

YOUR 6 – 9 YEAR OLD

The early elementary years are so exciting for both children and parents! Children are exploring their community and world, developing social relationships, learning to read, and beginning to process information so they can solve problems. Parents are so important at this time. Your child needs your encouragement, your teaching, your discipline, your ability to model social interactions and decision making.

NUTRITION

Children are still “picky” eaters and often want to eat the same thing for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. You can encourage your child to try other foods by taking advantage of your child’s creativity.

1. Let your child make her own sandwich. Give her choices of different food items she can put in her sandwich.
2. Let your child help you cook. He can learn so much from cooking. He can begin to read the recipe. He can measure the ingredients. He can experiment with changing ingredients. He is much more likely to eat something he has helped to cook.
3. Make a “breakfast” like pancakes or waffles for dinner. Or...make a “dinner” like tacos for breakfast. Children enjoy it when the routine is changed and are more likely to choose different foods.
4. Let your child see you eating a variety of fruits and vegetables.
5. Some research shows that Americans need additional vitamin D. Consider using a multi-vitamin.
6. Children need approximately 1200 mg of calcium each day – approximately 4 servings of calcium rich foods such as milk, yogurt, broccoli.

Everyone in the family should limit the amount of fried foods, fatty foods, and junk foods that they eat. Since you control the shopping list, choose your groceries carefully. Don’t buy sodas, chips, candies, cookies, cupcakes. Nutritious snacks include fresh fruit, popcorn, pretzels, cheese and crackers, string cheese, raisins, nuts, carrot sticks, yogurt and dried fruit.

DINNER HOUR

One of the best traditions a family can share together is to eat meals with each other as many times during the week as possible. The dinner hour is especially important and we encourage families to try to eat dinner together. This time allows the family to “regroup” and to share the day’s events with each other. You can use this time as a time for fun, sharing experiences, talking about feelings and emotions, discussing problems. Meal time should be a relaxing time and not a time for discipline. Turn off the television during dinner to encourage everyone to talk. Research has shown that teenagers are less likely to participate in high-risk behaviors if they have shared meal times with their parents.

DENTAL

Your child should have regular dental visits and should be brushing and flossing at least twice a day. The six year molars are probably in place and are the most likely place for cavities to form. Make sure your child is brushing carefully in the back of her mouth. You may want to ask your dentist about the possibility of using sealants to prevent cavities in the molars.

TOILETING

Some 6 – 8 year olds still have accidents at night and may wet their beds several times a month. Your child should gradually have fewer accidents as he grows and his nervous system matures. If your child has accidents during the day (either urine or stool) or has started having accidents after being dry for the past 6 months, please let your doctor know. Also, please let your doctor know if the accidents at night are interfering with your child’s life or disturbing your family.

SEX ED

Most 6 – 9 year olds have already been exposed to information about sexual activity and reproduction and will openly talk about this at school. If you have not already talked with your child about how babies are

made, this is certainly the time to begin. However, realize that the elementary years are usually a time of activity and energy, and children of this age are not as interested in issues related to sex. Boys and girls usually play separately and do not want to be with members of the opposite sex. The “cootie factor” is operating! When possible, it is helpful to respect your child’s choices of playmates and not encourage co-ed activities if your child does not desire it.

SCHOOL

Children are learning the routines that accompany regular school attendance. They should be comfortable with leaving parents and participating in school activities. If your child is having difficulty separating from you or interacting with friends at school, please talk to your pediatrician.

Experiences at school now center on academic learning instead of just developing social skills. Elementary age children are learning to read and do math problems. Reading is especially important as it is the basis for much of the child’s future learning. It is important to identify problems early so your child can receive help. This is a general guideline to help you know how your child is doing.

1. By the end of first grade, your child should be able to read a phonetic word such as “peppermint”.
2. By the end of second grade, your child should be able to read words with consonant blends, such as Washington, churches, brushing.
3. By the end of third grade your child should be able to read non phonetic words such as flight, brought, enough, appreciation.
4. And...by the end of fourth grade, your child should be able to read most words in a magazine.

In 3rd and 4th grade, school work becomes more difficult as your child has to process previously learned information to solve problems. The student has to read a math problem or write an essay. Children may begin to show that they have learning difficulties when they reach these grade levels. Please talk with your child’s teacher or your pediatrician if you have concerns.

BULLIES

Schools are sometimes a place where a child is bullied or threatened. Please talk with your child frequently and make sure that he feels safe at school. There are many resources for families and children who have experienced bullying, so please talk with your pediatrician if this is a concern.

HOMEWORK

Most elementary children look forward to having homework and being like the older children.

Unfortunately, however, homework can often cause arguments in families. There are some simple guidelines that may help you encourage your child’s learning.

1. The main purpose of homework in the early elementary years is to help teach your child responsibility and organizational skills. You can show your child ways to keep his notebooks and backpack organized - but your child should be doing his own homework.
2. Parents are responsible for the following;
 - a. making sure the child has time in her day to do her homework
 - b. making sure the child has the place in the home to do homework
 - c. making sure the child has the necessary supplies to do homework
3. As your child grows and matures, he will gradually become responsible for making sure he has the necessary supplies and time in his schedule to do homework.

An excellent resource is *Homework without Tears*

TELEVISION / VIDEO GAMES / COMPUTER GAMES / MEDIA

Children learn so much from television and video and computer games – and much of what they learn is not helpful or even harmful. They may see violent acts that are not punished. They will often see sexual experiences that are inappropriate for their age. They will spend time sitting when they should be exercising, reading, exploring, creating or just day dreaming. Children who watch more than one hour of television each day are more aggressive and less creative. They read less and may have more difficulty paying attention in school. They may gain weight because they are not exercising or are eating more food

while watching television. If your child plays video or computer games, make sure you know the content of the games. The games are often graphically violent and promote bloodshed. Some guidelines are:

1. LIMIT ALL "SCREEN TIME" TO ONE HOUR A DAY – OR LESS.
2. IF YOUR CHILD IS WATCHING TV – Be there with your child to discuss the values in the program and to help your child choose the programs carefully.
3. DO NOT ALLOW YOUR CHILD TO HAVE A TELEVISION OR COMPUTER IN HER BEDROOM. It is more difficult to monitor programs and internet use. Place the media screens in a central location where you can see what your child is doing.
4. CHILDREN LEARN FROM ADVERTISEMENTS – Be there with your child to point out your value system and to help her question the advertisers' messages. Children enjoy realizing that they can outsmart the advertisers by not listening to their messages.

IF YOUR CHILD IS HAVING DIFFICULTY PAYING ATTENTION IN SCHOOL – it is especially important to limit "screen time" and possibly eliminate it during the weekday.

HOUSEHOLD TASKS / FAMILY WORK / CHORES

Children learn that they are important members of the family when they are needed – when their work is important and appreciated. Make sure your child has specific tasks that are important to the functioning of the family. Setting and clearing the table, sorting and folding laundry, feeding pets, taking out the garbage - these are all ways that your elementary age child can help the family and develop self-esteem from a job done well.

SPORTS / EXERCISE/ OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES

Research is showing many benefits to children when they experience time outdoors in nature. Children who are allowed free, unstructured time outdoors often do better in school, are more creative, and have less mental health concerns. Children also benefit from exercise and team sports. There are many programs offered through San Francisco Park and Rec, as well as local sports associations. Remember, children who participate in sports have better self-esteem and do better in school.

PLAY

All children need to have unstructured, unscheduled time. Unfortunately, many children today have so many extra activities that they do not have any time to just play. Playtime allows children opportunity to:

1. experience boredom and think creatively of ways to resolve it
2. use his imagination
3. creatively develop games and the rules for the games
4. develop decision-making skills
5. experience the joys of childhood in an unhurried manner
6. do nothing!

SO...consider eliminating one of your child's structured activities and giving her the gift of FREE TIME.

TEACHING VALUES

Children are learning from you every day. YOU are their best teacher. They are learning from watching you how to talk to other people, how to treat each other, how to interact in the family. They are learning how to work, how to solve problems, how to deal with their emotions. They are learning what you do and do not value.

MONEY

Giving your child an allowance is an excellent way to begin teaching your child how to handle money. Some families choose to give their children a small allowance, feeling it is important for children to know that everyone benefits from the parents' employment. These families do not equate allowance with doing chores. Other families believe that children should learn that they earn money by doing work, and so they are given an allowance after chores are completed. Some families combine approaches - the children are given a small allowance and receive additional money for extra work that is done.

The most important thing is for parents to show children how to “use” money – how to put money away to be saved, how to pay for small items at the store, how to use money for gifts for other people. As your child grows, you may want to increase his allowance, while also requiring him to have a little budget – items that he has to purchase with his own money.

DECISION MAKING

Your child should be given the opportunity to begin making decisions and experiencing the consequences (both positive and negative) of her decisions. There are many decisions that a child can help make – if you feel it is appropriate

1. Which after-school activities to participate in
2. Which restaurant to go to
3. What weekend activity for the family to do together
4. Which friends to invite over
5. How to spend her money
6. What clothes to wear

Show your child how to think about decisions.

1. Determine what the options are
2. Consider every possibility
3. Think about strengths and weaknesses of each choice – Think of the pros and cons
4. Choose the best alternative
5. Re-evaluate after you see the results. Decide whether or not it was a good choice and what you might do differently next time.

WHAT OTHER VALUES DO YOU WANT YOUR CHILD TO LEARN?

Time Management

Help your child create a weekly chart of chores or tasks to be completed, books to read, etc.
Make sure your child’s life is not overly scheduled. He needs time to relax, think, daydream.

Friendship

Allow your child to invite friends over for dinner
Help your child shop for a friend’s gift
Do something special for your child’s friend

Personal acceptance of failure

Admit in front of your child when you have made a mistake
Acknowledge your feelings, but express the idea that you can try again or learn from your mistake.

Expressing emotions

Emotions are never right or wrong – they are simply feelings. It is our behavior that can be right or wrong. Help your child see the difference. “I can see you are very angry, but it is not acceptable to kick your brother.”

Religion

A place of worship is often a place where you can meet other families who share your values and who can support your family.

SAFETY

1. BIKES – Young children do not have the depth perception and quick reaction time that help adults ride bikes safely. So, be careful where you allow your elementary age child to ride her bike. NEVER allow her to ride in areas of busy traffic. Review bike safety rules with your child. She should always wear a helmet.
2. Review your family’s emergency plans for fire and earthquake in your home.
3. Make plans for the possibility that a disaster might separate your family.
4. Make certain your child knows how to dial 9-1-1.
5. Make certain your child knows safety rules on crossing streets, talking to strangers, etc.
6. Remind your child that he should always tell you if someone is touching him inappropriately

Used by permission: Jane E. Anderson, M.D. “Prescription for Parents”

