

Helping Children Learn

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

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EXPANDING YOUR CHILD'S WORLD

Go for simple pleasures

Preschoolers love to imagine and pretend. They don't need anything too fancy to be happy. That's why your child finds delight in going for a car ride or creating something from a paper towel roll and tape—while expensive toys sit untouched.

Your child may especially crave simple pleasures this month, after the excitement and stimulation of December. Preschoolers love to:

- **Make snowballs** and look at ice crystals—if you live in a cold climate. Or splash in puddles—if you're in a warmer climate.
- **Feed the birds.** Roll pinecones in peanut butter and seeds and watch the feathered friends gather. Or simply toss breadcrumbs.
- **Have scavenger hunts.** Near home, search for a rock, a twig or a leaf from a tree that always stays green. While traveling, see who can be the first to spot a blue car, a red sign and a white house.
- **Feel needed.** Routine errands will take on new meaning if your child has a job to do. Have her draw some of the things you'll buy at the market. Or she can make sure everyone is buckled up. The task doesn't matter—being part of the action does.



Source: Carol Baicker-McKee, *Fussbusters on the Go: Strategies and Games for Stress-Free Outings, Errands and Vacations with Your Preschooler*, ISBN: 1-56145-263-7 (Peachtree Publishers, Ltd., 1-800-241-0113, www.peachtree-online.com).

BUILDING ROUTINES

Avoid nagging by using a timer

After your child enters school, much of his life will be ruled by bells. Bells will tell him when to start working and when to go home. As he gets older, they'll tell him it's time to go to the next class.

Using bells is helpful at home, too, because it prevents nagging. Your child may respond better to the *ding!* of a timer than to hearing

instructions repeatedly. Plus, it's hard to argue with a bell. Set a timer to help your child:

- **Pick** up toys.
- **Turn** off the television.
- **Come** to the table for a meal.
- **Wait**, bag in hand, to go out the door for preschool.
- **Do** nearly anything that has to be done in a timely fashion.

Source: Ruth A. Peters, "How to get your children to do their chores," MSNBC.com, www.msnbc.msn.com/id/6470356.

WORKING WITH YOUR SCHOOL

Ease your kindergartner into the homework routine

Many kindergarten teachers wait until the second half of the school year before giving homework. So your child may just now begin to get homework. Here are some things to keep in mind:

- **It shouldn't** take long
- **It should** be fun.
- **It's mainly** for practice.

If you have any questions about your child's homework, talk to the teacher.

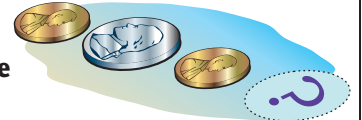
DEVELOPING CONCEPTS

Establish a learning habit

Help your child practice some new concepts this month.

For example:

- **Demonstrate** patterns. Get out some coins and place a penny, then a nickel, then a penny, on the table. See if he can tell you what should be next.
- **Build** visual and spatial skills with puzzles and patterns. Help your child put together some simple jigsaw puzzles.



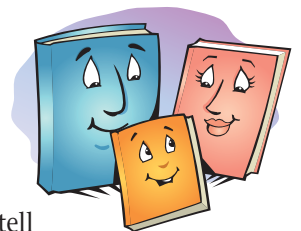
READING READINESS

Get your family in the regular reading groove

Reading is the foundation for most kinds of learning. Have frequent

family reading nights. Let your child look at a favorite book while you read something you enjoy. After 10 minutes, ask her to tell you about her book. This

builds her comprehension skills and also shows her that reading is important to you.



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QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

How can parents tell if their child is ready for kindergarten?

Q: My son will be five at the end of June. His preschool is holding a "Kindergarten Readiness Night" to help us decide whether to send our child to kindergarten in the fall. I plan to attend, but can you give me some information to consider beforehand?

A: Parents grapple with this issue every year. Some research shows that parents and teachers have different ideas about what a child needs most for kindergarten success. It's nice if your child can write his name and knows his letters. But teachers really hope their new kindergartners will:

- **Use words** (instead of acting out) to tell teachers and classmates what they need and how they feel.
- **Sit and listen.** Kindergarten teachers don't expect long attention spans. But your child should be able to sit and focus long enough to hear the teacher's directions or to listen to a story.
- **Work and play well** with other children.
- **Enjoy school!** Teachers want kindergartners to approach new experiences with interest and enthusiasm.

If you think your child will be able to do all that by next September, his chances of a great kindergarten year are excellent. If not, consult his preschool teacher about whether she thinks waiting would help. Good luck!



PARENT QUIZ

How rich is your child's vocabulary?

Your child will have an easier time learning to read and write if you help her add to her vocabulary before she even starts school. Answer the following questions *yes* or *no* to see if you're helping your child acquire a large vocabulary:

1. **Do you talk** with your child often, using new words?
2. **Do you define** new words and use them repeatedly?
3. **Do you ask** your child to recall the new words she learned that day?
4. **Do you label** items around your house to show your child the link between the spoken word and the written?

5. **Do you have** your child name and describe what she sees in pictures?

How did you do? Each *yes* answer means you're improving your child's vocabulary. For each *no* answer, consider trying that idea from the quiz.

"It is never too late to have a happy childhood."
—Tom Robbins

TALKING AND LISTENING

Don't miss out on listening

Your child wants to talk, but you're pressed for time. Instead of saying, "Not now, I'm busy," be positive. Try something like, "I want to listen, but I have to finish cooking first." Then make time as soon as possible.

Source: Steven W. Vannoy, *The 10 Greatest Gifts I Give My Children*, ISBN: 0-6715-0227-1 (Fireside, 1-800-223-2336, www.simonsays.com).

BUILDING SOCIAL SKILLS

Help shy children adapt

It's fine for children to be shy. But shy children still need to speak up sometimes. Compliment your child when she expresses herself. Also:

- **Practice social skills** that make everyday tasks easier—such as greeting friends and asking for help.
- **Avoid talking for your child.** Give her time to share her feelings and concerns.

BUILDING MATH SKILLS

Introduce your child to charts and graphs

Your child can use his observation skills (and his crayons) to create these simple charts and graphs at home:

- **A survey.** Pick a question, such as, "What is your favorite pet?" Have your child draw pets at the top of a piece of paper, then ask family and friends which animal they like best. Have him draw a smile underneath each animal. Which animal ends up with the most smiles?
- **A weather chart.** Help your child draw a calendar with a square for each day of the month. Have him draw a picture of each day's weather (like the sun, a cloud, a raindrop).



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