

# Helping Children Learn

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

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## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

### Should parents worry about preschoolers' writing skills?

**Q:** I've noticed that some children in my daughter's preschool class are printing letters. Should I teach her how to write?

**A:** You don't need to teach her right away, but it's a good idea to encourage her. Go slowly and never be pushy. Only move to the next level if she's ready and interested. To start:

- **Do plenty of art activities.** Talk about what she draws. If you're not sure what something is, just say, "Tell me about your picture."
- **Write captions for drawings.** Listen to your child's descriptions and write them down. For example, "This is my house and my dog." Read them back to her.
- **Keep the alphabet handy.** Post it where your child can see it every day. Mention that these are the letters people use to write. Show her the letters in her name.
- **Let her "write" by herself.** Yes, it may look like scribbles at first, but that's okay! Have her tell you what she wrote. Say, "I'm so proud that you're writing!"
- **Offer to label things.** Would she like to have her name on her drawing? Wonderful! You can write it for her or do it together.



## LEARNING THROUGH MUSIC

### Enrich your child's life with music

Music is a world in itself. No matter how much time you spend exploring it, there are still new things for you and your child to enjoy. You can:

- **Listen for fun.** Play music during your daily activities. Listen while doing chores, for example.
- **Move to music.** Movement is especially fun when done to a beat. Try giving your child a prop, such as a spoon to tap on a plastic cup as he marches.
- **Talk about tempo.** Some pieces are fast, while others are slow. Listen together and describe what you hear.
- **Experiment with pitch.** Sing familiar songs, such as "Old McDonald Had a Farm." Change your voices from high to low.

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](http://www.teacherspecialty.com)).

## BUILDING ATTENTION SPAN

### Improve concentration skills

Paying attention is a skill that needs to develop with time. To nurture your child's ability to concentrate:

- **Find** things to do that interest her.
- **Tell** exciting stories.
- **Play** games together.

Source: Lisa Jennings, "Getting Children to Pay Attention," *Simply Family*, [www.simplyfamily.com/display.cfm?articleID=attention\\_fam.cfm](http://www.simplyfamily.com/display.cfm?articleID=attention_fam.cfm).

## MAKING TIME COUNT

### Teach about healthy eating

Poor nutrition affects learning. It shortens attention span and leads to fatigue. Children with poor eating habits also miss more school due to illness.

The best time to teach good nutrition is now. Here's how:

- **Model** healthy eating habits.
- **Visit** a local farmers' market together.
- **Expose** your child to new foods.
- **Let** him help you prepare healthy snacks.

Source: "Children's Nutrition and Learning," ERIC Digest, [www.ericdigests.org/1994/nutrition.html](http://www.ericdigests.org/1994/nutrition.html).



## DEVELOPING THINKING SKILLS

### Teach your child how to recognize parts of a whole

Learning about how parts fit into a whole is an important problem-solving skill. To help your child develop this skill:

- **Cut** a picture into large pieces and have your child fit them together.
- **Show** your child incomplete objects—a pencil without an eraser or a shirt that's missing a button. Discuss each missing part and why it's needed.



Source: Kathryn Stout, "Simple Techniques to Encourage Thinking Skills in the Young," *Design a Study Teaching Help*, [www.designastudy.com/teaching/tips-0198.html](http://www.designastudy.com/teaching/tips-0198.html).

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## BUILDING MOTOR SKILLS

### Preschoolers need to move, move, move

By age four, children usually have learned many physical skills, such as jumping, skipping and bounding from one piece of furniture to the next. As you've probably discovered, they don't let their talents go to waste! To help your child use—and sometimes contain—his big supply of energy:

- **Spend time outside.** Spring is a perfect season to be outdoors, just where many kids want to be. So kick a ball around together. Race across the yard or down the sidewalk. Meet new friends at the park. Cheer for your child as he conquers the swings, slides and monkey bars.
- **Sign up for activities.** It's no accident that teams and classes start teaching kids independently (instead of with their parents) at this age. Preschoolers want to participate in vigorous activities, and they're ready to follow simple instructions. Be aware, though, that they shouldn't have to listen to lectures. Twenty minutes of non-active instruction should be the limit in a one-hour class. Then kids should practice and play.
- **Give incentives for self-control.** Sometimes children need to sit still—or at least move at a slower pace. For example, say, "If you stand near me at the bank, we'll walk to the library afterward." Then keep your word.

Source: Judy Molland, "High-Speed Kids," *Parents*, May 2004 (Meredith Corporation, 1-800-727-3682, www.parents.com).



## PARENT QUIZ

### Are you teaching listening skills?

Children who are good listeners do better academically and socially. Answer the following questions *yes* or *no* to see if you're helping your child become a good listener:

- \_\_\_ 1. Do you model good listening skills such as making eye contact with and not interrupting the speaker?
- \_\_\_ 2. Do you encourage your child to listen to different sounds and identify them?
- \_\_\_ 3. Do you read aloud to your child every day?
- \_\_\_ 4. Do you give your child simple, clear directions?

\_\_\_ 5. Do you praise your child for displaying good listening skills?

**How did you do?** Each yes answer means you're helping your child become a good listener. For each no answer, consider using that idea from the quiz to change your answer to yes.

*"What is a home without children? Quiet."  
—Henry Youngman*

## BUILDING SOCIAL SKILLS

### Language skills develop, improve social skills

It's important that your preschooler use her growing language skills to interact with others—and not resort to pushing and shoving. Encourage your child to:

- **Ask** for what she wants.
- **Tell** others how she feels.
- **Join** another child in play.

Source: Ellen Booth Church, "Joining the Group: How kids learn to be themselves with others," *Scholastic Parent & Child*, September 2004 (Scholastic, Inc., 1-866-436-2464, www.scholastic.com/parentandchild).

## DISCIPLINE

### Model school rules at home

Your child will need to follow many rules in school. Get him on the right track with rules at home. Here are some to try:

- **No** yelling.
- **No** running inside.
- **Put** trash in its place.
- **Take** turns and share.

Source: "ABC, 123 ... Success in the Classroom, QED," Perspectives in Education and Deafness, Gallaudet University, <http://clercenter.gallaudet.edu/products/perspectives/sep-oct98/klein.html>.

## DEVELOPMENTAL MILESTONES

### Conquer school fears with a sense of independence

Children usually have anxiety about starting kindergarten. Talk about your child's worries with her. Then help her overcome them by teaching her to:

- **Dress** herself.
- **Make** choices.
- **Work** independently.
- **Recite** her name, address and telephone number.



Source: Kathy Seal, "25 Tips from Teachers Guarantee a Great Kindergarten Year," *Parents* (Meredith Corporation, 1-800-727-3682, www.parents.com).

## Helping Children Learn®

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