own learning style. You can help.

- **Take** time to help establish study habits and a study place.
- **Help** your child practice skills through activities and play. Help with memory work. Drill or review by calling out words or questions and by listening to recitation.
- **Help** children learn where to find information — books, newspapers, magazines. Take them with you to the library regularly (twice a month).
- **Offer** ideas for projects related to school studies. Let children talk over their ideas with you.
- **Review** homework that has been completed. Discuss it with your child. Encourage your child to share what has been learned.
- **Encourage** all efforts and praise the things your child does well. Don't dwell on shortcomings.

Your involvement does take time and effort. However, most parents report that when they are involved in their child's school and homework, their child enjoys school and gets along better with teachers and peers. Your child may improve his or her grades and develop a positive attitude about school, education and the future.

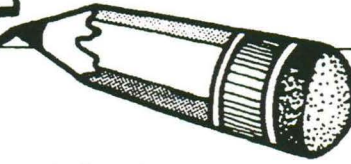
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The World Connection

The fourth grade student is entering a new scene — a new way of seeing things. School and studies inform fourth graders about the real world. Math can be used to solve shopping problems. Science reveals new understanding of the world they feel and see about them. Stories they read have real plots. The skills practiced in the first few grades now can be put to use. Students can actively contribute to their own lives. They want to discover more.

Parents still need to help guide the fourth grader's interests and activities. Peers begin to replace total parental influence. Thinking is still self-centered, but your child is seeing a bigger and broader picture.

The energy level of a fourth grader is high. At this age, students want to be more involved. You and your child might identify interests and evaluate together what to pursue. Arts and crafts, games, dramatics, sports, scholarship or music may be choices that parent and child can explore.

Making Choices About Their World

Activities will open opportunities for your child. Support your child's choices when you can. The child who is allowed to choose will more likely carry out his or her own selection. A parent who dreamed of being a national baseball star may well have a child more

interested in music than baseball. Children grow and change as adults do. A youngster who loved ball as a preschooler may get tired of Little League and decide to pursue something else.

Guide youth to explore a number of interests during these pre-adolescent years. This is the time to build talents, friendships and social skills. Since peer identity is becoming more important, this may be the time to choose a club or group to join. Children this age have a need to belong to a group. Groups with unwritten rules may develop, such as all who live in town versus all who live in the country or all who wear their hair in braids versus those who don't. Children at this age often divide themselves into groups of all boys or all girls. Groups may develop on their own, both positive and negative.

Look into a variety of clubs. You and your child can evaluate organized groups such as scouts, 4-H, or other groups led by involved adults. This gives you and your child a framework for activities. Looking to adults other than the parent is an exciting experience for the fourth grader. These clubs channel energies in a positive direction.

Every child needs to feel worthwhile so choose a group in which even small successes are applauded and failures treated as chances to learn. Look for activities that help youth compare their performances to their own past performances but not to others.

In all activities, parents will want to direct attention to the child's efforts and successes. Use failures or disappointments only as an opportunity to teach or to change. Plan any activity, especially a new effort, so that chances for success are good. Divide the activity into small pieces with several small goals instead of one large one. If a child experiences failures and says, "I can't," remind him or her that *can't* isn't forever. What he or she doesn't know now can be learned.

Joining groups or taking classes can be overdone. One child may be energetic and enjoy many activities, while another may need to work in one area at a time or may require more free time. Children need time to sit and dream, to explore and to forget the clock.

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Making Choices About Their Conflicts

Children this age will experience conflicts and will need to do problem solving. Problem solving involves choices. Use the following guide and examples to work through the conflict.

Offer Choices

Present children with at least two options and let them decide what they will do. Decision making is a skill basic to self-esteem and responsibility. Children need experience with many kinds of choices.

Progress to More Choices

First, offer "either-or" choices. "Do you want to wear your blue sweater or your jacket?" "Do you want to turn off the TV or shall I turn it off?"

Next, offer multiple choices. "Do you want to wear your zip jeans, your button jeans, or your new pants?" Add more choices as your child is able to handle them.

Finally, ask for other choices. "What have you considered wearing?"

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Help Children Think of Options

Situation: Dawn and William each get one hour of TV time a day. They are quarreling over who gets to sit in the comfortable chair to watch television. Dawn: "You always sit there; it's my turn." William: "I was here first. So, it's my turn." They want you to decide.

You can help children look for substitutions, distractions, similarities, differences, trade-offs or scheduling solutions. Possible options are:

- **Schedules:** Dawn uses it on even days, William on odd days; the person who is using his or her TV time gets the chair; or they alternate at commercials.
- **Trade-offs:** The child who sits in the chair will set the table for the other child at the next meal.
- **Differences:** Come up with a different but equally attractive choice — the "loser" uses your special rocking chair.
- **Similarities:** They both sit in the chair together or they both sit on the floor and no one sits in the chair.
- **Distractions:** Mom bakes cookies with the other child's help.
- **Substitutes:** One child can use a stool, a backrest, the sofa.

Choose some ideas to try: Select the three or four ideas you think may work and offer them.

A parent's challenge with a fourth grader is to set realistic expectations for the child. Such expectations need to be based on the child's developing interests and abilities. Give the child an opportunity to try a variety of activities. Observe your child and ask: Can the child succeed? Does the child enjoy the task? Does the child need instruction and assistance? Is the activity frustrating and upsetting to the child? Can the child succeed with encouragement and a little help?

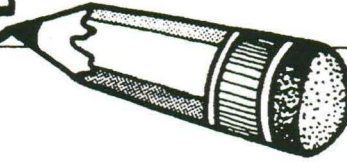
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The Social Fourth Grader Friends and Fights

"I'll never talk to Melissa again! We're not friends anymore."

Sound familiar? Your fourth grader is going through some bewildering ups and downs with friends. It isn't unusual for your child to get into quarrels with other children. The arguments may be intense and wild, but are usually brief. Learning to manage anger, to control temper and to limit quarreling by talking things out and by compromising is a gradual process. This skill will develop through the years. Children learn from their experiences and models.

As a parent, it is difficult to watch your child experience these emotional times when they lose their tempers. If you take these storms calmly, you will help your child learn to work things out peacefully. Getting into fights usually shows children the variety of styles and people in this world. Experiencing the consequences of quarrels can help your child develop self-control.

Expanding Friendships

At some point during this year you may find that people outside the family will become more important to your child. He or she is apt to become more

deeply attached to best friends and be more selective about them. As your child's interests and acquaintances expand, he or she may choose friends you don't know.

If your child feels strongly about wanting to spend time with a new friend, it may be important to arrange get-acquainted visits between the two families. It is sometimes difficult for parents to realize how important these childhood friendships are to children. If families cannot get together, invite your child's new friend to your home. This will allow you to meet and get acquainted. Most often you will be able to see very quickly why they enjoy each other. If you're concerned, it allows you to see firsthand what is happening so you can discuss it.

You may find that there is a child who seems to get in fights every time he or she is with your child. Under such circumstances, you wish you could keep them apart. Although you can tell your child not to bring the friend home, you won't be able to keep them apart at school.

Jack was a fairly quiet youngster, but whenever he was with Bill, they became very mischievous. Jack's mom was understandably disturbed by his behavior. She decided to keep a closer watch and see to it that they had a variety of approved but exciting things to do when they were together. This eliminated most problems. Many children are very active and imaginative at this age, but lack the judgment skills needed to make good choices about appropriate behavior.

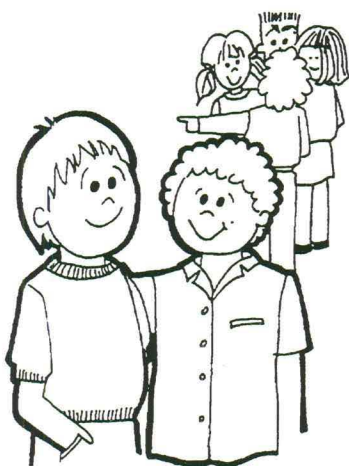
If you can spell out clear ground rules for your child and his or her companions, in a calm and friendly way, you are apt to be successful in keeping their good will as well as holding their behavior within your boundaries. Note what your child does and follow through with consequences for misbehavior, if necessary.

In the past, your child may have had little time for the opposite sex. This year may bring a new attraction between boys and girls. Since they are unsure of

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what to do about this new turn in their lives, they may escape to the familiar comfort of their own sex, where they can continue making and losing friends without losing too much of their pride in the process.

Your child has a lot to learn about how to get along with the opposite sex. Through day-by-day work and play with both boys and girls, children slowly gain knowledge that will help them during the dating, courtship and marriage days that may follow. Don't be alarmed by this new interest. Be open and discuss relationships in a straightforward manner. Your child will be confused and probably embarrassed if you tease or mock him or her. Boy-girl relationships are an important issue to children. Avoid teasing them.



“Group adjustment” at this age can be a concern to parents. Your child may go through a bewildering series of ups and downs with the groups he or she belongs to. Being outside the group doesn't always mean your child is having problems. Some children prefer to stand by themselves or with one or two close friends.

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If your child has problems making and keeping friends, he or she will need your help and support. Remind your child that this is a learning process and that a good friend forgives and tries again.

Challenge To Parents

This is an exciting year in the growth and development of your child. Children this age are learning that they can be friends and still have different ideas and customs. This is a major step in thinking. They also may question you about a variety of other family beliefs, customs and traditions, or about your likes and dislikes, food preferences, fears, wishes, religious beliefs, school and education values and more.

As they explore these questions, you have the opportunity for important communication. Take the time to visit and explore this expanding world with your fourth grader. Research indicates that your child's basic values are being established between ages eight and 10. Take these opportunities to really share your perceptions with them while they are still open to you and your ideas.

You can't rescue your child or fix his or her problems forever. You can take the time now to talk out the concerns your child faces and to point out in a caring way how his or her behavior leads to certain consequences. These are wonderful opportunities that you won't want to miss!

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