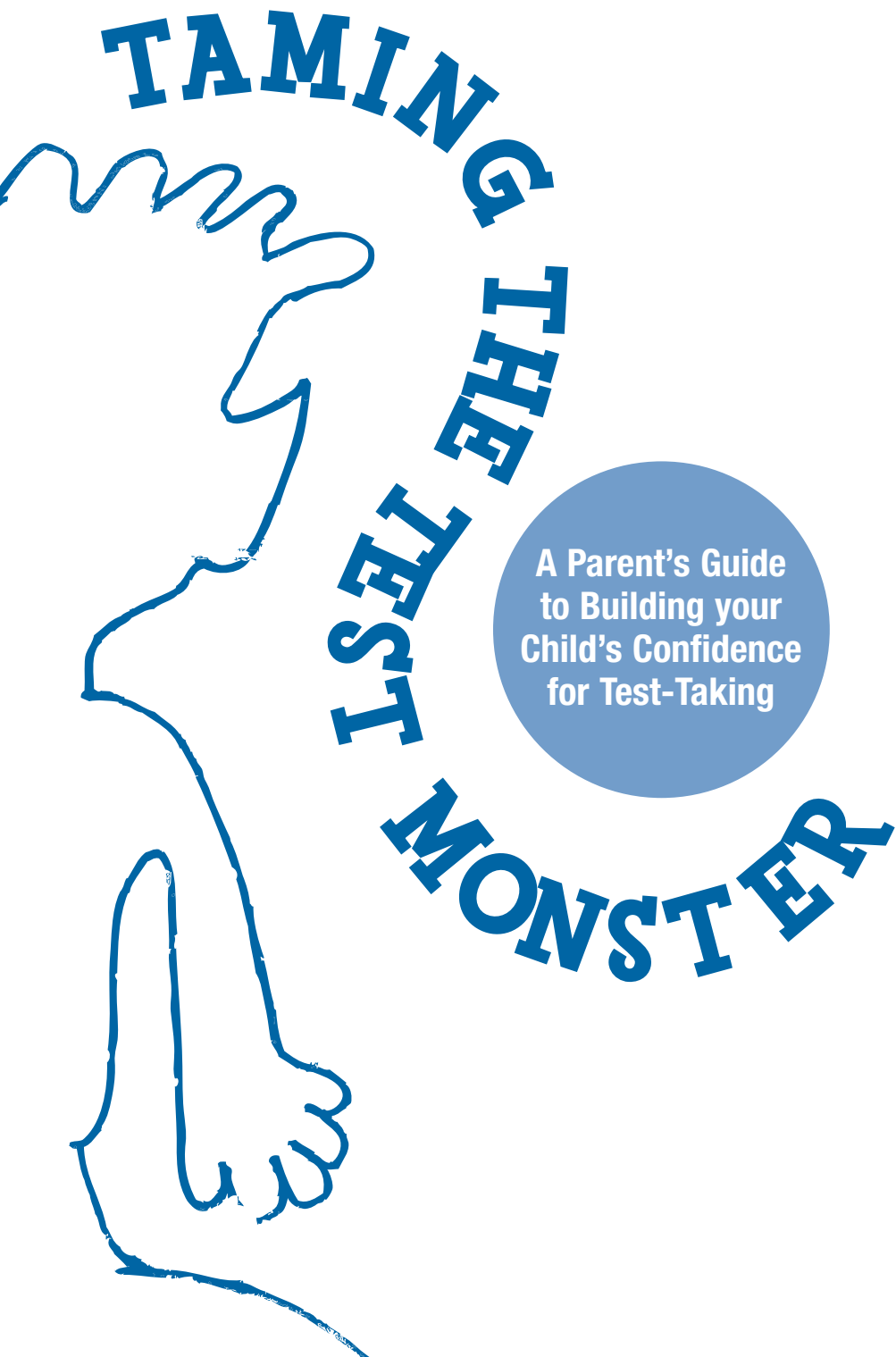


TAMING THE TEST MONSTER

A Parent's Guide
to Building your
Child's Confidence
for Test-Taking




Partnership with Children



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List of reproducible pages:

Page 11 – Test Monster Template

Page 12 – Test Heart Template

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What are Test Monsters?

Does your child get tummy aches on the day of a big test? Are there more tears and fights than usual, or any other signs of nervousness? To help children manage their feelings and do their best, Partnership with Children has created *Taming the Test Monsters*.

Taming the Test Monsters shows you how to relieve your child's fears about test-taking and provides strategies to support him during stressful situations. Research shows that preparing children emotionally for testing may affect their scores as much as studying. Your child can learn how to use the strategies described here to relieve anxiety so that the tests are a true measure of what he knows.

We recommend that you start working with your child at least four weeks before a scheduled standardized test. However, the techniques for identifying and coping with uncomfortable feelings are useful for many kinds of stressful situations your child may encounter in school, such as presenting a book report in front of the class or taking a surprise quiz.



Relieve your child's fears about test-taking and provides strategies to support him



Feelings

Learning how to handle all kinds of feelings is an important part of growing up. Here we provide ways to help you and your child talk about emotions, whether good or not-so-good. Your child should understand that everyone— classmates, students in other schools, all adults and children— has feelings.

When you give your child the chance to express what she is thinking and feeling, you'll be able to provide reassurance that leads to greater confidence in school, and not just on test days.

Taming the Test Monsters will explore how you should:

- talk about feelings
- make heart/mind/body connections
- teach anxiety-relieving exercises
- demonstrate your unconditional love

Reassure your child that:

- she's not alone
- it's okay to feel not-so-good
- feelings can change over time

How to Talk About Feelings

1. Ask your child **"What are feelings?"** Feelings are not something that we can see, touch, see, taste, hear, or smell. They are thoughts that shape the way we perceive the world and ourselves. However, we can see what people are feeling by the expressions on their faces and also in their movements. For example, jiggle your leg, tap your fingers on the table, and ask your child what he thinks you're feeling. Then ask him to think of another feeling and act it out for you. If your child is younger, you may want to prompt him to draw a happy face, and then a sad and an angry face. Talk about a situation that made him feel happy, sad, or angry.

2. **Talk about yourself.** What made you anxious in school? What helped you feel better? By sharing your own emotions, you validate your child's feelings, comforting him and making him feel less alone.
3. **Read a book together** that includes characters who have to overcome a challenge or confront a fear. Your child may remember Maurice Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are*, which is widely available in libraries and bookstores if you don't own it already. Even though it may be below his reading level, the book covers themes that apply to people of all ages.

After completing the story, ask your child, what did Max do when he was feeling wild? (He acted grumpy, yelled at his mother, wore his wolf suit, etc.) Remind him that Max was feeling wild and that caused a problem and certain events to happen in the story. Could your child take the feeling of being nervous about a test and make up a story like Mr. Sendak did?

4. Talk about **how your child feels about taking an important test.** [*Adaptation of the Feelings Web*]
 - a. Begin by praising your child for all of the hard work she has been doing to prepare for the test. Explain that it's just as important to prepare for tests emotionally (with her mind, heart, and body) as well as by studying.
 - b. Ask your child how she feels about the test. Keep the questions open-ended, rather than asking specifically if she feels nervous or worried. It's possible that she feels well-prepared and confident, too. Draw an outline of a body and ask her to write down what she is feeling when she thinks about taking the test and where on her body she feels it. Explain that people have all kinds of feelings about taking tests and that there are no wrong feelings.

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- c. Remind your child that **it's possible for feelings to change over time**. For example, with practice, something that could be a little scary becomes familiar and easy to handle. Ask her if she remembers when she had been afraid of something and then realized that it wasn't so awful after all. For example, "Remember your first day of school?"
- d. Let your child know that **you have confidence in her ability to do well**, and that you are with her and support her. All children need to feel the support of the adults around them. By letting her know that you care about her and support her, she can feel safe and secure in her feelings.

Exercising Test-Taking Muscles

Research has shown that physical activity at any age greatly reduces the negative impact of stress on the body. Your child can learn how to make the connection between his emotions and body, which will help him control any anxiety he may have related to test-taking. By using the deep-breathing and stretching exercises described here, your child can learn how to reduce stress at test time

Inward/Outward Exercise (Guided Imagery)

“Inward/Outward” is a stress-reducing technique that has been proven to work well for people of all ages, including children in grade school. Using guided imagery, you’ll help your child to make the connections between feelings and the body. Make sure to repeat the exercise three times in a row.

- a. Tell your child that you are going to do an activity together to explore how feelings can affect the mind and the body. Tell her the activity is called, “Inward – Outward.”
- b. Sit comfortably in chairs with your feet on the ground.
- c. Show your child how to breathe in through the nose and out through the mouth.
- d. Ask your child to close her eyes and sit quietly while breathing in through the nose and out through the mouth.
- e. Ask your child to go to her head and tell you what she is thinking. Then ask her to go to her

heart and tell you what she is feeling. Next, ask her to think about her body. How does she feel physically?

- f. Ask your child what it was like for her to be aware of her inside feelings and thoughts. What did she discover? Did her feelings change each time she breathed deeply with her eyes closed?

Take a Deep Breath Exercise

Another way to relax is to just take a few deep breaths. Ask your child to listen and follow what you are saying and doing:


- a. Sit up in your chair, relaxed and comfortable, with both feet on the floor and hands loosely in your lap.
- b. Take a deep breath in through your nose.
- c. Let your jaw relax open, and exhale out through your mouth with a deep sigh.
- d. Repeat this exercise three times.

'12 Point Tension Release' Exercise

Ask your child to stand up and, as in "Simon Says," listen and follow what you are doing, starting from the feet up. Remember to repeat each move three times and to keep breathing throughout.

1. **Feet:** Pick up your left foot and roll your ankle around in a circle to the left (counter-clockwise). Now roll your left ankle around in a circle to the right (clockwise). Now put your left foot down and pick up your right foot and roll your ankle around in a circle to the left. Then roll your right ankle around in a circle to the right.
2. **Legs:** Stand on your left leg and lift your right knee; then stand on your right leg and lift your left knee. Hold in your stomach and breathe while you do the knee lifts.

3. **Core (Back):** Put your hands on your hips. Gently and slowly arch your spine backward, then forward, holding in your stomach muscles (think of pulling in your belly-button to your spine). Breathe in as you arch backward, and breathe out as you arch forward, pulling in your stomach.
4. **Core (Waist & Back):** Put your hands on your hips, and swivel your hips around in a circle to the left. Now swivel your hips around in a circle to the right.
5. **Hands:** Roll your wrists in circles. Make fists and unclench them.
6. **Arms:** Keeping your arms relatively straight, circle them around front to back. Then reverse the motion, circling them back to front. Remember to breathe!
7. **Shoulders:** Now let's release our shoulders. Bring your shoulders up to your ears, and down again. Circle them front to back, arms hanging loose, and then back to front.
8. **Neck:** Loosen your neck by nodding slowly and gently to the front, then gently to the back. Slowly turn your head (again, gently!) from side to side, right to left, left to right.
9. **Mouth & Jaw:** Now focus on your jaw, and yawn wide.
10. **Whole Face:** Scrunch up your whole face: your forehead, your eyes, your nose, your mouth, your cheeks. Count to three silently and then release all your face muscles. Then, stretch the muscles in your face by opening your eyes wide and lifting up your eyebrows. Again, count to three silently and release all your face muscles.
11. **Lungs:** Breathing in through your nose and out through your mouth, take three deep breaths.
12. **Energize the Whole Body:** Finally, shake out your whole body and march in place to loosen up and feel more energy.



Your child can learn how to make the connection between his emotions and body, which will help him control any anxiety.



Preparing for Test Day

This handbook provides a number of solutions to help your child get ready emotionally to take an important test (or to perform in any situation that might be stressful). Exploring your child's feelings through art is a great way to help him recognize and control those feelings, especially any anxiety he may feel about a test.

Make a Test Monster

In addition to the mind/body relaxation exercises we described earlier, you can create a Test Monster with your child.

You'll need the following **materials** for this activity:

1. paper (we suggest you copy or trace the Test Monsters Template on page 11 of this book)
2. crayons or colored felt markers
3. scissors
4. a shoebox or other container you can close completely (for the finished Test Monster)
5. a roll of tape to secure the container

Test Monster Directions:

1. Show your child the Test Monster Template.
2. Let your child know that he is going to place on his Test Monster all of the not-so-good feelings he may be experiencing about taking the test. He can draw or write on the Test Monster to describe how the test makes him feel. Allow him several minutes to write or draw his fears and emotions inside the Test Monster outline.

3. Ask your child to explain what he has just drawn or written on the Test Monster.
4. Then show him the container and ask him to put the Test Monster into it.
5. Close the container and wrap it several times with tape, sealing the container completely. You can be as dramatic as you want when you're doing this.
6. Then place the container in a closet or drawer in your room (not in your child's room), which he can see is secured. Tell him that the Test Monster, which holds his fears about the test, will stay locked away and will not be allowed out during the test. Note: If your child questions this, you can say that you have a lot of experience with fears about tests and that you can keep those fears locked away so he can be free to concentrate on doing well.

Create a Test Heart


To remind your child that he is loved and supported while taking a test, you can give him something to hold onto—literally.

Before test day, ask your child's teacher if it's okay for him to have a paper heart on his desk or in his pocket while he takes the test so that it's easily available if he wants to touch it for reassurance. A paper heart with the names of people who love him [or a picture of his pet] taped to his desk or held in his pocket can do wonders to comfort him.


If the teacher doesn't give permission, then you can put the heart in your child's backpack or lunchbox. Remind him to think about the heart and what he wrote on it if he gets worried or nervous while taking the test.

Here are the **materials** you'll need:

1. construction paper
2. scissors to cut out hearts



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- 
3. crayons or markers
 4. pencil
 5. adhesive tape

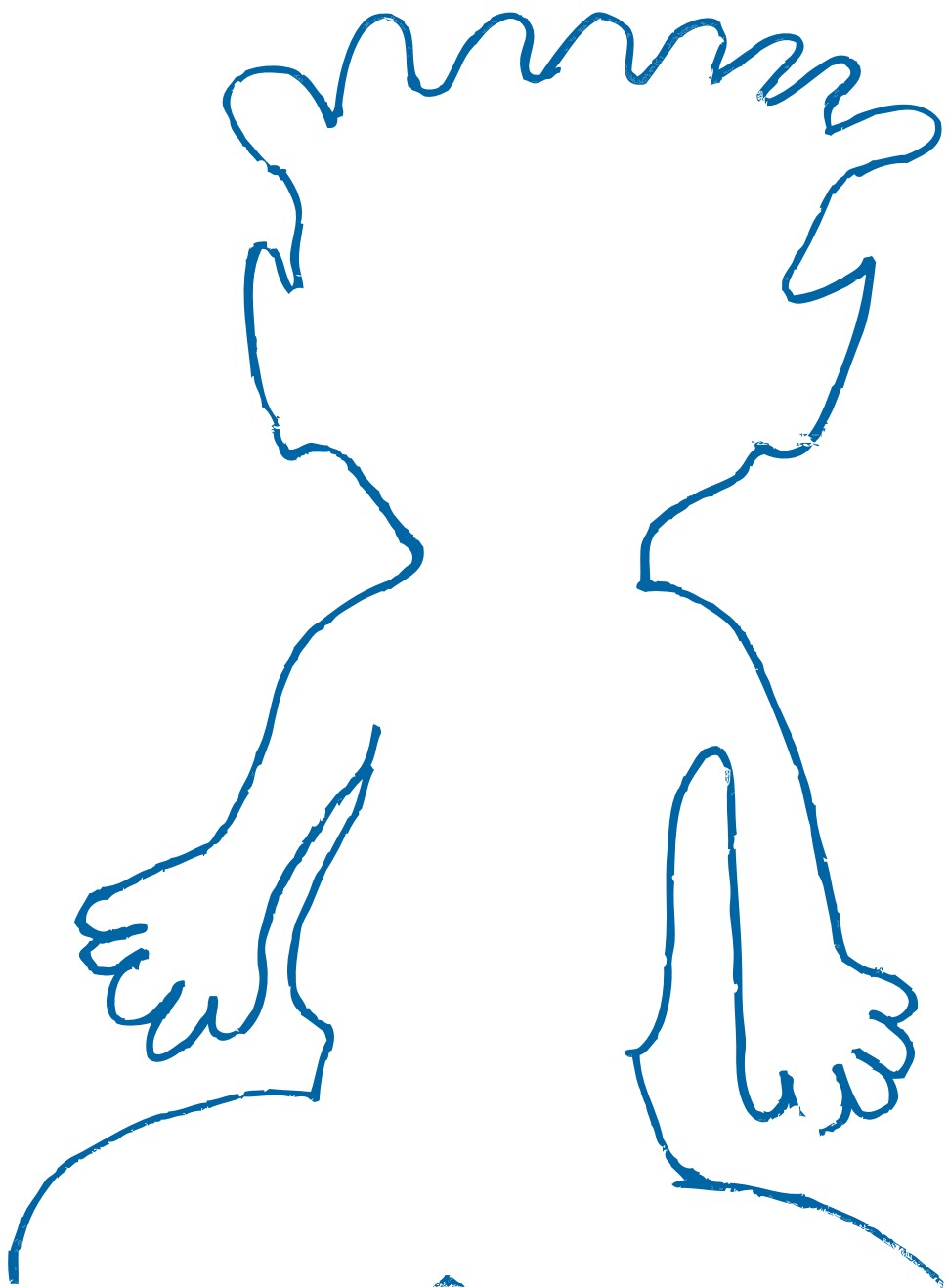
Test Heart Directions:

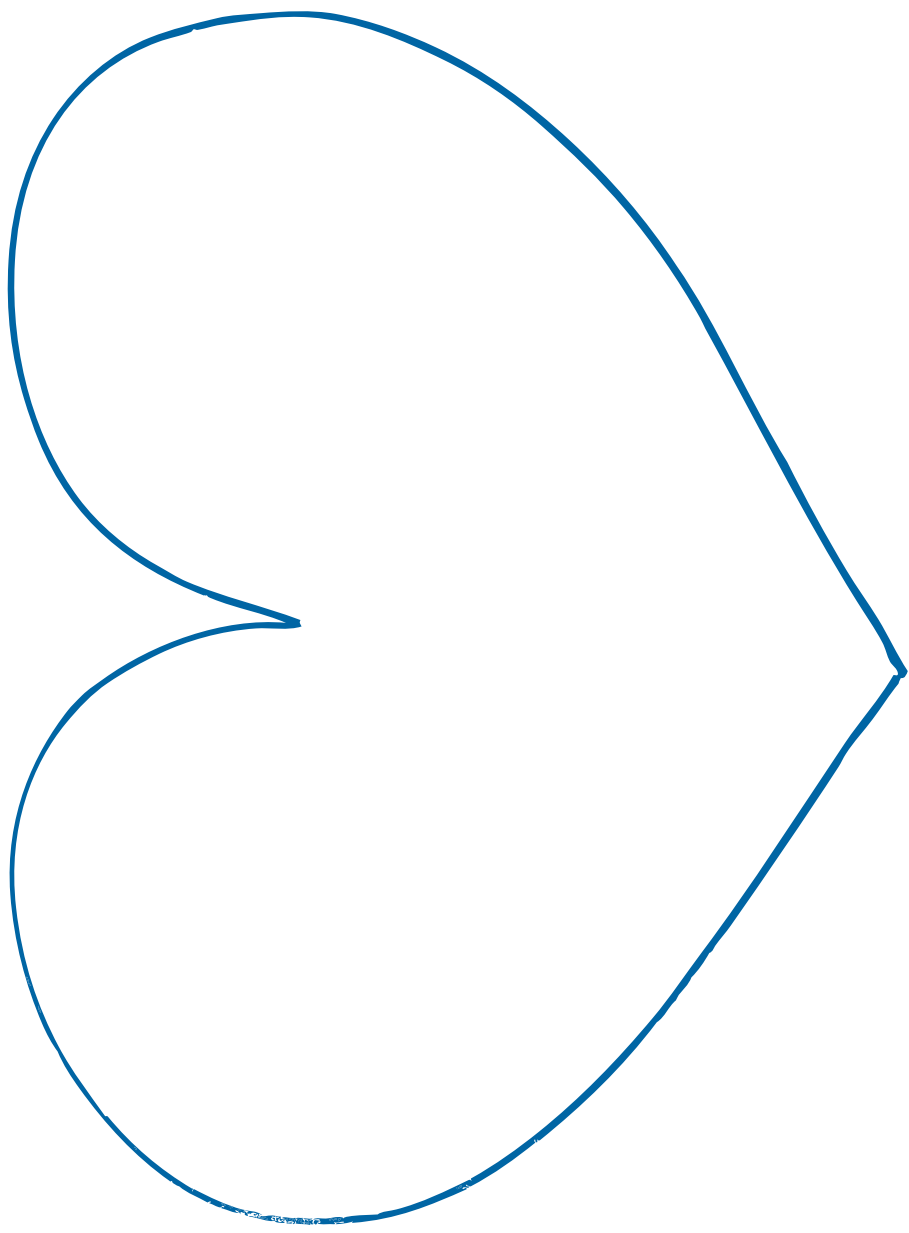
1. If your child is old enough, have him trace and cut out a heart-shaped piece of construction paper. The heart should be about the size of his hand, perhaps a little bigger if he's small. Otherwise, you can cut it out for him.
2. Ask him to write on the heart the names of all the people in his life who love and support him. Tell him when he has finished the activity, he may decorate the heart in any way he wishes.
3. Ask him to show you what is on the heart and talk about how each person has made him feel loved.
4. On test day, make sure your child has packed the test heart to bring to school

Be Predictable: Establish Routines

Structure, consistency, and repetition are what children need to make sense of their world, whether they're nervous about a test or not. Children who feel anxious about taking tests need to feel secure in the predictability of their daily life. Adhering to the three B's of your child's evening routine—bath, book, and bedtime—during test-taking time is more important than ever.

Research also shows that regular exercise is also a great way to relieve anxiety. Make sure your child has the opportunity to run, skip, and jump every day, either in scheduled activities or during free play time. If you can, take a brisk walk, go to a park, or ride bicycles together as a family. If you're stuck inside, do jumping jacks (if your downstairs neighbors don't mind!) or run up and down stairs together for five to ten minutes at a time.





Make up a schedule and share it with the whole family so that your child knows when to expect meals, school, play time, bed time and other daily activities. You can use the suggested My Daily Schedule template below [or on page xx] to create one if you don't have one already. You can adjust it to reflect your family's particular schedule and keep it posted on your refrigerator for everyone to see.

My Daily Schedule

Time	Activity
7:15am	Wake Up
7:25am	Get Up, Wash Face, Brush Teeth, Get Dressed
7:55am	Eat Breakfast
8:15am	Leave for School
8:25am	School Starts
2:55pm	School Ends
3:00pm	After-School Program/Homework
5:00pm	Arrive Home from After-School Parent Checks Homework Pack Backpack for the Next Day
5:15pm	Free Play Time
6:30pm	Dinner
7:00pm	Help Clean up/Chores
7:30pm	Take Bath/Shower
8:00pm	Free Play Time
8:30pm	Bed Time Read Books/Sing Songs

Make sure your child has the opportunity to run, skip, and jump every day.

Children often get distracted easily... realize that it is your job to remind your child of tasks and routines.

Tips to Establish and Maintain Your Child's Daily Routine

Be aware of your child's capabilities and know when you are asking too much. Follow the same routine each day so that he knows what is expected of him and he has enough time to prepare. Children often get distracted easily...realize that it is your job to remind your child of tasks and routines. Write out the schedule and tasks and display it in a frequently used room in your house. You can create a colorful poster or calendar as a family activity.

Give your child clear and specific directions. For example, instead of saying, "clean up your messy room", be more specific and say "Please put the blocks in the blue container" or "Please put the books on the floor back on the bookcase". The clearer you are, the easier it is for him to comply with instructions and routines.

Adapt your routines as your child grows and changes. When there are changes in the routine, describe them in a simple way. Give your child choices when possible. For example, allow him to choose his bedtime story. If he challenges you, remain calm but firm. Your child needs to know that you expect him to follow the schedule.

1. Have realistic expectations.
2. Display your child's daily routine.
3. Set clear limits and discuss them in advance.
4. Be consistent.
5. Give clear commands.
6. Explain and demonstrate.
7. Offer reminders.
8. Explain any changes to the routine simply.
9. Let your child make some choices.
10. Handle challenges calmly but firmly.

Tips to Help You Prepare for Test Day

There are a few things you can do prepare your child for test day. Research shows that being well rested and properly fed helps students do better on tests. Help her get to bed on time and prepare a good breakfast in the morning. To avoid rushing, wake her up a little bit earlier than usual and get to school on time.

Make your child feel as good as possible before the test. For example, give her a small special treat the night before or put an encouraging note in her book bag. Be upbeat and encouraging and express your confidence in her.


Your child can do her best if you help her:

- get a good night's rest
- get up a little earlier to avoid rushing
- get to school on time
- eat a healthy breakfast
- feel confident

Here are some reassuring things to say:

- Tests do not tell how smart you are.
- Tests are important.
- What you've learned is more important.
- I am proud of you.

On test day, you and/or your child's teacher can tell your child that if she feels nervous during the test, she now has skills to help with her feelings: breathing, stretching, and looking at her Test Heart to remind her that she is loved. Be sure to reassure your child that her Test Monster is still safely locked away, and will remain so until she gets home.



Make your
child feel as
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possible
before the
test.



About Partnership with Children

Partnership with Children, Inc., founded in 1908 is a not-for-profit organization providing emotional and social support to at-risk children so that they can succeed in school, in society and in their lives.

We help children and young people in need, their families and their schools through our school-based Open Heart - Open Mind, Center for Capacity Building and Life Steps programs. We provide intervention, preventative services, counseling and leadership development. Founded in 1908 as Big Sisters, we have served the New York City community for almost 100 years.



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