

Helping Children Learn

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

Krys Croxall, Superintendent of Program
Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board

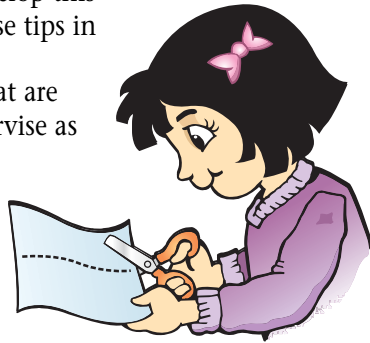
March 2005

BUILDING MOTOR SKILLS

Help your child practice with scissors

Young children do many school projects that involve using scissors. This requires having strong hand muscles. To develop this strength, kids need lots of practice. Keep these tips in mind:

- **Use proper scissors.** Find safe scissors that are designed for young children. Always supervise as your child learns to cut.
- **Start with snipping.** Give your child paper and ask her to snip around the edges, creating a fringe. Remember that her thumb should point up as she cuts.
- **Practice cutting straight lines** (after your child can snip well). Cutting pieces of paper in half is a good way to begin. You also can draw lines that go part-way up the paper as a guide.
- **Move on to basic shapes.** Draw large squares, circles, triangles and rectangles. Use thick, dark writing so your child can see shapes easily. Remind her to turn the paper with one hand while she cuts with the other. Don't worry if she doesn't stay on the lines. Experience (including mistakes) is the best teacher!



Source: Becky Daniel, *The Playful Preschooler*, ISBN: 1-56822-955-0 (Instructional Fair, 1-800-443-2976, www.childreusspecialty.com).

READING READINESS

'Pretend reading' is an important step

Does your child look at books and pretend to read? It's important to encourage this behavior, because it's a step toward reading. Here are some ideas that will help:

- **Read every day** with your child.
- **Find books** with simple illustrations and rhythmic text.
- **Reread familiar books** that your child loves.
- **Read enthusiastically.**
- **Pause** while you're reading. Point out pictures. Ask your child interesting questions.
- **Stop** before you say a fun word. See if your child can fill it in.
- **Have your child** tell parts of the story he knows.
- **Let your child tell** (or pretend to read) you the story. Help when necessary, but don't worry about including every word. Say how proud you are!

Source: "Beginning Literacy and Your Child: A Guide to Helping Your Baby or Preschooler Become a Reader," U.S. Department of Education, www.ed.gov/parents/academic/help/reader/reader.pdf.

EXPANDING YOUR CHILD'S WORLD

Give your child time to adjust to new situations

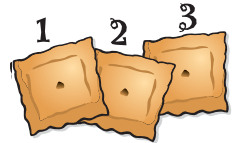
Is your child much more comfortable at home than elsewhere? That makes sense, because home is familiar. Be patient as your child gets used to new situations. Talk about them ahead of time. What will you see? What will you do? Show him how relaxed you are.

YOUR CHILD AND YOU

School readiness activities should be fun for children

Sometimes parents worry too much about school readiness. They drill children about letters and numbers, even though kids are bored.

It helps to remember that learning should be fun. Teach numbers by counting yummy crackers, for example. Or decorate letters with glitter. Play is the best way to teach.



DEVELOPMENTAL CONCEPTS

Teach the days of the week

Children love the comfort of regular routines. Understanding that one day follows another, and that people do different things on different days, is helpful.

Try these ideas:

- **Talk about your plans.** You might say, "Today is Tuesday. It's show-and-tell day." Or, "On Thursdays, we visit Grandma."
- **Use a calendar.** Put stickers on certain days, such as smiley faces on show-and-tell days or hearts on days you see loved ones.

Source: Jennifer K. Geddes, "How to Teach a Tot the Days of The Week," *Parenting*, November 2002 (The Parenting Group, 1-800-234-0847, www.parenting.com).



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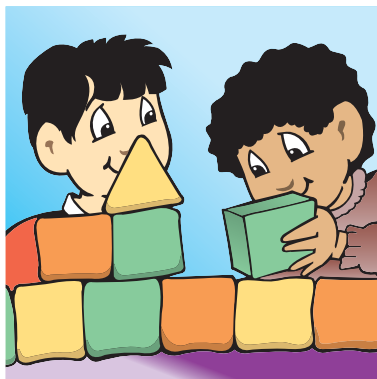
QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

When do children start socializing?

Q: My three-year-old is an only child. Is it important for him to play with other preschoolers?

A: Children can enjoy each other at any age. But once they turn three, most kids like playing together. For example, they might build a village of blocks or pretend to be daddies caring for babies. But even when children are ready for socializing, playing nicely takes practice. Help your child by taking these steps:

- **Invite over just one friend at first.** Limit playtime to 90 minutes or less. Plan to serve a snack or drink when the kids need a break. Reading stories also provides a nice distraction.
- **Set out toys such as cars, stuffed animals, trains, dolls and blocks.** These encourage children to use their imaginations together. (You may want to put away favorite items if they're likely to cause problems with sharing.)
- **Avoid TV and electronics.** Children might be next to each other while watching a show or playing a computer game, but they're not paying much attention to each other. Make the most of your child's time with friends.



Source: Nicole Bokat, "Fickle Friendships," *Parents*, October 2002 (Gruner+Jahr USA Publishing, 1-800-777-0222, www.parents.com).

PARENT QUIZ

Are you enforcing your family rules?

Family rules affect school life because they build children's self-discipline. Here's a quiz to see if you're setting helpful rules. Give yourself five points for something you always do, zero points for something you never do—or any score in between.

- ___ **1. I explain rules** to my child.
- ___ **2. I make rules** that teach important lessons.
- ___ **3. I respect** family rules myself.
- ___ **4. I choose rules** that match my child's abilities.
- ___ **5. I enforce rules** consistently.

How did you score? *Twenty or above is good. Fifteen to 19 is average. Below 15? Use the ideas in this quiz to make rules more successful.*

"As parents, the most important thing we can do is read to our children early and often."

— Laura Bush

LEARNING THROUGH ART

Don't ignore your child's attempts at writing

Does your child scribble and call it writing? Don't correct her! Scribbling is one of the first steps toward writing. It's something to be excited about. So next time your little one scribbles and says, "Look what I wrote," you might respond by saying, "Wonderful! Tell me about it."

DISCIPLINE

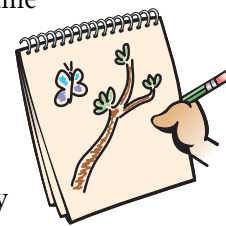
Let your child follow your example of self-control

Does your child "lose his cool" when he's angry? Young children need help learning self-control. This process takes time. As you encourage your child to use appropriate words, make sure you set a good example. If you lose your temper, apologize and do better next time.

USING OUR SENSES

Springtime 'friends' build the skill of observation

March is an exciting time to explore nature. It often brings hints of spring, such as little changes in trees and plants.



Choose a sunny day and explore your yard or neighborhood. Let your child pick a "friend" to observe. For example, does she see a tree with buds? Write down or draw the details she notices. Visit regularly to keep track of changes. In a few months, clip the notes and drawings together and help your child make a book about spring.

Source: Jennifer R. Bradford-Vernon, *How to Be Your Child's First Teacher*, ISBN: 1-5622-99-4 (Instructional Fair, 1-800-443-2976, www.childrengspecialty.com).

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