

Helping Children Learn

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

Krys Croxall, Superintendent of Program
Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board

April 2008

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

How can parents help build responsibility?

Q: My daughter's preschool teachers say they're teaching about how to make good choices. They want us to do this at home, too, but I'm not sure how. What types of choices are appropriate for a four-year-old?



A: Your child's teachers are right about the importance of making decisions. This skill helps kids gain self-control, responsibility and independence. It may also lessen parent-child struggles.

Learn to ask yourself, "Is this something my child can decide?" The answer may be no. (Your child cannot choose, for example, whether to cross a busy street by herself.) But with your guidance, she might pick things such as:

- **Which outfit to wear.** Give her a choice of two.
- **What to have for breakfast,** from a list you approve.
- **Which TV show to watch.** Again, from your approved list.
- **What to play when a friend comes over.** First the friend gets a choice, then your child does, and so on.

Enjoy watching your child blossom as she weighs her options! Remember that when she makes mistakes, she learns from that, too.

BUILDING SELF-ESTEEM

Be careful when describing children

Parents need to show that they believe in their children. This helps kids believe in themselves—and their ability to succeed in school. It helps when adults choose words that boost, not hurt, self-esteem. For example:

- **Substitute** positive for negative labels. Change *too shy* to *very observant*. Try *energetic* instead of *hyperactive*.
- **Correct** others if they label your child. If someone says, "He's wild!" you might respond, "He has a lot of enthusiasm."
- **Don't compare** your child to others. Avoid statements like, "Your brother is neat and you're so messy!" or, "You take after Aunt Mary. She was always shy."
- **Choose** flattering or neutral nicknames, not names that criticize, like "Sniffles" or "Slowpoke."

Source: Michele Borba, *Parents Do Make a Difference*, ISBN: 0-7879-4605-2 (Jossey-Bass, 1-888-378-2537, www.josseybass.com).

BUILDING SOCIAL SKILLS

Encourage your child to make and keep friends

Children who have a hard time getting along with others are more likely to struggle academically, too. To help your child form positive relationships:

- **Practice** conversation-starters. "I like puppies. What pets do you like?"
- **Enroll** him in a playgroup. Arrange "play dates" at your house.
- **Teach** about sharing toys, taking turns, listening and being kind.

BUILDING MATH SKILLS

Develop math concepts

Help your child explore numbers. Paint 10 dried beans blue on one side.

Have your child:

1. **Shake** them up and pour them out.
2. **Count** the beans that landed with the blue side up.
3. **Count** the beans with the other side showing.
4. **See** that they add up to 10.



Source: Jennifer Taylor-Cox, *Family Math Night: Math Standards in Action*, ISBN: 1-930556-99-3 (Eye on Education, 914-833-0551, www.eyoneducation.com).

MAKING TIME COUNT

Switch off the TV for a better start in school

Studies show that TV viewing for young children has a negative effect on later academic achievement. To decrease TV time:

- **Keep** a diary. Note what your child views and how much time she spends watching.
- **Read** *The Berenstain Bears and Too Much TV* to your child.
- **Have** your child put a sticker on a calendar each day that is TV-free.



Source: "Television and the Family," American Academy of Pediatrics, www.aap.org/family/tv1.htm.

Are you predictable?

Does your child know exactly what the consequences will be if she misbehaves? Good! It might seem a little boring to enforce the same rules over and over, but for discipline to be effective, the more predictable you are, the better.

MOTIVATING YOUR CHILD

It's ideal when children motivate themselves

Rewards motivate children from the outside. But children learn more—and retain more of what they learn—when they're motivated from the inside. To promote self-motivation:

- **Make sure** your child does tasks because he's interested in them, not just to get praise or prizes.
- **Respond** consistently to your child's needs while letting him be as independent as possible.
- **Encourage** trial and error. Show that it's okay to make mistakes.
- **Let** your child evaluate his work. Before saying "Good job," see what *he* thinks of it.

Source: "Motivating Learning in Young Children," National Mental Health and Education Center, www.naspcenter.org/parents/earlychildmotiv_ho.html.

YOUR CHILD AND YOU

See nature in a new way

Children often notice things that adults don't see. Now that it's spring, have your child give you a tour of your neighborhood. What things does she find interesting? A tiny bug? A pretty leaf? Help her make a list and tuck it in a scrapbook.



Source: Steve and Ruth Bennett, *365 TV-Free Activities You Can Do With Your Child*, ISBN: 1-5806-2755-2 (Adams Media Corporation, 1-800-872-5627, www.adamsmedia.com).

Helping Children Learn®

Published in English and Spanish, September through May.
 Publisher: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.
 Managing Editor: Patricia Hodgdon.
 Editor: Jennifer McGovern. Staff Editor: Rebecca Miyares.
 Writers: Susan O'Brien & Erika Beasley. Editorial Assistant:
 Pat Carter. Head of Translations: Michelle Beal-García.
 Layout & Illustrations: Maher & Mignella, Cherry Hill, NJ.
 Copyright © 2008, The Parent Institute®, a division of NIS, Inc.
 P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474
 1-800-756-5525 • www.parent-institute.com • ISSN 1527-1005

DEVELOPING THINKING SKILLS

Teach your child to think critically

Research on thinking skills in young children points to several successful strategies. Questions, conversations, stories and play can help kids become better thinkers, which is a key to success in school. To help your child with this:



- **Schedule "thinking times"** with your child. This lets him know you want him to think in new and special ways.
- **Use story time to develop thinking skills.** Ask your child to predict what might happen. Why did a character do what she did? What else could she have done?
- **Play games that require your child** to sort objects in different ways, such as by size, color, shape and use.
- **Have your child think about** and say the steps of a process. Start with simple tasks (with just a couple of steps), such as setting the table.
- **Encourage your child to use** ordinary household items as toys to spark his creativity.
- **Ask your child about his play.** How did he build a tower? How did he solve a puzzle? How does he imagine doing it next time?

Source: G. Taggart and others, "Thinking Skills in the Early Years: A Literature Review," National Foundation for Educational Research, www.nfer.ac.uk/research-areas/pims-data/summaries/thinking-skills-in-the-early-years-a-literature-review.cfm.

PARENT QUIZ

Are you encouraging a love of books?

If you raise your child to enjoy reading, she'll take that attitude to school. And good readers tend to learn better. Answer the following questions *yes* or *no* to see if you're bringing up a book lover:

- ___ 1. **Do you show** your child how to handle books with care?
- ___ 2. **Do you take** your child to the library and reading programs?
- ___ 3. **Do you select** books for your child that match her current interests?
- ___ 4. **Do you agree** to reread her favorite books when she asks?
- ___ 5. **Do you make sure** your child sees you reading?

How did you do? Each *yes* answer means you are helping your child develop a love of reading. For each *no* answer, consider trying that idea from the quiz.

"The real menace in dealing with a five-year-old is that in no time at all you begin to sound like a five-year-old."

— Joan Kerr