

# Helping Children Learn

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

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## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

### How important are listening skills?

**Q:** Since kids have to listen so much at school, should I start encouraging this skill now, even though my child has a short attention span?

**A:** As your child gets older, she will need to communicate in more complex ways. Of course, she'll need to listen to teachers and respond appropriately. Talking and listening skills will also help her make friends and express wants and needs.

Make time to focus on talking and listening each day. It's normal for preschoolers to have short attention spans, so be patient. Start with short conversations, and you'll see them become longer and livelier over time. Also:

- **Choose moments when you can** really focus on your child. Right before sleep or in the car might work.
- **Ask your child about topics she enjoys.** It's easiest for kids to talk about things that interest them.
- **Encourage discussion.** Say something like, "I asked you a question. How about if you ask me a question, too?"
- **Make eye contact.** This isn't easy for kids. When possible, gently ask your child to look at you when she talks. Compliment her progress!

Source: Peggy Schmidt, "Communication is key," Scholastic.com, [www.scholastic.com/familymatters/raisingkids/communication.htm](http://www.scholastic.com/familymatters/raisingkids/communication.htm).



## READING READINESS

### Squeeze reading into busy schedules

Reading with children is an important way to prepare them for school. Some days are busy, though, so try these 15-minute solutions, such as reading:

- **In the car.** Point out signs and license plates. Help your child read words and letters around him.
- **In the kitchen.** Show your child the recipe. Point out words on cans and boxes.
- **When traveling.** If you are away on a business trip, call home and read a story over the phone with your child.
- **During the day.** Collect fun things to read, such as comic strips and greeting cards.
- **While waiting.** Pull out a book when you're stuck in line or in an office waiting room.
- **At bedtime.** Read a soothing tale or listen to an audio book.
- **Around the house.** Label household items such as *chair* and *bed*.

Source: "Fifteen-Minute Reading Activities," Family Education Network/PTA Connection, <http://news.fen.com/article/0,1120,63-15229,00.html>.

## BUILDING SOCIAL SKILLS

### Be aware of bullying

Bullying can begin as early as preschool. Teach your child that it's never okay to:

- **Hit**, push or harm another person on purpose.
- **Call** people bad names.

If your child experiences these behaviors, she should:

- **Speak** up for herself and say, "Stop it."
- **Walk** away from the bully.
- **Talk** to you about it.

Source: KidsHealth, "Bullying and Your Child," Nemours Foundation, [www.kidshealth.org/parent/emotions/feelings/bullies.html](http://www.kidshealth.org/parent/emotions/feelings/bullies.html).

## BUILDING CHARACTER

### Share the joy of giving

Preschoolers can learn to be kind to others. At this age, they can:

- **Help** you make cookies for a neighbor.
- **Find** gently used toys to give to a donation center.
- **Sing** a song to someone else to brighten their day.



Source: Jolene L. Roehlkepartain and Nancy Leffert, *What Young Children Need to Succeed: Working Together to Build Assets from Birth to Age 11*, ISBN: 1-57542-070-8 (Free Spirit Publishing, 1-866-703-7322, [www.freespirit.com](http://www.freespirit.com)).

## BUILDING MOTOR SKILLS

### Put a new twist on tag

You probably remember playing tag as a child. Here's a new way to play. Allow players to avoid being "tagged" by doing something funny, such as touching their noses. Some other ideas: Wiggle your ears or raise your eyebrows.



Source: Susan K. Perry, *Fun Time, Family Time*, ISBN: 0-3807-8772-2 (Avon Books, 1-800-331-3761, [www.harpercollins.com](http://www.harpercollins.com)).

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## DEVELOPING THINKING SKILLS

### Improve concentration with the right 'touch'

Doing an extended activity encourages preschoolers to concentrate. Using a sense of touch can make this more fun. To keep your child busy and engaged, try:

- **Weaving.** Cut horizontal slits in a clean foam tray or piece of cardboard. Give your child long, narrow, colorful strips of paper and show him how to weave them through the openings—under, over, under, over. Encourage him to keep at it.
- **Creating hand signals.** Your child will love sharing a "secret code" with you. Use hand signs for "I'm hungry," "I love you," "Thank you," and other things you say often. Remembering meanings and motions will be a fun mental workout for him.
- **Guessing.** Play a game to sharpen your child's reasoning skills. Put five or six familiar objects in a bag. Let him put his hand inside and—without looking—grasp one object. See if he can tell you what it is just by using his sense of touch. Then move on to the next item. When he's done, let him test you!



Source: Lee Hausner and Jeremy Schlosberg, *Teaching Your Child Concentration*, ISBN: 0-89526-394-7 (Lifeline Press, an imprint of Regnery Publishing, 1-888-219-4747, [www.regnery.com/lifeline/lifeline.html](http://www.regnery.com/lifeline/lifeline.html)).

## PARENT QUIZ

### Are you encouraging creativity?

Creative children grow emotionally and mentally. They learn to express themselves, cope with their feelings and solve problems. Answer the following questions *yes* or *no* to see if you're fostering your child's creativity:

- \_\_\_ 1. **Do you allow** your child to choose activities?
- \_\_\_ 2. **Do you keep** art supplies handy?
- \_\_\_ 3. **Do you choose** toys that can be used in different ways?
- \_\_\_ 4. **Do you nurture** your child's interests?
- \_\_\_ 5. **Do you avoid** interrupting your child's daydreams?
- \_\_\_ 6. **Do you display** your child's creations around your home?

**How did you do?** Each *yes* answer means you are helping your child become more creative. For each *no* answer, consider using that idea from the quiz to change your answer to *yes*.

"The only people who fail are those who never try."

—Ilka Chase

## BUILDING SELF-ESTEEM

### Give relief to perfectionists

"Everyone makes mistakes." That's easy to say. But when mistakes are personal, they're harder to accept. If you're hard on yourself for every error, try to lighten up. Show your child that mistakes aren't the end of the world. In fact, they can teach important lessons.

Source: William Sears and Martha Sears, *The Discipline Book*, ISBN: 0-3167-7903-2 (Little, Brown & Company, 1-800-759-0190, [www.twbookmark.com](http://www.twbookmark.com)).

## DISCIPLINE

### Teach rules of discipline

Discipline involves teaching children how to behave. Keep in mind, though, that misbehavior isn't necessarily "immoral." Often, it's simply "immature." When young children:

- **Lie**, they may be mixed up. Many confuse fantasy and reality. They may even believe their own untruths.
- **Steal**, they may not understand ownership. It's hard to know whose things are whose. It's okay to take a flier from a store, for instance, but not gum.

Source: Penelope Leach, "Bad Behavior," *Child.com*, [www.child.com/child/story.jhtml?storyid=/template/data/child/story/data/bad\\_behavior.xml](http://www.child.com/child/story.jhtml?storyid=/template/data/child/story/data/bad_behavior.xml).

## BUILDING LANGUAGE SKILLS

### Work on language skills

Reinforce the language skills your preschooler is learning. Here's how:

- **Encourage clear speech.** Repeat sentences back to your child.
- **Build vocabulary.** Introduce names of fruits or animals.
- **Have fun with words.** Sing songs and do finger plays.



Source: Dana Sullivan, "Learning Milestones: Language Skills," *ParentCenter*, <http://parentcenter.babycenter.com/general/preschooler/ppreschool/72275.html>.

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