

# Helping Children Learn

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

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## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

### How can parents raise good readers?

**Q: I know it's really important for kids to be good readers. When should I start helping my child with reading? What are some ways I can do this?**

**A:** It's never too soon to start! Long before children actually "learn to read," they build reading skills. For example, talking and singing build verbal skills. And listening to books teaches about the written word. Some of the best ways to prepare for reading are:

- **Encourage your child to talk.** Then listen to him. Ask questions that require more than a "yes" or "no" answer.
- **Teach about books and printed materials**—how to hold them, turn pages, and follow words from left to right.
- **Use the alphabet.** Sing the alphabet song. Point out letters. Have fun writing words, such as your child's name.
- **Emphasize the sounds of language.** Use nursery rhymes and songs. Let your child hear how words are made up of smaller parts and sounds.
- **Read aloud to your child.** Help him see the connection between printed words and the words you say.

Source: Bonnie Armbruster, Fran Lehr and Jean Osborn, "A Child Becomes a Reader: Birth Through Preschool," The Partnership for Learning—National Institute for Literacy and RMC Research Corporation, [www.nifl.gov/partnershipforreading/publications/html/parent\\_guides/birth\\_to\\_preschool.html](http://www.nifl.gov/partnershipforreading/publications/html/parent_guides/birth_to_preschool.html).



## USING OUR SENSES

### Build your child's sense of touch

Which activity uses the sense of touch—eating, singing or painting? If you said all three, you're right!

To enhance your child's sense of touch while doing things that seem geared toward other senses, try:

- **Singing.** It's fun for the ears, but also for the fingers. Try fingerplay songs with your child, like "The Itsy Bitsy Spider" and "Pat-a-cake."
- **Eating.** If you give your child a variety of textures—such as soft bananas, rough crackers and smooth peas—you are building her sense of touch, too.
- **Painting.** To heighten this, have your child paint with just her thumb—or just her knuckles. Or have her paint on textured paper.

Source: Sandra Markle, "Funny Fingers," *Parenting* (The Parenting Group, 1-800-234-0847, [www.parenting.com](http://www.parenting.com)).

## BUILDING ATTENTION SPAN

### Lengthen attention spans

By the time your child enters kindergarten, she should be able to pay attention for about 20 minutes. Being able to concentrate is an important skill to teach your child. To slowly stretch your child's ability to concentrate:

- **Encourage** her to sit still when you read to her.
- **Slowly** increase reading time.
- **Play** with building blocks. Make a higher tower each time.

Source: "Attention Deficit Disorder," Fort Carson MEDDAC and Evans U.S. Army Hospital, Pediatric Clinic Patient Education Center, <http://evans.amedd.army.mil/peds/PDF/add.pdf>.

## DEVELOPING CONCEPTS

### What are the 'right' toys?

The "right" toys engage your child in learning and practicing key concepts. Look for toys that build motor skills, foster creativity and social skills, teach counting and colors. For example:

- **Sandbox tools.**
- **Building blocks.**
- **Art supplies.**
- **Board games.**
- **Dolls and train sets.**



## EXPANDING YOUR CHILD'S WORLD

### Celebrate the birthday of Dr. King with your child

Make a "dream board" with your child. Draw a cloud on a large piece of paper. Read parts of Dr. King's "I have a dream" speech. Ask your child how he would make the world a happier place. Draw pictures or print key words in the cloud.



Source: "Preschool Martin Luther King Theme," Everything Preschool, [www.everythingpreschool.com/themes/drking](http://www.everythingpreschool.com/themes/drking).

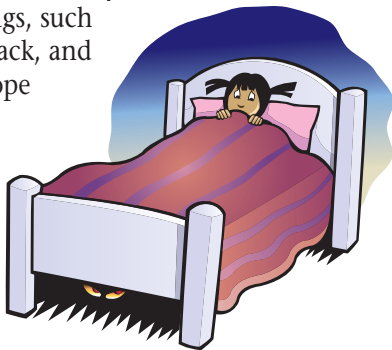
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## DEVELOPING THINKING SKILLS

### Facing fears is a family project

It's normal for preschoolers to be afraid. After all, they're capable of imagining some pretty scary things, such as monsters under the bed, animals that attack, and falls from high places. To help your child cope with fears and enjoy life:

- **Take fears seriously.** If your child is afraid, she needs you to acknowledge her feelings. Don't dismiss them—even if you know they're unrealistic.
- **Be helpful, not critical.** Talk with your child about her fears. Avoid belittling phrases like "Don't be silly!"
- **Face fears gradually.** If your child is afraid of dogs, you might read about dogs, watch a show about dogs, and meet a nice puppy when your child is ready.
- **Be honest with your child.** Lies like "Shots don't hurt at all" can worsen fears. Instead, find ways to be truthful and comforting.
- **Find solutions together.** You can role play. "Imagine a bee is flying by us. What should we do?" Offer solutions, too. "Would you like to sleep with your teddy bear?"
- **Provide good role models.** Face fears calmly yourself. Allow your child to observe others, such as an older brother or sister getting a shot.



Source: Karen M. Carlson, "Questions About Kids?" University of Minnesota Center for Early Education and Development, [www.education.umn.edu/CEED/publications/questionsaboutkids/afraid.htm](http://www.education.umn.edu/CEED/publications/questionsaboutkids/afraid.htm).

## PARENT QUIZ

### Are you promoting perseverance?

Children who persevere have an advantage. They stick with tasks—even difficult ones, and this contributes to school success. Answer the following questions *yes* or *no* to see if you're encouraging this trait:

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you let** your child see you finishing tough jobs?
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you say** things like, "This is tough, but I can do it"?
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you offer** encouragement, such as, "Hang in there," and, "You've almost got it"?
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you allow** short breaks during long tasks?
- \_\_\_ **5. Do you show** pride when your child completes something challenging?

**How are you doing?** *Each yes answer means you're helping your child develop perseverance. For each no answer, try using that idea from the quiz to change your answer to yes.*

"A child can ask questions that a wise man cannot answer."  
—Author Unknown

## BUILDING RESPONSIBILITY

### Teach respect for limits

Your child can learn responsible behaviors when you set limits that are:

- **Important.** Preschoolers aren't able to remember dozens of rules.
- **Fair.** Your child should be able to live by the limit most of the time.
- **Consistent.** If rules keep changing, he will learn to disregard them.

## WHEN YOU NEED HELP

### Four-year-olds may do their best to test your patience

If your four-year-old seems a bit defiant, don't be surprised. Around this time, kids may take more risks, say "no" more often and shock adults with "potty talk." React calmly, reinforce important rules and take heart. Age five will probably be easier!

Source: Development Tracker, "4 year old: How to Help," Parent Soup, [www.parentsoup.com/tracker/preschool/articles/0,12106,263924\\_264384,00.html](http://www.parentsoup.com/tracker/preschool/articles/0,12106,263924_264384,00.html).

## WELLNESS

### Make healthy eating fun

Picky eating. Tiny appetites. Wanting the same dish over and over. These are the frustrating eating habits of a preschooler! To include a variety of foods (like vegetables!):

- **Offer tiny portions,** especially of new foods. Introduce new foods one at a time.
- **Mix new foods into favorites.** (Add pureed vegetables to spaghetti sauce.)
- **Serve food in a fun way.** Arrange vegetables into funny patterns. Cut foods into different shapes.



Source: Rachel Lister, "Feeding Picky Toddlers: Encouraging Healthy Eating Habits," suite101, [http://infant-toddler-health.suite101.com/article.cfm/feeding\\_picky\\_toddlers](http://infant-toddler-health.suite101.com/article.cfm/feeding_picky_toddlers).

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