

Helping Children Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

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QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

How can parents teach preschoolers basic math?

Q: I want my daughter to be comfortable with math. We count a lot, but what else can we do?

A: Once you start looking for opportunities to practice math, you'll find them everywhere! Math is part of everyday life. For example, "How can we cut up this sandwich so that everyone gets a fair share?" "Your shirt has a pretty pattern! Pink, purple, pink, purple." "How many steps do we climb to get to our apartment? One, two, three" You can also:

- **Familiarize your child with shapes.** A sandwich is a *square*. Cut it in half, and it becomes *rectangles* or *triangles*. A cake is a *circle*, and it fits on a *round* platter. If these shapes are too simple, talk about others. A stop sign, for instance, is an *octagon*.
- **Discuss what numbers mean.** When kids begin counting, they recite numbers. Then they learn that numbers actually represent things. Start low. ("Here is *one* book." "You have *two* eyes.") Move to bigger numbers when your child catches on.
- **Look for numbers everywhere.** They're on license plates, road signs, houses and more. What do these numbers mean? How do we use them? Also use math words, such as *more* and *less*.



BUILDING SOCIAL SKILLS

Social activities prepare for school

Through friendships and play, children develop skills that make adjusting to school easier. To encourage this kind of learning:

- **Play** with your child. Come down to his level. Avoid directing play or criticizing what he does. Be responsive to his ideas.
- **Talk** with your child about his friends and play. Keep the conversation pleasant.
- **Be** positive about negative events. Instead of accusing another child of being "mean," for example, suggest that maybe he was having a bad day.
- **Help** your child solve problems. Encourage him to compromise and negotiate rather than shout, sulk or hit.
- **Give** your child freedom when he's ready. Keep an eye on things when friends visit, but don't interfere unless it's necessary.

Source: Jacquelyn Mize and Ellen Abell, "Encouraging Social Skills in Young Children: Tips Teachers Can Share with Parents," College of Human Sciences, Auburn University, www.humsci.auburn.edu/parent/socialskills.html.

DEVELOPING THINKING SKILLS

Boost your child's thinking skills with better questions

You can develop your child's ability to think by posing certain questions. Ask your preschooler to:

- **Compare** two characters in a story. How are they similar? Different?
- **Classify** and sort items—toys with wheels, foods that taste sweet, etc.
- **Summarize** a story you've read. What happened first? What happened last?

READING READINESS

Teach reading skills at home

To build your child's reading skills:

- **Teach letters.** Sing the alphabet song. Use magnetic letters.
- **Teach about books**—how to hold them, turn pages, read from left to right.
- **Read aloud.** Help your child see the connection between words on a page and the sounds of words.



Source: Bonnie Armbruster, Fran Lehr and Jean Osborn, "A Child Becomes a Reader," The Partnership for Learning—National Institute for Literacy and RMC Research Corporation, www.nifl.gov/partnershipforreading/publications/pdf/low_res_child_reader_B-K.

YOUR CHILD AND YOU

Make time to do nothing

During this hectic season, you and your child need time to relax and do nothing. Some ideas:

- **Curl** up together with a good story book.
- **Color** a picture together.
- **Sit** on the floor while he plays with his toys. Just be with him.



Source: Margery D. Rosen, "The Joys of Doing Nothing," Scholastic.com, www.scholastic.com/familymatters/raisingkids/nothing.htm.

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DISCIPLINE

Tone down reactions to misbehavior

Thomas W. Phelan, a psychologist and author, has a saying about children: "They're *not* little adults!" Children don't respond to reasoning the way adults do. When parents forget this, Phelan says, it can be frustrating. What to do instead? He suggests using few words, counting and staying calm. Here are the details:

- **Explain the counting method.** "You know, Michael, I am tired of yelling. So I'm going to stop. When you misbehave I'll say 'one.' If you keep going, I'll say, 'two.' If you still keep going, I'll say, 'three,' and you'll go to your room."
- **Keep your voice steady and just loud enough** for your child to hear well when the time comes to use counting. Or say nothing and simply hold up fingers. Make sure he understands that you're counting silently.
- **Escort your child to his room** if he misbehaves and you count to three. He should stay about one minute for every year of age. (A five-year-old, for example, would stay five minutes.) Used consistently, this simple technique should have exciting results.

Source: Thomas W. Phelan, *1-2-3 Magic: Effective Discipline for Children 2-12*, ISBN: 0-9633-8619-0 (Parentmagic, Inc., 1-800-442-4453, www.parentmagicstore.com).



PARENT QUIZ

Are you promoting independence?

A child who is confident about her ability to do things herself is more likely to be confident about learning new things in school. Answer the following questions *yes* or *no* to see if you're guiding your child toward independence:

- ___ 1. **Do you show** enthusiasm as your child tries new things?
- ___ 2. **Does your child have** a safe environment in which to explore and experiment?
- ___ 3. **Do you avoid** stepping in when you see your child doing something incorrectly and let her figure things out?
- ___ 4. **Do you give** your child small choices to make, such as what outfit to wear?
- ___ 5. **Do you praise** your child for what she accomplishes on her own?

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

"Childhood is the most beautiful of all life's seasons."
—Author Unknown

BUILDING SELF-ESTEEM

Help your preschooler build positive self-esteem

Children with high self-esteem are more likely to try harder in school. To help your child develop a positive self-image:

- **Be affectionate.** Tell her you love her. Spend time with her.
- **Pay attention.** Answer her questions honestly and quickly.
- **Encourage** her to try new tasks. Praise her efforts.

Source: "The 3-, 4- and 5-Year-Old Child: Self-Esteem," University of New Hampshire, Cooperative Extension, http://ceinfo.unh.edu/Family/Documents/ec345_self.pdf.

BUILDING LANGUAGE SKILLS

Create a cookbook

Your child can build language skills by "writing" a cookbook with you. Together, find pictures of his favorite foods. Glue them onto pages and write recipes. List instructions, such as, "1. Spread peanut butter on bread." Attach the pages to make a book.

Source: Rosemary Black, "Read This!" *Sesame Street Parents*, Special Bonus Issue (Children's Television Workshop, www.sesameworkshop.org/parents).

EXPANDING YOUR CHILD'S WORLD

It's easy to enjoy science

Science is all around your child. You can use everyday objects to teach about it. Here's one way: Go outside and pick up two rocks. Ask your child to rub them together as hard as she can. Now have her carefully touch one.



The heat she feels is called *friction*.

Source: Claudia Jones, *Parents Are Teachers, Too: Enriching Your Child's First Six Years*, ISBN: 0-9135-8935-9 (Williamson Publishing Co., a division of Ideals Publications, 1-800-932-2145, www.idealspublications.com).

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