

Helping Children Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

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READING READINESS

Develop writing, reading skills

Writing is a bridge to reading. And you can help your preschooler become a reader by giving him plenty of opportunities to write at home. When your child creates scribbles and squiggles on a page, he'll have a great sense of accomplishment if he learns that his pictures and lines can tell a story.

To encourage writing:

- **Keep writing materials within easy reach.** All you need are some crayons, pencils and paper.
- **Encourage drawing.** Your child will develop the fine motor skills needed for writing. Ask your child to tell you about his picture. Write a sentence about what he said under the picture. Later you can read it together.
- **Expose your child to letters.** Look at picture books with letters or give your child refrigerator magnet letters to play with.
- **Involve your child in writing with you.** If you are making a grocery list, give your child crayons and paper and have him make his own "grocery list." Your child will learn that writing and reading have a purpose.
- **Write notes to your child.** When he finds them, ask him to bring them to you so you can read them together.

Source: PBS Parents, "Writing Milestones," Public Broadcasting System, www.pbs.org/parents/readinglanguage/preschooler/writing_milestone_preschooler.html.



BUILDING MATH SKILLS

Teach lasting lessons about shapes

Recognizing shapes will help your child in school. She'll use them in kindergarten all the way through high school geometry and beyond! Right now, though, she should learn that shapes are fun. You can:

- **Point out** circles, squares and triangles. The top of a can is a circle. Some floor tiles are squares. Sandwiches can be cut into triangles. Shapes are everywhere!
- **Help your child** practice drawing shapes and cutting them out. Once she learns the basic shapes, add more, such as rectangles and pentagons.
- **Play games** with shapes. For example, cut out a circle, square and triangle. Give your child clues, such as, "I am round. I have no sides." Can she guess the shape?

Source: Grace D. Coates and Jean Kerr Stenmark, *Family Math for Young Children*, ISBN: 0-9125-1127-3 (Lawrence Hall of Science, 1-800-897-5036, www.lawrencehallofscience.org/equals).

BUILDING SELF-ESTEEM

Make your child feel valued

It is often the things you do that make your child feel best about herself. For example:

- **Display your child's work.** She'll love seeing her art on the refrigerator.
- **Take pictures of your child.** Have someone take pictures of the two of you together. Display them in your home.
- **Find time each day** for your child to sit on your lap. Let her know that you are concentrating only on her.

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

EXPANDING YOUR CHILD'S WORLD

Investigate the outdoors

Head outside with your child and enjoy some windy-day activities:

- **Talk about the wind.** Can he hear it? What does it do to the leaves?
- **Fly a kite.** Don't have one? You can use anything that blows in the breeze, such as a length of thin fabric.



DEVELOPING CONCEPTS

Help your child understand the concept of time

Your child might not be able to tell time just yet, but he certainly understands "time for bed" or "dinner time." To reinforce the concept of time:

- **Use a timer.** When he hears a "ding," it's time to go.
- **Create a clock** showing a specific time. Hang it next to a real clock. When the hands on the real clock match the hands on the paper clock, it's time to go.



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QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Mommy, I can do it myself!

Q: I have a four-year-old who wants to do everything for herself—and for me! While I appreciate her independence and helpfulness, I would like some suggestions. What types of tasks are appropriate for her?

A: Your child's independence and helpfulness will be a great benefit to your family at home. These qualities also lead to a sense of responsibility which will help her be successful at school. Here are a few suggestions of age-appropriate tasks for your child. She can:

- **Get dressed** by herself.
- **Put away** her books and toys.
- **Clear** her plate after a meal.
- **Wipe** the table with a damp sponge.
- **Prepare** a simple lunch—a peanut butter or ham and cheese sandwich.
- **Pour** a glass of milk or juice.
- **Do** light dusting with a duster or soft cloth.
- **Sort** laundry.
- **Hang** up her towel.
- **Fill** pet bowls with water or food.
- **Care** for plants.
- **Count** the number of people eating, then set the table.

The list of tasks that your four-year-old can handle is almost endless. You might also check with her preschool teacher for suggestions. The most important thing to remember is to keep safety in mind. Don't let her use sharp objects, cleaning chemicals, appliances, ladders, etc.



PARENT QUIZ

Is your child prepared to handle change?

The earlier you can teach your child to adjust to change, the better he'll be able to adapt to changes in school and throughout life. Answer these questions *yes* or *no* to see if you're showing your child how to deal with change:

- ___ 1. **Do you follow** daily routines with your child?
- ___ 2. **Do you realize** that a small change for you may seem like a major change to your child?
- ___ 3. **Do you talk** to your child about upcoming changes?
- ___ 4. **Do you reassure** your child that the change will be good?
- ___ 5. **Do you give** your child time to transition to a new activity?

How did you do? Each *yes* answer means your child is learning to deal with change. For each *no* answer, try that idea from the quiz.

“Children are travelers in an unknown land and we are their guides.”
— Robert Fisher

BUILDING SOCIAL SKILLS

Teach how to apologize

Knowing how to apologize is an important social skill for your child to learn. Here are some tips:

- **Explain what went wrong.** Preschoolers often don't apologize because they have no idea why they should. So tell your child, “You hurt Matt's feelings when you said you wouldn't play with him. This is a time to say, ‘I'm sorry.’”
- **Encourage empathy.** Your child may need help to “put himself in someone else's shoes.” “Remember when Ben wouldn't play with you? You were so sad. That is how Matt feels now.”

Source: Vicky Mlyniec, “Learning to Say, ‘I'm Sorry,’” Parents.com, www.parents.com/parents/printable/Story.jsp?storyid=/templatedata/parents/story/data/6181.xml.

BUILDING ATTENTION SPAN

Boost attention skills

Helping your child develop her attention span now will make learning a lot easier for her—and improve her success in school. Here are some simple strategies:

- **Play games** that require close attention. “Simon Says” is a fun example.
- **Encourage activities** that require doing things in order. Try building a simple model or cooking together.

DISCIPLINE

Curb the ‘gimmies’ easily

It's common for kids to beg for treats at the store. But there's an easy way to stop this. Before the trip, explain what you will buy. Then—no matter how much your child begs—stick to the shopping list. Soon your child will realize that whining just doesn't work.



Source: Shari Steelsmith, *Go to Your Room! Consequences That Teach*, ISBN: 0-9650-4772-5 (Parenting Press, 1-800-992-6657, www.parentingpress.com).

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