

## Science Fair Tips for Parents

One thing we hear often from parents is that their young scientist was enthusiastic at the beginning but lost steam to the point that the parent had to finish the project for them at the last minute. To avoid this scenario, some project planning is required. Below are some tips that we hope will help you avoid that pitfall and get through the project with your student as excited as ever about what she or he has accomplished and with your sanity and sense of humor intact!

- 1) Probably the biggest key is to help your student simplify, simplify, simplify! Even professional scientists have a tendency to bite off more than they can chew, so you can imagine how easy it is for your student to get carried away.
- 2) Make sure to intermix the more tedious parts (e.g. looking up background, writing out the information, making graphs and charts) with the fun parts (model making, executing the experiment, drawing).
- 3) Speaking of writing out information - a big help is to have your student keep a journal to record data and information as she or he goes. This requires a little bit more work on the front end of the project, but it helps focus them (and you) and will be a tremendous help as they start designing their presentation.
- 4) In the journal have your student actually write out her or his goals or hypothesis. This is simple, but it is a step often skipped and it really will help to focus both your student and you. As the parent, you can then guide your student back to her or his hypothesis or goal as the project unfolds.
- 5) Help your student to choose a project that can be done little by little over a period of time. By spreading out the tasks, it tends not to be so overwhelming.
- 6) Tap into the creative side of your student. Have her or him paint a border on her or his display board, or put on stickers, or draw a picture to be used on the display, etc.
- 7) While it's fine to give some simple design ideas for the board, allow your student to put together the display! It's a fun and important step for your student to "own" the project. On fair day you will be proud to hear your student proudly telling the judges how she or he drew the pictures or typed the information herself or himself.

### **So, here's an example scenario:**

Your scientist says she wants to do a project on hand sanitizer. You think that sounds alright because she is very diligent about using it, so that will definitely keep her interest. But when you start to help her find materials you realize there is an astounding amount of information from what bacteria is, good vs. bad bacteria, key figures/moments in medical history related to the evolution of germ theory, etc. To boot, she decides she wants to build a scale model as a visual aid. Suddenly, the fun little project has blossomed into something overwhelming.

### **Solution:**

Remember, keep it simple! Tell her the hand sanitizer project is a good idea, but it has to answer a specific question and then she needs to do build a display showing the steps in finding the answer to the question. In other words, have her choose one aspect of hand sanitizer (effectiveness with vs. without). How is she going to measure effectiveness? So, that is where the focus of the entire presentation needs to be. The display board might include some key moments in the understanding of germs, but will focus on her question, have photos of her conducting experiments, show a chart or graph explaining her findings, etc. She will be happier at the end because she will understand what is on her display.

Most of all - Have fun!

The JSIS Science Fair Advisory Committee

## Science Project Resources

- ❑ **Look through our own JSIS or your local Library for books about science and science projects.**
- ❑ **Visit your local bookstore.** There is always a science for kids section. You may also want to check out used bookstores.
- ❑ **Find project ideas on Science Buddies.** Over 700 project ideas to choose from.  
<http://www.sciencebuddies.org/>
- ❑ **500 ideas from Astrology to Zoology.** Literally a wide range of science fair projects.  
<http://www.all-science-fair-projects.com/>
- ❑ **Check out this cookbook of science demonstrations.** The Franklin Institute in Boston has provides directions for different levels of science projects. The site provides all the information you need to prepare an experiment but you have to provide the explanation.  
<http://www.fi.edu/tfi/activity/>
- ❑ **Taste this "Science Snack Menu",** from the Exploratorium in San Francisco! The Exploratorium provides really cool experiments, complete with explanations.  
<http://www.exploratorium.edu/snacks/index.html>
- ❑ **Check on the Adventures of Science Bob for experiments and ideas.**  
<http://www.sciencebob.com/>
- ❑ **Read this online science magazine just for kids.**  
<http://www.yesmag.bc.ca/>
- ❑ **DO try this at home.** Content from Science Centers and museums worldwide.  
[http://www.tryscience.org/experiments/experiments\\_home.html](http://www.tryscience.org/experiments/experiments_home.html)
- ❑ **Look for science fair project ideas on the ultimate Science Fair site.**  
<http://www.scifair.org/>
- ❑ **Search for science topics here.** This site has a long list of science sites for kids.  
[http://www.yahooligans.com/Science\\_and\\_Oddities/](http://www.yahooligans.com/Science_and_Oddities/)
- ❑ **Great ideas are on the Science Fair Studios.**  
<http://school.discovery.com/sciencefaircentral/scifairstudio/ideas.html>
- ❑ **Science News for Kids.** Dedicated to science for kids ages 9 – 14.  
<http://www.sciencenewsforkids.org/articles/ScienceFairZone.asp>

Questions? For more information, please email [jsis.sciencefair@gmail.com](mailto:jsis.sciencefair@gmail.com) or visit us on the web at <http://jsisweb.com/science-fair>.