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There are many ways you can help your child sharpen test-taking skills by practicing them in your everyday lives together:

- When your child reads articles in magazines or newspapers, or even after watching the news or documentaries on TV, ask about what he or she has read or seen. Ask what the *main idea* is and what the *supporting details* are... because these are elements students need to identify on standardized tests.
- Understanding an author's purpose is a valuable test-taking skill, too. When your child is watching TV, ask what he or she thinks the purpose of specific ads and programs might be.
- To improve your child's ability to describe characters, make a game of it. Name people you know and ask for three-word descriptions of each, based on what they do, how they look, how they act or talk and so on.
- When the family's finished with the newspaper or a magazine, pick an article and ask your child to go through it underlining key words.
- When you see movies with your child, ask questions like "What's the setting for this story? What's the author's purpose? Could this really happen?"
- Help your child understand reference sources by setting up situations for him or her to use them. Such as, looking up words in the dictionary and synonyms in a thesaurus, subjects in an encyclopedia, places in an atlas, stores in the phone book and so on.
- With a younger child, be sure he or she learns how to read a clock and a thermometer, how to tell coins apart and what they're worth.
- When your child gets excited about subjects or events, encourage him or her to write little stories about them. Start with an interesting hook. Establish the main idea and support it with details. Build up to a high point.
- Pose simple math problems around the home. For example, count how many socks are in the drawer and how many are left when you remove a pair.
- Practice geometry around the house by asking your child to identify shapes of household objects, measure the perimeter and area of each room and so on.
- Have your child look for graphs, charts and tables in magazines and newspapers and explain the information found in them.
- Always be on the lookout for opportunities for your child to practice math, reading and other skills... at the dinner table, traveling in

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the car, during sporting events, watching TV or movies or talking about the day's events. Try to make it fun!

- You can probably think of other practice opportunities that are unique to your home, family activities and child's interests.

To make sure your child is in the best physical and emotional condition on test day...

- First, according to our test experts Kathie Taylor and Sherry Walton, "make certain you are aware of the conditions – the environment, the setting, the timing, the supplies [the children] are expected to bring (i.e., #2 pencils, calculator, etc.), opportunities for breaks and snack availability."
- Make sure your child is well-rested. What this means may vary with each child, but as a parent you know what it takes for your child to get proper rest.
- Provide a good dinner the night before, and a good, nutritious breakfast that will keep your child's energy level up throughout the test.
- A child who needs regular physical activity in order to "feel good" should get it as usual.

- According to Kathie Taylor, Ph.D., and Sherry Walton, Ph.D., coauthors of *Children at the Center: A Workshop Approach to Standardized Test Preparation K-8* (Helnemann, 1998), your child should pace studying for the test "over the course of days or even weeks... to get more comfortable with the information" rather than cramming the night before.

- And, of course, the best thing you can do for your child prior to a standardized test is some good, healthy attitude adjustment. This begins with *your* attitude. If *you* get uptight about tests and worry about how your child will perform, your attitude will be picked up by your child. Talk to teachers to learn about an upcoming standardized test, get their advice about how to prepare and ask to see sample tests. Then, pitch in and help your child become a better test taker.

Teach your child these two techniques to relieve stress during the test...

1. Use relaxation techniques, such as taking five deep breaths or counting down from 10, if you find yourself becoming tense or freezing.
2. Say to yourself, "I am a good test taker." Confidence is half the battle.

Test-taking tips courtesy of Sylvan Learning Center. For more test-taking advice, go to www.educate.com and click on "Resources for Parents." You can also contact (Insert name) at (Insert phone number).