

Helping Children Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

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Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board

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TALKING & LISTENING

Take special care when speaking to your child

Young children take parents' words to heart. They often believe exactly what parents say—even if parents are joking or exaggerating. It's easy for kids to get confused. That's why it is important to choose your words carefully. Make sure you:

- **Don't lecture.** "If I've told you once, I've told you a thousand times, you're letting every bug from outside into this house!" Those instructions are too complicated. An alternative might be, "Jacob, please close the door."
- **Don't label your child.** Being called "bad" or "lazy" will stick with your child for a long time, and it will be difficult to convince him that he is not these things. Talk about his behavior instead. For example, "It was nice of you to draw a picture for Grandma. It made her so happy!"
- **Don't dismiss your child's feelings.** It may not be a big deal to you that Billy took three of the best toy dinosaurs today at preschool, including the one your child wanted. But it's important to your child. Rather than saying, "Oh, don't worry about it," it's better to reply, "I bet that upset you. Tell me more about what happened."

Source: Ellen Hayes, "Listening and talking," BBC, www.bbc.co.uk/parenting/your_kids/toddlers_listentalk1.shtml.



WELLNESS

Physical fitness linked to academic fitness

Exercise makes the heart beat faster and increases oxygen to the brain. Research links this to improved thinking and memory. According to leading fitness groups, active children get better grades. Now is a great time to encourage your child's interest in exercise. To do this:

- **Make regular plans** that involve physical activity. Throw a ball around. Go biking or take a walk.
- **Give your child chores** that get her moving. She could help carry in groceries, for example, pick up toys or sweep.
- **Show your child** that *you* like exercise. Let her see you doing aerobics or playing a sport.
- **Monitor your child's** passive activities, including television viewing and computer use. Balance them with active play.

Source: S. Blackthorn, *The Parent's Success Guide to Parenting*, ISBN: 0-7645-5927-3 (Wiley Publishing, Inc., 1-800-762-2974, www.wiley.com).

BUILDING RESPONSIBILITY

Encourage independence

According to research, independent preschoolers make friends more easily, do better in school and end up having higher scores on reading tests. To encourage your child to think and act on her own:

- **Assign regular chores.**
- **Give your child choices.**
- **Don't use bribery.**

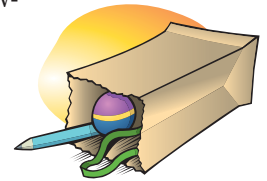
Source: "Preschoolers Who Take Responsibility Do Better Later On," EurekaAlert, www.eurekaalert.org/pub_releases/2005-08/bpl-pwt080205.php.

USING OUR SENSES

Encourage your child to learn through touch, smell

Your child depends on his senses to explore the world. Here are two ways to help him learn:

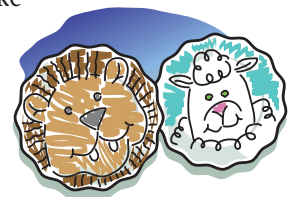
1. **Take your child to a nursery.** Let him smell different flowers. Take home a favorite to plant together.
2. **Put several items in a bag**—a ball, a crayon, a book, a rubber band, etc. Have him reach in, touch one object and describe it.



EXPANDING YOUR CHILD'S WORLD

Teach your child about the weather with lions & lambs

Explain the saying, "March comes in like a lion and goes out like a lamb." Get two paper plates. Draw a lion on one, a lamb on the other. Have your child check the weather each day in March. If it



is cold, write that date on the lion plate. If it is mild, write that date on the lamb plate.

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QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

How can parents tell if their children are gifted?

Q: I know all parents see the best in their children, but sometimes I am stunned by my preschooler's intelligence. How will I know if she's unusually advanced?

A: Every child has special talents and gifts. But some kids have abilities that put them far ahead of others their age academically. If you believe this describes your child, talk with a professional, such as her teacher or doctor. You can also look for certain traits.

A preschooler with advanced academic abilities may:

- **Do things expected of a much older child.** For example, she might read chapter books at age three or four.
- **Ask questions with intense curiosity.** "What would happen if animals stopped eating other animals, and they all just ate plants?"
- **Show high levels of focus.** For instance, a typical child might play with blocks for a short time. A child with advanced ability might be passionate about building and spend hours creating a whole city.
- **Have an amazing memory.** Instead of just visiting the zoo, the child might remember many facts about each animal she saw.

Source: Jill Levey, "How to tell if your preschooler is gifted," Babycenter, www.parentcenter.babycenter.com/refcap/preschooler/pspecial/65003.html.



PARENT QUIZ

Are you teaching good manners?

Being polite and getting along with others are important social skills your child will need to succeed in school. Answer the following questions *yes* or *no* to see if you're teaching your preschooler good manners:

- ___ **1. Do you use *please*, *thank you* and *excuse me* when speaking to your child?**
- ___ **2. Have you taught your child how to use the telephone?**
- ___ **3. Do you help your child send thank-you notes when he receives a gift? (He can draw a picture.)**
- ___ **4. Do you teach your child proper table manners (such as not to talk with food in his mouth)?**

- ___ **5. Do you praise your child's efforts at using good manners?**
How did you do? *Each yes answer means you are helping your child learn good manners. For each no answer, consider trying that idea from the quiz.*

"In time of test, family is best."
— Burmese proverb

BUILDING ATTENTION SPAN

Spend time growing your child's concentration skills

When your child goes to school, he'll need to pay attention to learn. Work toward having your child spend 15 minutes concentrating on one activity. Here's how:

- 1. Sit** with your child and do something he enjoys.
- 2. Don't allow** interruptions.
- 3. Decrease** your interaction with him gradually.
- 4. Respond** briefly, bringing his attention back to the activity.
- 5. Increase** his focus one minute at a time.

READING READINESS

Turn reading into an interactive experience

Help build decoding and comprehension skills. Encourage your child to participate when you read to her. Here's how:

- **Fill in the rhyme.** Read two lines, but leave off the last word. (*Decoding*).
- **Retell.** Pick a character. Ask your child what happened to him. (*Comprehension*).

WHEN YOU NEED HELP

Make bad days better

You argued with another adult. You had a bad day at work. The car broke down. And you're afraid you'll take it out on your child. Instead of snapping, give yourself permission to pamper yourself and your child a bit. Order dinner or eat leftovers. Curl up together with a good book or movie. End the day with a bedtime story and a hug. It's a great way to turn the negative into a positive.

Source: Arlene Eisenberg, Heidi E. Murkoff and Sandee E. Hathaway, *What to Expect: the Toddler Years*, ASIN: B000HL03QS (Workman Publishing Company, Inc., 212-254-5900, www.workman.com).



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