

Helping Children Learn

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

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EXPANDING YOUR CHILD'S WORLD

Build strong parent-teacher relationships

Preschool teachers nurture children and help them get ready for kindergarten. They introduce them to new activities and skills. But for the best results, teachers need parents to be involved. You can:

- **Share information about home life.** This might concern a family matter that affects your child's emotions, for example, or something about your child's hobbies. The goal is to help the teacher understand your child.
- **Ask the teacher what you can do.** Some teachers invite parents to read to the class. Others welcome homemade crafts or treats. If you have special skills to contribute, mention them.
- **Show appreciation for the teacher's efforts.** Let her know what's working. "Joey loves coming to school. He tells me about story time every day. Thank you!"
- **Attend parent conferences and events.** Look for opportunities to strengthen the school-family connection.



Source: Steven P. Shelov, M.D. and Robert E. Hannemann, M.D., *The American Academy of Pediatrics: Caring for Your Baby and Young Child from Birth to Age 5*, ISBN: 0-553-37184-3, (The Bantam Doubleday Publishing Group, 1-800-726-0600, www.randomhouse.com).

DISCIPLINE

Set firm limits when it comes to TV

When deciding what to let your child watch on TV, consider quantity and quality. Children shouldn't watch more than an hour or two a day, and the shows they watch should be appropriate. You should:

- **Monitor what your child sees.** Watch together when possible. Don't choose shows that contain violence or harmful messages.
- **Review what you've seen.** After a show, address key issues. "The girl hurt the boy's feelings. What should she have said to him?" Help your child learn from stories.
- **Discuss commercials.** Understand that the products look exciting to your child. Explain gently, yet firmly, that ads may not be reliable—and you can't buy everything you see on TV.
- **Be a good role model.** Spend most of your free time reading, exercising and playing with your child—not watching TV.

BUILDING RESPONSIBILITY

Assign enjoyable chores

Preschoolers can and should do simple household chores. When they succeed, they feel good about themselves. This sets the stage for becoming responsible students. To encourage this:

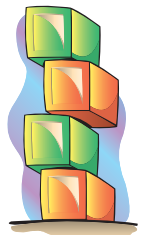
- **Pick age-appropriate chores.** Find jobs your child can handle without too much instruction.
- **Be specific.** Explain exactly what to do. "Put your toys in the toy box" is more helpful than, "Clean up."
- **Demonstrate.** You might say, "Look how I'm putting the napkins next to the plates."
- **Be patient.** Encourage your child, and don't criticize.

Source: Mary VanClay, "The Responsible Child: How to Teach Responsibility," ParentCenter, <http://parentcenter.babycenter.com/refcap/preschooler/praising/64681.html>.

BUILDING MATH SKILLS

Math is part of play

It's easy to practice math while your child builds with blocks. Help her create different patterns (red block, green block, red block, green block). Count blocks, too, touching each one as she counts it.



DEVELOPING CONCEPTS

Use touch to enjoy fall items

Here's a fun way to play with fall items, such as leaves, pine cones, nuts and mini pumpkins. Put several things in a shoe box, and cut a hole in the top. Can your child reach in and guess what he feels?



Source: "Preschool Fall Activity Theme," Gayle's Preschool Rainbow, www.preschoolrainbow.org/preschool-fall.htm.

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QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Is your child patient enough?

Q: My child is pretty impatient. Is this something I should work on with her?

A: To do well in school, children must be able to get along with others. To get along, they need patience—the patience to share, wait in line and listen without interrupting, for example. You can build your child’s patience by:

- **Being a role model.** In frustrating situations (such as waiting in traffic), find ways to cope. You might say, “Looks like a traffic jam. Let’s play a guessing game while we wait.”
- **Enjoying nature.** Appreciate a sunrise or sunset. Stargaze together. Look for certain types of birds. Sit quietly in the woods, waiting for deer or rabbits to appear.
- **Baking together.** Start from scratch, collecting necessities, mixing ingredients and watching bread or cake rise. Be sure to let them cool before tasting.
- **Saying “no” sometimes.** Don’t always give your child what she wants the instant she wants it. Let her enjoy looking forward to things. She might even save money for them.
- **Playing board games.** This teaches your child to wait her turn. Make sure games are designed for her age, though, or waiting will be too difficult.



Source: Marilyn Heins, “Teaching Kids Patience,” ParentKidsRight, www.parentkidsright.com/pt-patience.html.

PARENT QUIZ

Are you making reading fun?

It’s important for children to develop a love of reading early on. Answer the following questions *yes* or *no* to see if you’re encouraging this.

- ___ **1. Do you choose** books that interest your child?
- ___ **2. Do you read** dramatically, using various character voices and sound effects?
- ___ **3. Do you make** reading interactive by discussing the story and answering questions?
- ___ **4. Do you take** breaks from reading if your child loses interest?
- ___ **5. Do you let** your child fill in parts of the story he knows?

How did you do? Each *yes* answer shows you’re building a love of reading. For each *no* answer, consider using that idea from the quiz to change your answer to *yes*.

“You cannot teach a child to take care of himself unless you will let him take care of himself. He will make mistakes and out of these will come his wisdom.”
—Henry Ward Beecher

MAKING TIME COUNT

Make family meals a priority

Parents and kids often eat at different times. But try to plan one meal a day together. You might sit down for breakfast, for example, or have Friday night dinners. Spend time talking—and strengthening your relationship.

Source: “Family Dinners: The Recipe for Connectedness,” FamilyEducation.com, <http://life.familyeducation.com/family-time/healthy-lifestyle/29528.html?detoured=1>.

BUILDING CHARACTER

Help your child learn to think about others

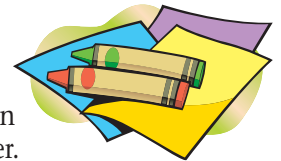
Learning to share is a long process that requires help from parents. Set a good example by sharing with your child. Encourage him to share with others. Setting a timer can help. “John gets the toy for two minutes, and then it’s your turn again.”

BUILDING MOTOR SKILLS

In writing, ‘bigger’ is better

Preschoolers are developing their writing skills. Although their attempts may look like scribbles, handwriting improves with practice. Using “big” supplies can help, such as:

- **Big paper.** Start with unlined, full-size sheets. They provide plenty of room for experimenting with letters.
- **Big utensils.** Try thick crayons, pencils and markers, which can make writing easier.



When your child seems ready, move on to thinner utensils and lined paper with wide spaces.

Sources: Ellen Booth Church, “Best Writing Practice for Preschoolers,” Scholastic Families, www.scholastic.com/earlylearner/experts/learning/3_5_bestwritingpresch.htm.

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