Mix-it-up study methods

Fresh techniques will breathe new life into your child’s study sessions. Share these ways to add variety and help him stay motivated.

Create a mural
Suggest that your child hang a big sheet of paper on a wall. On it, he can write and illustrate facts, concepts, and procedures he’s studying. Say his math test includes rounding numbers, he might write the rule (“If a number ends in 5–9, round up”) in big orange letters across the bottom and add examples in green going sideways up the mural. Let him design a new panel for each subject. He’ll have a handy study tool—and a colorful piece of art.

Play with clue cards
Encourage your youngster to make and play a card game with a study partner. He could write each concept on a separate index card and list three clues on the back. For “electric circuit,” clues might include “path,” “current,” and “conductor.” He can shuffle the cards and stack them clue sides up. Players take turns drawing a card, reading the clues, and saying what’s on the other side. Keep the card if you’re right—the person with the most cards wins.

ACTIVITY CORNER

Write a picture book
Your youngster can use her imagination to retell a familiar story, then preserve her version in a homemade book! She’ll practice experimenting with characters, setting, and plot as she writes.

First, let your child pick a story and think of ways she could put her own twist on it. She might write a plot based on Charlie and the Chocolate Factory (Roald Dahl) but use herself and her friends for the main characters. Or maybe she’ll pick a story set in another country, such as Madeline by Ludwig Bemelmans, and have it take place in the United States.

Next, have your youngster write each sentence or paragraph of her story on a separate sheet of paper and illustrate it. Finally, invite her to read her book aloud to your family.

Boost independence
Coaxing my daughter, Grace, through her routine on school mornings was no easy task. I decided that she needed to become more independent—and that our mornings could be more pleasant. So I’ve started having her get ready by herself.

I let Grace pick out an alarm clock and showed her how to set it. Then, on her closet door, we posted a list of her morning tasks, including getting dressed, brushing her teeth, and fixing her hair.

Now when we’re both ready, we meet downstairs for breakfast before we head out the door. Our mornings are much easier, and I think Grace is proud of her newfound independence.

Time for a cell phone?

Q: My fourth-grader says some of his friends are getting cell phones, and now he wants one. Are cell phones appropriate at this age?

A: Most kids this age don’t really need a cell phone, since they’re supervised by adults who carry phones. And owning a phone, especially one with internet access, is a big responsibility. To decide when to give your son a phone, first think about your family’s budget. Also, consider how well he follows safety rules and takes care of his belongings. Those are good indicators of how he will behave with a phone.

If you feel he’s ready, you might start with a lower-cost one with limited features. Then, create guidelines. Perhaps he may use his phone only to call or text family members and close friends. Discuss consequences for breaking or losing it. And set times when his phone is off-limits, such as during family meals, in the hour before bedtime, and after lights-out.