

Helping Children Learn

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

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MAKING TIME COUNT

Plan ahead for kindergarten success

Next year, your child may enter “big school.” Will she be ready? Five veteran kindergarten teachers were asked what skills they would like their students to have. Surprisingly, they didn’t stress knowing letters, numbers, shapes and colors. They focused on preparedness to learn. Build your child’s:

- **Curiosity.** Help her explore the world. Go for nature walks. Show how things work.
- **Oral-language skills.** Give your child lots of new experiences to build her understanding and vocabulary. Name and describe what she sees.
- **Listening skills.** Read and tell stories together. Pause when your child makes comments or fills in parts she memorized.
- **Critical thinking.** While reading, ask your child why she thinks something happened. Can she predict what will happen next?
- **Independence.** Teach your child self-help skills, such as dressing herself, pouring a drink and zipping her coat.
- **Social skills.** Give your child practice playing and sharing with peers. Make time for regular social activities.
- **Fine-motor skills.** Use your fingers to mold clay, play ball, paint and more. Provide a variety of writing utensils.



Source: Ellen H. Parlapiano, “Ready for Kindergarten?” *Scholastic Parent & Child*, April/May 2003 (Scholastic Inc., 1-866-436-2464, www.scholastic.com).

BUILDING RESPONSIBILITY

Teach your child how to stay calm

Young children have a hard time coping with their emotions. They’ve yet to learn how to identify and talk about feelings. So they act them out—crying, hitting, throwing tantrums, etc. You can help your child calm down, listen and learn. Teach him to:

- **Count** to five or 10.
- **Take** a deep breath.
- **Go** to relaxing place.

- **Choose** an object from a “Calm Down Kit” that contains comforting items, such as an old baby toy or a family photo.

Next time your child starts to lose control, remind him how to calm down. “Can you count to five?” “Let’s take some deep breaths together.” Or, “Go to the calm-down spot.” Having self-control is a key to future success in school.

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, Boystownpress.com).

DEVELOPING THINKING SKILLS

Take time to answer your child’s endless questions

Parents often joke about how many questions kids ask. But questions are a sign of curiosity and learning. It’s important to answer them—even if you have to say, “I don’t know. Let’s look it up at the library.”

Source: Lillian Alice Noda, June Mori-Shida & Nancy Chisato Adachi, *Off to a Great Start: Activities for Becoming Your Child’s Best Teacher*, ISBN: 0-7802-4207-6 (The Wright Group/McGraw Hill, 1-800-523-2371).

DISCIPLINE

Avoid using negative labels

When your child misbehaves, don’t react by saying, “Bad boy” or “Bad girl.” Instead, say, “That behavior is not okay.” Be specific about how your child can do better next time. Negative labels hurt kids because they think, “If I am bad, it’s no use trying to be good.”



LEARNING THROUGH ART

Turn autumn treasures into works of art

Autumn is the season of change. Leaves change colors. Apples ripen. Acorns and pinecones fall. Children are eager to dig in and experiment with nature! Your child might like to:

- **Start** by reading a book about fall, such as Elaine Good’s *Fall is Here!*
- **Go** on a fall treasure hunt. Make a list ahead of time.
- **Use** the “treasures” to make a collage or other home decoration.



Source: Dina Anastasio, “A Walk in the Woods,” *Sesame Solutions*, www.sesameworkshop.org/parents/solutions/information/article.php?contentId=108682.

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QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

How can you raise a self-assured student?

Q: I want my child to become a confident student. How can I encourage this now?

A: To do well in school, kids need to feel capable and worthwhile. They need to like themselves. This helps them handle ups and downs—and try new things they can learn from. Make sure you:

- **Tell your child how wonderful, talented and fun he is.** Children's views of themselves often reflect what their parents think and say.
- **Be affectionate with your child.** Hugs, kisses and pats on the back show love and reinforce your words.
- **Talk and play with your child often.** Send the message, "You're great company! I appreciate you."
- **Let your child help around the house.** He'll see that he's a valuable part of the family "team."
- **Praise your child's efforts and attempts**—not just his "successes." Teach that hard work and perseverance are admirable.
- **Allow your child to do things himself.** Emphasize his strengths and try to ignore behaviors that are annoying but harmless.
- **Give your child a sense of control.** Offer him options, such as picking between two outfits. Then accept his decision.

Source: "Building Confidence and Self-Esteem," BBC, www.bbc.co.uk/parenting/your_kids/toddlers_confidence.shtml.



PARENT QUIZ

Is your child learning to make friends?

Getting along with peers is essential to school success. Answer the following questions *yes* or *no* to see if you're helping your child develop this skill.

- ___ **1. Do you provide** opportunities for your child to play with peers?
- ___ **2. Do you talk** with your child about her interactions with friends?
- ___ **3. Do you encourage** good manners, such as sharing and expressing anger properly?
- ___ **4. Do you demonstrate** kindness by speaking positively about friends?

___ **5. Do you set** an example when you play with your child—by sharing toys and saying *please* and *thank you*?

How did you do? Each *yes* answer shows that you're encouraging social skills. For each *no* answer, consider using that idea from the quiz to change your answer to *yes*.

"To help your children turn out well, spend twice as much time with them and half as much money."
—H. Jackson Brown, Jr.

BUILDING LANGUAGE SKILLS

Practice telling stories

Recounting experiences helps children prepare for reading. To retell an experience, a child must speak in the past tense, put things in order and come to a conclusion. To encourage these skills:

- **Recall events together.** Discuss positive things, such as birthdays.
- **Make time for talking.** Review the day's events at the dinner table or at bedtime.

Source: "A Time to Remember: A Narrative Retelling Unit," Project EASE (Early Access to Success in Education), <http://gseweb.harvard.edu/~pild/projectease.htm>.

READING READINESS

Make an 'I Can Read' book

A personalized "I Can Read" book helps your child learn that print has meaning.

- **Staple** several blank pages together.
- **Write** "I can read ____" at the top of each one.
- **Fill** in the blanks with words she knows.
- **Paste** related pictures under the words.
- **Read** the book together!

Source: Jill F. Hauser, *Growing Up Reading: Learning to Read Through Creative Play*, ISBN: 0-913589-73-X (Williamson Publishing Co., 1-800-234-8791, www.idealspublications.com).

EXPANDING YOUR CHILD'S WORLD

Explain your everyday activities to your child

Errands and chores may be "old hat" to you, but they're learning experiences for your child. Take time to explain them. "We'll drop this letter in the mailbox. Soon, the letter carrier will pick it up. He'll take it to the post office, and they'll make sure Grandma receives it!"



Source: Claudia Jones, *Parents are Teachers, Too: Enriching Your Child's First Six Years*, ISBN: 0-913589-35-7 (Williamson Publishing Co., 1-800-234-8791, www.idealspublications.com).

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