

Helping Children Learn

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

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DISCIPLINE

Encourage self-discipline

Many preschoolers seem to have only two settings—fast and loud. But as your child prepares for kindergarten, she needs to learn that there will be times to turn down the volume and sit quietly. Learning this self-discipline skill now will lead to success in school.

A kindergarten day is usually bustling with activity. However, in the classroom, your child will be expected to sit and listen to directions or sit quietly for a story. In the hallways, your child will also be expected to walk quietly.

Here are some ways to prepare your child for short periods of quiet:

- **Develop a signal.** For example, pretend to flick an imaginary switch to “off” and then firmly set your lips together.
- **Use code words or phrases.** For example, instead of “Quiet! Now!” say, “Time for our inside voices.” “Let’s play the quiet game.”
- **Try the “sandwich method”** teachers of young children often use. First allow your child to engage in noise and movement; then ask for a brief time of quiet; then it’s back to noise and movement. If you let your child “get the wiggles out” first, and let her know she’ll have another chance to do so right after quiet time is over, you’ll have better success with quiet time.

Source: Carol Baicker-McKee, *FussBusters on the Go*, ISBN: 1-56145-263-7 (Peachtree Publishers, Ltd., 1-800-241-0113, www.peachtree-online.com).



LEARNING THROUGH ART

Art builds incredible skills in children

Art is a great learning activity. It helps kids recognize colors, build finger muscles and express themselves. Meanwhile, they’re having fun! Keep these tips in mind:

- **Let your child decide** what to make. Occasionally you may need to share an idea to get him started such as “Let’s draw spring flowers.”
- **Make a display.** Put art where everyone can see it. Show pictures to guests. Say things like, “Isn’t this beautiful?”
- **Be positive.** Talk about the colors and materials your child used. Never criticize his work.
- **Provide a variety of supplies.** Use markers one day and paint the next. Keep an eye out for interesting materials, such as fabric scraps and magazine pictures.
- **Consider sharing.** Before your child starts a project, ask if he’d like to make it for someone else. Grandparents love receiving special creations!

YOUR CHILD AND YOU

Give children what they want: more time with you

The best gift you can give your child is your time. Here are some suggestions for spending time with him:

- **Set aside time** to read together.
- **Plan an afternoon** at a nature center.
- **Look for a new game** you can learn and play together.

READING READINESS

Surround your child with books

To help develop your child’s reading skills, choose and read books filled with rich language. The librarian at your local library is a great resource. Experiment with different kinds of books, including fiction, nonfiction and poetry. And remember to emphasize reading time over TV time!



BUILDING RESPONSIBILITY

Practice responsibility

Whether your child is in preschool or kindergarten, it’s not too early to start building her sense of responsibility. Here are some ways to start:

- **Make a large wall calendar.** Help your child mark what she needs to do. “Show & Tell” on Wednesday. Library books due on Friday. This organization will come in handy when she has more complicated homework assignments later in life.
- **Have her choose** what she’ll wear to school the night before. This will save time in the morning—a great habit to get into before elementary school begins.



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QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

How can parents keep kids active?

Q: It seems that childhood obesity is always in the news. I try to emphasize healthy eating habits and limit junk food, but I know that physical activity is also very important. Can you offer some suggestions for keeping my preschooler physically active?



A: You're off to a great start by practicing good nutrition. Your preschooler no doubt loves to move. Enjoy your active child! With a little planning, you can take advantage of that energy. Here are some ideas:

- **Plan for an hour or more of physical activity a day.** Five or 10 minutes at a time, throughout the day, is also fine.
- **Head to your nearest park,** playground or local school for some outside activity.
- **Provide balls to kick and throw,** or something safe to climb on. Your preschooler will also be happy just to run and jump
- **Look for classes at your local recreation center.** Choose activities that center around moving and having fun, not winning a game or being the best.
- **Rake leaves and pile them up in the fall.** Build a snowman or fort in the winter. Garden or fly a kite in the spring. And walk, walk, walk all year round.

PARENT QUIZ

Are you teaching your child to give?

Learning to care about others and connect with them through giving will help your child in school and in life. Answer the following questions yes or no to see if you're developing this habit in your child:

- ___ **1. Do you point** out the positive feelings your child gets when she shares?
- ___ **2. Do you show** your child that you give?
- ___ **3. Do you encourage** your child to celebrate birthdays and holidays by giving to others?
- ___ **4. Do you promote** giving all throughout the year, not just during the holidays?

___ **5. Do you praise** your child when she gives or shares?
How did you do? Each yes answer means you're making charity a valuable part of your child's life. For each no answer, try that idea from the quiz.

"No act of kindness, no matter how small, is ever wasted."
—Aesop

TALKING AND LISTENING

Use empathy when talking

To build your child's emotional development, listen and respond to her feelings with empathy. Here's how:

- **Get down** on your child's level and look her in the eyes.
- **Listen quietly,** making soft sounds to reassure her: "Oh." "I see."
- **Repeat what she says,** using different words. If she says, "Susie is so mean! I don't want to play with her!" say, "It sounds like she hurt your feelings."

BUILDING CHARACTER

Teach your child: 'It's the right thing to do'

A toddler behaves to earn approval—or to avoid a negative consequence. An older child starts to learn good behavior because "It's the right thing to do." Here's how to set your child on this lifelong path:

- **Give unconditional love.** Kids who are secure in their parents' love tend to behave better than those who are not.
- **Correct your child** if he is disrespectful. "In our family, we use kind words." Be a good role model.

Source: Peg Rosen, "How to raise a really GOOD kid," *Parents* (Meredith Corporation, 1-800-727-3682, www.parents.com).

BUILDING MOTOR SKILLS

Support body awareness

Children with a strong awareness of body space are more efficient at moving. These activities can help:

- **Play** physical games, such as the "Hokey Pokey."
- **Make** an obstacle course that is safe and fun.
- **Pretend** to be other things, such as wind or clouds.



Source: Claudia Jones, *Parents Are Teachers Too*, ISBN: 0-9135-8935-7 (Williamson Publishing Co., 1-800-586-2572. www.williamsonbooks.com).

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