

Helping Children Learn

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

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BUILDING SOCIAL SKILLS

Children need stress relief, too

Children who have too much stress often exhibit difficult behavior. They may become shy, anxious or withdrawn. They might resort to uncontrollable crying or angry outbursts. Some preschoolers regress to an earlier stage of development, such as by thumb sucking. To minimize your child's stress and help her cope:

- **Let your child go at her own pace** when playing and learning.
- **Plan activities that emphasize cooperation**, not competition.
- **Boost your child's self-esteem.** Help her feel proud—not ashamed—of herself.
- **Have reasonable, clear expectations** of your child.
- **Be patient and encouraging** in good times and bad.
- **Make time to listen** to your child's concerns every day.
- **Talk about feelings.** Say that it's okay to feel angry, sad or scared. Use art, puppetry and play to express emotions.
- **Find ways to eliminate** sources of stress.
- **Teach relaxation techniques**, such as taking deep breaths.
- **Encourage your child to run, jump, climb, etc.,** to relieve tension.



If your child's signs of stress persist, don't hesitate to get help from teachers and other professionals.

Source: Dr. Karen DeBord, Ph.D., "Helping Children Cope with Stress," National Network for Child Care, www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/fcs/human/pubs/copestress.html.

EXPANDING YOUR CHILD'S WORLD

Let your child learn from plants

Gardening is a fun way to introduce kids to the world of science. It also promotes patience and responsibility. Start with an easy-care, child-safe houseplant. Teach your child:

- **Where to put the plant.** Talk about its need for sun, but avoid too much direct light.
- **How to water the plant.** Show your child how to check the dirt to see if it's dry.
- **How to dust plant leaves.** Dust blocks sunlight and prevents photosynthesis.
- **How to mist the plant.** Give your child a sprayer filled with lukewarm water.

Try to save seeds from citrus fruits. Help your child plant them in a six-inch pot. When a seedling sprouts at least four leaves, transfer it to its own pot.

Source: Rachel T. Terry, "Indoor Gardening Activity for Kids," PageWise, http://mdmd.essortment.com/indoorgardening_rjgx.htm.

DISCIPLINE

Stay calm during tantrums

Preschoolers, especially before they turn five, put their own wants and needs first. This helps to explain stubborn behavior. Remember to:

- **Let** your child choose between two options whenever possible.
- **Enforce** a few simple rules instead of overwhelming your child with limits.
- **Give** your child little responsibilities that she can handle successfully.

Source: Thomas Lickona, *Raising Good Children*, ISBN: 0-553-37429-X (Bantam Books, 1-800-726-0600, www.randomhouse.com/doubleday/).

READING READINESS

Applaud reading attempts

Predictable books repeat words or actions, helping kids get comfortable with stories.

When you read these books often, your child will learn words and phrases. This builds vocabulary and confidence. Soon he'll be "reading" with you.



Source: "Helping Your Preschool Child," U.S. Department of Education, www.ed.gov/parents/earlychild/ready/preschool/preschool.pdf.

BUILDING MOTOR SKILLS

Motor skills help your child with basic school activities

Children need strong motor skills in kindergarten. For example, they should be able to:

- **Skip** (step-hop, step-hop).
- **Put** large beads on a string.
- **Draw** a person with several body parts.
- **Cut** with safety scissors.
- **Hop** a few times in a row.
- **Stand** on one foot for five seconds.



Source: Tara Losquadro Liddle, *Why Motor Skills Matter*, ISBN: 0-07-140818-5 (Contemporary Books, 1-800-262-4729, www.books.mcgraw-hill.com).

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QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Are preschoolers responsible for lying?



Q: It makes me angry when my child lies. But I don't think he's doing it on purpose. Does this make sense?

A: Yes, because preschoolers often have trouble telling the difference between reality and make-believe. Your anger may confuse and frighten your son. Remember that preschoolers:

- **Have active imaginations.** They are in the “age of fantasy.” Your child may simply describe what he wishes were true. That means he's *pretending*, not lying.
- **Think they are telling parents the “right thing.”** Your child may think you'd rather hear, “I didn't paint on the wall” than the facts.
- **Need excellent role models.** Be honest with your child and others. If your child hears you fibbing, he'll think he should do the same.
- **Want parents' help.** If you know your child has lied, be matter-of-fact. “That's not what happened. You made a mistake and told me something that's not true. Please tell me the real story.”
- **Succeed with loving support.** Treat your child with calm understanding. You want to send the message that he can always come to you with the truth.

Source: Jolene L. Roehlkepartain and Nancy Leffert, *What Young Children Need to Succeed*, ISBN: 1-57542-070-8 (Free Spirit Publishing, 1-866-703-7322, www.freespirit.com).

PARENT QUIZ

Are you teaching how to tell time?

Most preschoolers can't tell time. But there are activities that prepare them to learn this skill. To see if you're helping, answer the following questions *yes* or *no*.

- ___ **1. Do you describe** the time of day? (“It's nighttime. It's dark outside.”)
- ___ **2. Do you connect** numbers to routines? (“It's one o'clock. Time for your nap.”)
- ___ **3. Do you explain** the clock? (“This is the second hand.”)
- ___ **4. Do you time** activities? (“Let's see how many spaces the minute hand moves while you eat.”)

___ **5. Do you refer** to clock numbers? (“We'll leave when the little hand is on the two.”)

How did you do? Each *yes* answer shows that you're teaching about time. For each *no* answer, try to change your answer to *yes*.

“No one has yet realized ... the kindness and generosity hidden in the soul of a child. The effort of every true education should be to unlock that treasure.”
—Emma Goldman

DEVELOPING CONCEPTS

Teach chronological order

Understanding the order of events—called *sequencing*—is necessary in math and reading. Begin with the basic concepts of “before” and “after.” Give your child examples. “After breakfast, we'll read a story.” “Brush your teeth before bed.” It's helpful to connect new concepts to familiar routines.

Source: Becky Daniel, *The Playful Preschooler*, ISBN: 1-56822-955-0 (Instructional Fair, 1-800-417-3261, www.teacherspecialty.com).

BUILDING LANGUAGE SKILLS

Try to expand conversations

Having many back-and-forth verbal exchanges is important for speech development. It's especially helpful for kids with speech delays. Try asking your child *how*, *why* and *what* questions. Also:

- **Give your child chances to talk** with other kids. Encourage him to listen and respond.
- **Make silly sounds.** Roar. Moo. Turn this into a “Simon Says” game.
- **Read books that encourage talking**, such as Wilt Berry's *Let's Talk About* series. Ask a librarian for ideas.

Source: Dr. Stanley I. Greenspan, “Helping Kids With Speech Delays,” *Scholastic Parent & Child*, February/March 2004, (Scholastic Inc., 1-886-436-2464, www.scholastic.com/parentandchild).

BUILDING MATH SKILLS

Make patterns with music

Math is based on patterns. To teach about patterns through music:

- **Sing songs that repeat phrases**, such as “B-I-N-G-O.”
- **Sing songs with responses.** “Are You Sleeping? Are You Sleeping? Brother John? Brother John?”
- **Make patterns.** Clap twice. Stomp your feet. Repeat.

Source: Jennifer R. Bradford-Vernon, *How to Be Your Child's First Teacher*, ISBN: 1-56822-998-4 (Instructional Fair, 1-800-417-3261, www.teacherspecialty.com).

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