

# Helping Children Learn

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

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## BUILDING MATH SKILLS

### Make math part of your child's day

Early childhood is a key time to show your child that math is not only fun, it's natural. That's right—math is found in nearly everything people do. Here are some easy ways to build your child's math awareness:

- **Look for patterns.** Help your child find them on her sheets, curtains and clothing. "Your shirt has a red stripe, then a yellow stripe, then a red stripe. That's a pattern. Let's see what other patterns we can find!"
- **Estimate.** Say to your child, "I think you might finish your toast in 10 bites. Let's see." Then help her count her bites.
- **Sequence.** Children love daily routines. Talk about your family's plans. "First I'll take you to preschool. After school, we'll have lunch. Then it's playtime."
- **Choose a "shape of the day."** In the morning, show your child a shape. "Look at your plate. It's a circle. We're going to have a circle hunt today!" Compliment your child when she finds circles throughout the day.
- **Identify numbers.** "That big sign has a two and a five on it!" Suggest that your child spot some, too.



Source: Carol Sue Fromboluti and Natalie Rinck, "Early Childhood: Where Learning Begins—Mathematics," U.S. Department of Education, [www.ed.gov/pubs/EarlyMath/title.html](http://www.ed.gov/pubs/EarlyMath/title.html).

## DISCIPLINE

### 'Show & Tell' acceptable behavior

Sometimes children don't understand what's expected of them. For example, a dad says several times, "Stop whining." Finally his son admits, "Daddy, I don't know what whining is."

Try using an adult version of "Show & Tell" to explain:

1. **Identify the problem behavior,** such as grabbing.
2. **Describe the behavior** in language your child can understand.

"You just grabbed. You took the dump truck away from your friend."

3. **Give advice and role play.** "Next time, say, 'May I please have a turn?'" Then pretend to be a classmate and act out the situation with your child. Have him repeat friendly words.
4. **Provide feedback.** "You asked for the toy so politely. I'm really proud of you!"

Source: Bridget A. Barnes and Steven M. York, *Common Sense Parenting of Toddlers and Preschoolers*, ISBN: 1-889322-41-5 (Boys Town Press, 1-800-282-6657, [www.girlsandboystown.org](http://www.girlsandboystown.org)).

## DEVELOPMENTAL MILESTONES

### Provide opportunities for doing things 'all by myself'

Preschoolers take pride in their accomplishments. It's important to let them do tasks on their own, such as getting dressed. Be patient as you teach each step. Things won't be perfect, so relax and express lots of pride.

Source: "Tips for Teaching Self-Care Skills," Pediatric Services, [www.pediatricservices.com/prof/prof-09.htm](http://www.pediatricservices.com/prof/prof-09.htm).

## MAKING TIME COUNT

### Everyday rituals show love, provide a sense of security

Family rituals are important on special occasions. But daily routines bring the most comfort to your child. Say "I love you" before school, for instance. Put happy drawings in your child's preschool lunch bag. Or read a book at bedtime each night.



Source: Catherine Newman, "Everyday Magic," *FamilyFun*, October 2001 (Disney Publishing, 1-800-289-4849, <http://familyfun.go.com>).

## LEARNING THROUGH ART

### Get creative with orange

Fall is a time to enjoy the color orange. Get started with these ideas:

- **Make orange prints.** Dip pieces of carrot or squash into orange paint. Make designs on white or black paper.
- **Play with orange play dough.** What shapes can your child make? A pumpkin? A goldfish? An orange?
- **Try orange foods,** such as cheese, carrots and sweet potatoes.



Source: Elizabeth McKinnon, *Toddler Theme Calendar*, ISBN: 1-57029-242-6 (Totline Publications, 1-800-417-3261, [www.teacherspecialty.com](http://www.teacherspecialty.com)).

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## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

### Increase your child's attention span

**Q: I want to teach my child things, but his attention span is so short! What can I do about this?**

**A:** Research shows that the more children can pay attention, the more they are likely to achieve in school. It's essential to remember, though, that preschoolers have naturally short attention spans.

Be patient as you take these steps:

- **Provide a quiet, comfortable space** for your child to concentrate.
- **Start small.** Give your child a puzzle with just a few pieces. Or have him draw a simple picture.
- **Offer helpful suggestions** such as, "That bottle of glue is frustrating. Let's try some tape."
- **Take breaks when necessary.** "It's time for a snack. Then we can read another book."
- **Make encouraging comments.** "You're almost finished!" "You're a good worker!"
- **Limit TV.** A program or two is fine. But research shows that excessive TV teaches children to shift focus too quickly.
- **Increase gradually.** When your child sits happily through two books, for example, go for three. Stop if he isn't having fun.
- **Reward your child's efforts with praise.** "You did it! You must feel proud."



Source: Michael H. Popkin, Ph.D., Bettie B. Youngs, Ph.D., and Jane M. Healy, Ph.D., *Helping Your Child Succeed in School*, ISBN: 1-880283-15-8 (Active Parenting Publishers, 1-800-825-0060, www.activeparenting.com).

## PARENT QUIZ

### Do you teach the importance of honesty?

Preschoolers are known for stretching the truth. At this age, fantasy and reality are confusing. Answer the following questions *yes* or *no* to see whether you're encouraging honesty:

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you point out** examples of real and pretend?
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you show** understanding that some lies are wishful thinking?
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you explain** why honesty is important?
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you compliment** your child's truthfulness?
- \_\_\_ **5. Do you set** a good example by avoiding lies?

**How did you do?** Each yes answer means you're encouraging truth telling. For each no answer, use ideas from the quiz to change your response to yes.

"Except in rare times of great stress or danger, there is no reason why we cannot say No to children in just as kind a way as we say Yes."  
— Educator John Holt

## TALKING AND LISTENING

### Use special 'listening phrase'

Listening is hard for most preschoolers. Here's how to use an effective "listening phrase" to get them to pay attention:

- **Pick an attention-getter.** For example, "Please put on your listening ears." Or "I need you to look and listen now." Making eye contact also helps.
- **Consider age.** Keep directions short. The younger the child, the simpler requests should be.
- **Check "reception."** Every so often, have your child repeat what you told her. Explain things again if necessary.

Source: Ann Pleshette Murphy and the editors of Parents magazine, *The Parents Answer Book*, ISBN: 0-307-44060-5 (Golden Books, 1-800-733-3000, www.randomhouse.com/golden/).

## EXPANDING YOUR CHILD'S WORLD

### Teach your child to observe

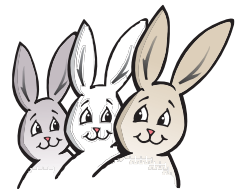
You don't need special equipment to introduce your child to science. A little outdoor time will do. Find something that fascinates your child, such a tree or a bug. Then look at it carefully. What do you notice? Rough bark? Wings? Lots of legs? Talk about what you see.

Source: Jennifer R. Bradford-Vernon, *How to Be Your Child's First Teacher*, ISBN: 1-56822-998-4 (Instructional Fair, 1-800-253-5469, www.teacher-specialty.com).

## READING READINESS

### Reading readiness includes vocabulary, writing, phonics

Reading books to your child is one way to prepare him for reading. But there are other things you can do also. For example, use new words in conversation. Let your child "write" in scribbles. Look for letters, and listen for them too: "Bunnies starts with B. Bbbbbunnies!"



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