

Helping Children Learn

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

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May 2008

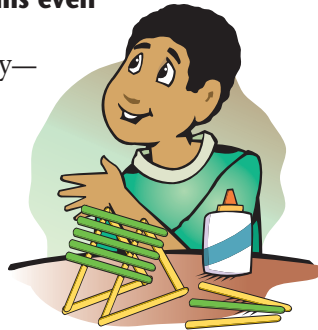
QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Build language skills at home

Q: My child communicates well. But since he'll start kindergarten this fall, I'd like to help him build his language skills even more. Can you give me some suggestions?

A: Language skills are directly connected to literacy—or learning to read and write. It's wonderful that your son has a strong start! You can encourage his progress if you:

- **Talk every day.** Many families use meals and bedtime as special opportunities to chat.
- **Discuss subjects your child likes.** Be sure to give helpful, age-appropriate responses to questions.
- **Tell stories about your day** and ask your child about his. Try open-ended questions that can't be answered with a *yes* or *no* ("How did you make that art project today?").
- **Be patient while your child talks.** Avoid interrupting him. Show you are interested in what he has to say.
- **Discuss upcoming events.** For example, what will you do tomorrow? This weekend? How many hours or days until then?
- **Introduce new words.** Say them in context so they make sense. "We haven't eaten in hours! I'm *famished!*"



MAKING TIME COUNT

Make the most of your travel time

Often families spend more time getting somewhere than they do at the actual event. When they finally arrive, kids may be tired, bored and whiny. To make travel more fun and enriching:

- **Play word games.** Try "I Spy." Tell your child you're looking at something that is a certain color. Challenge her to guess what it is. Then let her "spy" something for you to guess. This is especially fun on walks.
- **Count creatively.** Count the people on a train, plane or bus. See how many are wearing something particular—such as jeans. Another idea: Count how many stops you make or rest stops you pass.
- **Use supplies.** Helpful items on trips include books, crayons, paper and small toys. Don't have them with you? Enjoy traditional activities, such as singing songs or telling stories.

Source: Donna Erickson, *More PrimeTime Activities With Kids*, ISBN: 0-8066-2606-2 (Augsburg Fortress, 1-800-328-4648, www.augsburgfortress.org).

TALKING & LISTENING

Watch for a need to talk

Learn to read cues to help your child talk things out—instead of acting out. Your child may need to communicate if she:

- **Gets frustrated.**
- **Stomps around.**
- **Throws toys.**
- **Screams.**

Take your child to a quiet place to calm down. Then say, "I think you need to tell me something."

Source: Jolene L. Roehlkepartain and Nancy Leffert, *What Young Children Need to Succeed*, ISBN: 1-57542-070-8 (Free Spirit Publishing, 1-800-735-7323, www.freespirit.com).

DEVELOPING THINKING SKILLS

Boost brain power at home

Research shows that a child's brain develops best through simple activities at home. You and your child can:

- **Play with blocks,** puzzles, dolls, puppets, toy animals, etc.
- **Read** (and reread) favorite books.
- **Get physical.** Running and swimming move opposite sides of the body.



Source: Jane Meredith Adams, "Your child's amazing brain," *Parenting*, May 2005 (Time Inc., 1-800-234-0847, www.parenting.com).

READING READINESS

Make reading easy as ABC

Children who can recognize the letters of the alphabet when they enter kindergarten are generally better readers at the end of first grade. Here's one way you can help: Play with alphabet blocks. Show your child a "B" block. Look for things that start with "B"—his *bow*l, a *book*.



Source: Bonnie D. Schwartz, *Raising a Reader*, ISBN: 1-57886-051-2 (Scarecrow Education, 1-800-462-6420, www.scarecroweducation.com).

May 2008

BUILDING RESPONSIBILITY

Building independence in your child takes many steps

Establishing a greater degree of independence is important for your child in preschool. She is moving from the baby and toddler years, when you had to do nearly everything for her, to the school years, when she will be called upon to do many things for herself. Here are some tips for gently guiding your child toward independence:

- **Encourage her each time** she does something for herself. Say things like, "You must be proud that you put on that outfit!" "You cleaned up all the blocks. That's so responsible!"
- **Break difficult tasks into parts** instead of rushing in to do them for your child. For example, "That's a big puzzle. Try putting together the edge pieces first. Then we can fill in the rest together."
- **Show your child that her needs, wants and opinions are important to you.** Ask questions like, "Which book is your favorite?" "Would you like to choose what we have for dinner on Sunday?" "When Miss Kathy says you can go to centers at preschool, which center do you pick? Why do you like that one?"



Source: Meri Wallace, *Keys to Parenting Your Four-Year-Old*, ISBN: 0-8120-9745-9 (Barron's Educational Series, Inc., 1-800-645-3476, www.barronseduc.com).

PARENT QUIZ

Encourage a good work ethic

It's important to teach your child to value work. Answer the following questions *yes* or *no* to see if you're raising your child to have a strong work ethic:

- ___ 1. **Do you encourage** your child to pick up after himself?
- ___ 2. **Do you let** your child help with simple chores—like folding washcloths?
- ___ 3. **Do you give** your child "work toys"—like play brooms and vacuums?
- ___ 4. **Have you created** a chore chart? (Your child can check off each task he completes.)

- ___ 5. **Do you praise** your child's efforts, even when the results are less than perfect?

How did you do? Each *yes answer means you are developing your child's healthy attitude toward work. For each no answer, try that idea from the quiz.*

"Those who love the young the best stay young longest."
—Edgar Friedenberg

DEVELOPING CONCEPTS

Give age-appropriate answers about death

To help your child cope with this difficult concept at home and at school:

- **Be simple and direct.** "Grandpa's heart stopped working."
- **Do not relate death** to "loss" or to "sleep."
- **Reassure him.** Most people live for a long time.
- **Help him say goodbye.** It's okay to cry.

Source: Kenneth Miller, "Dealing With Death," *Parents*, May 2005 (Meredith Corp., 1-800-727-3682, www.parents.com).

BUILDING CHARACTER

Encourage caring at home

It's important to show your child how to be caring. To guide your child toward showing concern and kindness for others:

- **Use kind words,** including *please* and *thank you*.
- **Have kind actions.** Teach her the importance of sharing.

Source: Barbara A. Lewis, *Being Your Best*, ISBN: 1-57542-063-5 (Free Spirit Publishing, 1-800-735-7323, www.freespirit.com).

WELLNESS

Strong, healthy bones support your child's body

Many children do not get enough calcium, the crucial mineral that builds bones. To help your child build strong bones:

- **Make sure** he gets at least three servings of a calcium-rich food daily, such as milk.
- **Investigate** other sources: soy milk, orange juice with added calcium, baked beans, broccoli.
- **Aim for** an hour of exercise: playing outside, moving to music, climbing stairs.



Source: Catherine Newman, "Building Better Bones," *FamilyFun* (Disney Publishing Worldwide, 1-800-289-4849, www.familyfun.go.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.

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P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474

1-800-756-5525 • www.parent-institute.com • ISSN 1527-1005