Retelling Can Improve Your Child’s Reading Comprehension

You’ve just finished reading a story with your child. One of the best ways to check comprehension and boost understanding of the story is by asking your child to retell it.

Retelling a story requires your child to think about the details and decide what’s really important.

Give your child these three rules for retelling a story:

Tell what’s important.
Tell it in a way that makes sense.
Don’t tell too much.

Your child should be able to tell you what happens at the beginning, the middle and the end of the story. Your child should also be able to name the main characters.

You can prompt your child by asking open-ended questions, such as, “What happened next?” It’s okay if your child doesn’t remember all the details. That gives you a chance to say, “Let’s go back and look at that part of the story again.” Revisiting parts of the story will show your child that he sometimes has to read things more than once to gain a thorough understanding.

Studies show that this simple activity will help your child become a more thoughtful reader. Your child will start to pay attention to words whose meanings he doesn’t know. Your child will focus on the story structure and pay more attention to important details. All of these things will improve your child’s reading comprehension and make him a better reader—and a more successful student!

Should You Pay for Good Grades?

You’re worried about your children’s grades. Then they make a suggestion: “They would do better if you paid them for every good grade they bring home.”

Should you get out your wallet? No, say most experts on motivation. Here’s why paying kids for good grades is not an effective motivator:

- It places the emphasis on the wrong thing. If you promise your children money for a good grade, they will be working for the money rather than working to learn. They may find that they want the money so badly that they would even be willing to cheat to get it.
- It doesn’t help your children learn the satisfaction of doing a job well. Children need to learn the joy that comes from doing something to the best of their ability. Great pride comes with handing in one’s best work. That is the reward your children ought to be striving for.
- It focuses on the outcome rather than the effort. Children need to learn the importance of trying their best and sticking with challenging subjects. Putting all their attention on a reward at the end of the process will make it harder for your children to learn that lesson.

So what should you do? Let your children know that school is important. Celebrate their successes with time spent together. And keep your money in your pocket.
Are You Teaching Your Children How to Prioritize?

Prioritizing is a tall order for many children. What is the main thing they need to do? How can they focus on that?

Are you helping your children learn to put first things first? Answer yes or no to the questions below to find out:

___1. Do you encourage your children to write down their assignments every day—from tomorrow’s math homework to next month’s science project?

___2. Have you explained that your children’s top priority should be anything that is due tomorrow?

___3. Do you help your children decide what to do first if several things are due at the same time?

___4. Do you encourage your children to complete a small part of a long-term project each day?

___5. Do you enforce rules about what your children have to finish before they are allowed to watch TV or play outside?

How well are you doing?

Each yes means you are helping your children prioritize. For each no answer, try that idea with your children next time.

Q & A

Q: There are some mean kids in my children’s classes. One of them is picking on another student. I found out that although my children are not bullying the student, they stand by as these things are happening. What should I do?

A: Children who are bullied aren’t the only ones who are affected. Children who witness repeated incidents of bullying can be affected, too. Standing by and doing nothing hurts onlookers’ self-confidence and self-respect.

Even if your children want to help the victim, they may fear getting hurt or becoming a target of the bully. They may not want to be labeled as “snitches.” Or, they simply may not know what to do.

Your job is to give your children the power to do what they know is right. Here’s how:

Have a casual talk about school. “I hear some students are being mean to Daniel. Have you ever seen anything like that go on?”

Talk about your family’s values. Tell your children, “I know you’d like to stop this from happening, and you can.”

Encourage them to tell a teacher. They might say, “You should check out the bathroom on the second floor after lunch. Please don’t tell anyone I told you.”

Encourage them to talk to their other friends about what’s going on. Together, they might distract the bully: “Hey, we’ve got some work to do—let’s get back to class.” Or they can just say, “Cut it out. It’s not cool to pick on people.”

Suggest that they seek out the victim later to offer their support and friendship.

Three Activities Can Help Your Children Master Math Vocabulary

When children learn math, they also need to learn a whole new vocabulary. If they have to stop to think about words, like product or quotient, they won’t be focused on doing the math.

Just as your children need to commit basic math facts to memory, they also need to know many math terms. So make a game of learning them.

Here are three activities to try with your children:

Play math concentration. Write a math term on an index card. Write its definition on another card. Then deal out five or six pairs of cards face down. Your children can only turn over two cards at a time. The goal is to make a match by turning over a math term and its correct definition.

Link math symbols to math words. Have your child create flash cards with a symbol on one side and the word it represents on the other. Use the flash cards to help your children review.

Create memory aids that show a term doing the thing it represents. The math term circumference, for example, is the distance around the edge of a circle. So your child could write the word circumference around the edge of a circle.