



Elementary School

School:

School assumes a central role in your child's life when they reach the age of five or six, drawing much of their attention and energy away from the family unit. The elementary-school years can become a time of enormous satisfaction and excitement. As they learn to read and master other academic skills, they will develop a love of learning and a pride in their achievements. This can contribute to their self-esteem, not only because of their accomplishments in the classroom but also as they separate successfully from the home environment. In the process their teacher can become a source of support and an important role model in their life.

For some children, however, school may cause frustration and stress. Learning disabilities can interfere with the joy of learning. Poor study habits or a lack of motivation can create academic difficulties. Sometimes children may have a poor relationship with their teachers, or they may experience separation anxiety that can interfere with their school attendance.

To make your own child's education as positive and productive as possible, closely monitor their academic progress and social adjustment, and get to know their teachers. Discuss with your child what they are learning in the classroom and how they feel about school. Encourage them to demonstrate their newly learned skills and to practice them with you. Supervise your child's homework and make sure they are preparing themselves for tests. Limit their screen time and encourage them to read, write, and express themselves creatively through hobbies and sports. If your child or their teacher reports any problem areas, communicate openly with school personnel, and try to figure out how best to help your child overcome their difficulties. If necessary, please call us for suggestions to help solve any ongoing problems.

Friendships:

As important as your child's family is to them, friends and acquaintances will become increasingly significant. They will spend more time with their peers, both in and out of school. These playmates will provide companionship, and your child will probably become preoccupied with being socially accepted by their friends. They will feel a strong need to be just like the others and to be recognized as unique.

Your family will also have to deal with the stresses associated with your child's peer relationships. From time to time they will have conflicts with friends, which can undermine how they feel about themselves. Maybe they will be excluded from a circle that they really want to be a part of, leading to unhappiness and loneliness.

During these years, monitor your child's choice of friends and supervise their play activities. Get to know their friends' parents and share with them your observations about the children's activities. Offer support, understanding, and guidance to your child when problems arise in their peer relationships. When a conflict occurs, try to understand how your child feels about it, and what they see as the factors contributing to it. Then discuss how the other child might view the problem, and together work out ways to resolve the conflict. At the same time keep in mind that you cannot solve every peer-related conflict. Nonetheless, be diligent to offer support and guidance, conveying your own values and expectations.

Outside activities:

Your child will develop a number of outside interests, from sports to scouting, from music lessons to clubs. Many of these activities will require a commitment on the family's part, in terms of time and, in some cases, money. It may also require parental patience and tolerance as children experiment with different programs before finding the ones they prefer.

In general parents should be willing to support the child with resources, encouragement, supervision, chauffeuring, and, at times, direct participation.

Providing a strong foundation by establishing healthy habits in these years will equip your child for the significant challenges that lie ahead. You will never regret the time that you invested in their lives.

Adapted from *Caring for Your School-Age Child: Ages 5 to 12* American Academy of Pediatrics.