

Helping Children Learn

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

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DISCIPLINE

Discipline becomes easier with age

By age four, children have learned a lot about following rules. They understand and remember many rules they hear. Yet despite their growth, preschoolers aren't clear about why following rules is important. And they still have trouble controlling their behavior. To help your child obey more easily:

- **Keep rules simple.** Use words and sentences on your child's level. "No pushing others." "Put away toys in the toy box."
- **State rules ahead of time.** For example, "We brush our teeth before bed."
- **Stick to essential rules.** It confuses kids when there are too many rules—or when some rules aren't enforced.
- **Be a role model.** Use your behavior as an example your child can follow.
- **Explain rules calmly.** When your child misbehaves, discuss how he can improve next time.
- **Rely on rules.** Avoid saying, "Because I said so!" Instead, restate rules and the reasons for them.
- **Tune in to your child.** When kids are sick, tired or hungry, behaving can be more difficult. Think of creative ways to help your child comply.

Source: "Principles of Parenting: Helping Young Children Behave," Auburn University, www.humsci.auburn.edu/parent/behave.



READING READINESS

Learn the ABCs in *and* out of order

Being able to identify letters presented in random order—like *S*, *J* and *B*—is the strongest predictor of future reading success, say researchers. To help your child with this skill, go beyond singing the ABCs and using flashcards. You might:

- **Post a new letter each day** on the refrigerator. Add pictures of things that start with the letter. At the end of the week, mix and rematch the letters and pictures.
- **Challenge your child to identify** letters around her. For example, ask, "What is the first letter on the stop sign?" Or "Can you find the letter *D* on that box?"
- **Talk about the most important** letters in the world to your child: the ones in her name. Do activities with them, such as making cookies in their shapes.

Source: Laura Hilgers, "What You Can Do Now to Prevent Reading Problems Later," *Child*, September 2003 (Meredith Corporation, 1-800-777-0222, www.child.com).

BUILDING RESPONSIBILITY

Give the right amount of responsibility to your child

Sometimes parents aren't sure how much responsibility to give preschoolers. You can:

- **Give** a few small responsibilities, such as helping to clean up toys.
- **Choose** jobs your child can handle.
- **Compliment** how your child helps herself and the family.
- **Offer** reminders. (Don't ever punish your child for forgetting a task.)

BUILDING MOTOR SKILLS

Play builds fine motor skills

Fine motor skills, which use the small muscles in the hand, are important for school success. For example, being able to hold a pencil properly helps with writing. To develop fine muscles, have your child:

- **Play** with clay, putty or dough.
- **Work** simple jigsaw puzzles.



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

WHEN YOU NEED HELP

Make mornings manageable

Some mornings are dreadful. Time and tempers run short. The ride to school is stressful, not relaxing. To solve this problem, prepare at night by:

- **Organizing** school supplies—including an outfit.
- **Putting** breakfast items (bowls, cereal boxes, cups, etc.) on the table.
- **Making** lunches or snacks and refrigerating them.



Source: Carol Baicker-McKee, *FussBusters at Home*, ISBN: 1-56145-262-9 (Peachtree Publishers, Ltd., 1-800-241-0113, www.peachtree-online.com).

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QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Does your child have trouble with writing?

Q: My preschooler's writing is so messy. How can I tell if she has a writing problem?

A: Since preschoolers are developing the motor skills they need to use writing tools like pencils and crayons, the letters they craft might not be too easy to read. It's also common for preschoolers to write letters backwards.

In addition, young children are fidgety, so they may not sit long enough to write carefully. But there are some warning signs that a child is really struggling to write. Specialists say children might need help if they:

- **Refrain from drawing** and tracing.
- **Aren't comfortable** holding a pencil or crayon.
- **Can't stay with any task** long enough to get the hang of it.
- **Exhibit extreme** restlessness.

If you're worried about your child's writing, talk with her preschool teacher. She sees your child in many learning situations and can help you assess her progress. She can also suggest writing activities to do at home with your child.

Source: Holly Hanke, "How to Tell When Your Preschooler Needs Extra Help with Writing," ParentCenter, <http://parentcenter.babycenter.com/refcap/preschooler/plerning/64520.html>.



PARENT QUIZ

Are you teaching your child respect?

Being respectful is critical to success in school and life. Answer the following questions *yes* or *no* to see if you're encouraging this behavior.

- ___ **1. Do you model** respectful behavior, such as listening without interrupting?
- ___ **2. Do you give** specific praise when your child is respectful? "Thanks for knocking before coming in! Great job!"
- ___ **3. Do you resolve** conflicts calmly with your child?
- ___ **4. Do you help** your child express himself? (For example, explain that saying "I'm angry" is much better than hitting.)

___ **5. Do you teach** polite phrases, including *please* and *thank you*?

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

"The objective of education is to prepare the young to educate themselves throughout their lives."
—Robert Maynard Hutchins

BUILDING SELF-ESTEEM

Meet all your child's needs

Parents "do" so much for children that sometimes their emotional needs get overlooked. Make sure you:

- **Appreciate** your child's imagination. Have fun pretending together.
- **Talk** about your child's joys and fears.
- **Accept** your child for who he is. Compliment his strengths.
- **Provide** a loving and safe home. Children need to be around caring, respectful adults.

Source: Heidi Hoff, "Ten Things a Preschooler Requires," Partnership for Learning, www.partnershipforlearning.org/article.asp?ArticleID=1804.

TALKING & LISTENING

Keep activities educational

No matter how eager you are for your child to learn the ABCs, be patient. Keep activities lighthearted, and if your child gets bored, stop. Remember that while you want your child to learn school skills, you also want her to learn something else: that learning is fun!

Source: Catherine Newman, "Fun From A to Z," *FamilyFun*, September 2004 (Disney Publishing, 1-800-289-4849, www.familyfun.com).

EXPANDING YOUR CHILD'S WORLD

Fill indoor time with fun

Preschoolers are constantly wondering and exploring. When you're stuck inside during the winter months, this can be frustrating! You and your child can:

- **Visit with family** and friends—through pictures. Find old photos of your child with relatives or photos of you as a child.
- **Host a concert** in which you play homemade instruments or sing favorite songs. Invite family members or friends to be the audience.

Source: Mary Mohler, "10 Terrific Activities for Toddlers," *Parents Magazine*, March 2003 (Meredith Corporation, 1-800-727-3682, www.parents.com).



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