

# Helping Children Learn

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

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May 2005

## DISCIPLINE

### Asking questions invites children to think about their behavior

Parents ask children questions to teach skills and get information. "Where's your foot?" "Do you want some juice?" You can also use questions to discipline your child.

You might ask:

- **"What happened?"** This encourages your child to review the situation. It's better than accusatory or confusing responses such as, "Shame on you!"
- **"What's the rule ... ?"** Saying, "What's the rule about playing in the living room?" gives your child a chance to correct her own behavior: "I can't leave my toys out."
- **"What do you think ... ?"** Help your child consider her options. "We're having trouble keeping your toys organized. What do you think we should do?" Contributing to solutions can make them more meaningful to her.
- **"Do you know ... ?"** Reinforce good behavior by saying things like, "Do you know how I feel about that?" Your child will love to answer, "Proud of me!"



Source: Jean Illsley Clarke, *Time-In: When Time-Out Doesn't Work*, ISBN: 1-884734-28-6 (Parenting Press, Inc., 1-800-992-6657, [www.parentingpress.com](http://www.parentingpress.com)).

## YOUR CHILD AND YOU

### Make time in May for outdoor learning

May is a perfect month for rediscovering the outdoors with your child. There's a lot to be said for just going out "to play" with no special purpose. When you want to greet nature with a bit more focus, try the following activities:

- **Check out a bird watching** book from the local library. Then take your child out for a walk. Try to observe at least two

different kinds of birds. What are their colors? What noises do they make? At home, draw pictures of birds with your child.

- **Collect things**, such as rocks, leaves, twigs, shells—even bugs! Collections are great for young children because they teach science and math skills. Try putting items in a certain order or classifying them.

Source: Winifred Yu, "nuts about nature," *Parents*, October 2002 (Gruner + Jahr USA Publishing, 1-800-777-0222, [www.parents.com](http://www.parents.com)).

## BUILDING MATH SKILLS

### Discuss numbers naturally

You don't have to have math workbooks to teach your child about numbers. Just apply math to real life. Try activities like these:

- **Do chores together**, such as setting the table. Say, "There are five of us, so we need five plates and cups."
- **Count things** that are meaningful to your child. "How many days until your birthday?" "How many dolls do you have?"

Source: Nancy Paulu, *Prepare My Child for School: Helping Your Preschool Child*, U.S. Department of Education, [www.ed.gov/print/parents/earlychild/ready/preschool/part.html](http://www.ed.gov/print/parents/earlychild/ready/preschool/part.html).

## BUILDING ATTENTION SPAN

### Activities can boost your child's attention span

Children must be able to pay attention to succeed in kindergarten. You can help by doing activities that require focus. For example, read interesting stories to your child. Do puzzles together. Give him short, step-by-step instructions. Spend longer on these activities as his attention span grows.



## WHEN YOU NEED HELP

### Prevent summer boredom

Worried that boredom will ruin your child's summer?

Look at summer as a chance to do out-of-the-ordinary things.

You might take day trips or relax for hours with a pile of books and kids' magazines. Before school ends, make an "emergency box." When your child says, "I'm bored," you can pull out a special art project or exciting book.



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## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

### Is crying okay for 'big kids'?

**Q: My four-year-old still cries when things upset him. Shouldn't he be using words instead of tears by now?**

**A:** Babies cry to communicate their needs. Once kids start talking, parents expect them to explain what they want. This works some of the time, but crying is still a normal way for kids to express themselves.

Keep these do's and don'ts in mind:

- **Don't say, "Don't cry."** Crying is a healthy way to release feelings.
- **Do acknowledge feelings.** For example, "You seem really sad. Tell me about what happened."
- **Don't threaten or punish.** Tears mean your child is under stress. There's no reason to add to it.
- **Do communicate nonverbally.** Get down on your child's level. Look him in the eye. Listen. Give him a hug.
- **Don't bribe.** Saying, "Stop crying and I'll give you a treat" ignores emotions that need to be discussed.
- **Do apologize if necessary.** If you've wronged your child, admit it. You'll feel better—and your child will, too.



Source: Aletha J. Solter, Ph.D., *Helping Young Children Flourish*, ISBN: 0-9613073-1-5 (Shining Star Press, 805/968-1868, [www.awareparenting.com](http://www.awareparenting.com)).

## PARENT QUIZ

### Are you planning for summer learning?

Summer shouldn't be a vacation from learning. Answer the following questions *yes* or *no* to see if you're planning an educational summer:

- \_\_\_ **1. Have you contacted** the library about special summer events?
- \_\_\_ **2. Will you make extra time** for reading with your child?
- \_\_\_ **3. Will your child** take "field trips," such as to a museum or zoo?
- \_\_\_ **4. Does your child** have plenty of art supplies, such as crayons and finger paint?
- \_\_\_ **5. Is there plenty of time** in your schedule for family activities?

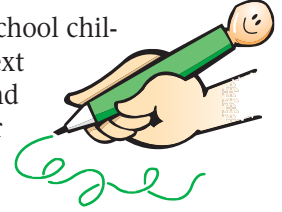
**How did you do?** Each yes answer means you're preparing for an enjoyable summer that involves learning. If you answered no to any question, consider how to change your response to yes. Keep in mind that for kids this age, learning and fun should always go hand-in-hand.

"Children do not understand the difference between work and play. All that matters to them is whether a task is fun."  
—Dorothy Eison

## DEVELOPMENTAL MILESTONES

### Expect scribbling before your child learns to write

It's normal for preschool children to scribble. Next they make curvy and straight lines. Older children turn these lines into shapes and letters. Eventually, scribbling stops. Make sure to compliment your child at each stage of the process!



Source: Diane Dodge, "Help! My Preschooler Can't Write!" [parentsoup.com/print/0,,150399,00.html](http://parentsoup.com/print/0,,150399,00.html).

## MAKING TIME COUNT

### Involved parents help children succeed in school

Studies make it crystal clear. When parents are involved with schools, kids succeed.

You can help in these ways:

- **Stay informed.** Ask teachers how you can support your child's learning.
- **Keep caregivers up-to-date.** Discuss changes in your child's life—such as a divorce or loss of a pet.

Source: Jolene Roehlkepartain and Nancy Leffert, *What Young Children Need to Succeed*, ISBN: 1-57542-070-8 (Free Spirit Publishing Inc., 1-800-735-7323, [www.freespirit.com](http://www.freespirit.com)).

### How do you use our ideas?

Have you used an idea from *Helping Children Learn* with your child? Tell us about it! Just for sharing your story with us, we'll send you a series of six booklets filled with great tips for helping your child learn. Write to:

**Helping Children Learn**

The Parent Institute

P.O. Box 7474

Fairfax Station, VA 22039

or email: [hcl@parent-institute.com](mailto:hcl@parent-institute.com).

Don't forget to include your name, phone number, email address and mailing address.

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