

Helping Children Learn

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

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March 2009

BUILDING SOCIAL SKILLS

Sharing is a lifelong lesson

In nearly every hour of the school day, your child will need to share toys and materials. Taking turns, waiting for the teacher's attention, waiting in line—these all involve sharing, too. But sharing doesn't always come easily. It takes practice. So keep practicing with your child. Here are some ideas:

- **Set an example for your child.** Take a piece of fruit and divide it with your child. Allow her to use your things, when appropriate. In the car, let her listen to the music she likes on the way there and listen to what you like on the way home.
- **"Ask before you touch."** Young children cannot deal with many rules, but "ask before you touch" should be one of them. If your child grabs something, require her to put the item back. Do not allow her to have it unless she asks nicely. That means including magic words such as *please* and *thank you*, and using a kind tone of voice.
- **Reinforce.** Remember, sharing doesn't come easily or naturally to most children. So notice when your child does it. "I really liked the way you let Grandpa get in the car first. Thank you for waiting your turn!"

Source: Tracy Rasmussen, "Preschool confidential: The 3 things teachers wish our children arrived at school already knowing," *Wondertime* (Disney Publications, 1-866-201-5048, <http://wondertime.go.com>).



BUILDING MOTOR SKILLS

Have fun building small muscles

Small muscles are a big deal. Children need the little muscles in their hands to do tasks, such as writing, drawing and cutting. Encourage your child to:

- **Dress.** Young preschoolers can pull on their own clothes. As they get older, they should work on zipping, buttoning and lacing shoes. (Actually tying shoes can wait until the early school years.)
- **String.** Let older children make necklaces with yarn and pasta or beads. Or sew using shoelaces and cardboard shapes with holes around the edges.
- **Trace and color.** Learning to trace a line builds hand control. So does coloring within lines. But don't do these activities too often. Children need plenty of opportunities to draw creatively without restrictive lines in the way.

Source: Becky Daniel, *The Playful Preschooler*, ISBN: 1-5682-2955-0 (Instructional Fair, 1-800-417-3261, www.instructionalfair.com).

SCREEN TIME

Plan now to put limits on video games for your child

Even if you've been avoiding them, your child will eventually learn that video games exist. Playing games is more active than watching TV. But it can also be more addictive. So it's important to plan now to set limits. Experts recommend no more than two hours of *total* screen time a day. That includes TV, computer and video games.

READING READINESS

Read and rhyme in March

March 2, Dr. Seuss's birthday, is a great time to ignite your child's love of reading. Read *The Cat in the Hat*. Then:

- **Write several groups** of four words.
- **In each group**, put one word that doesn't rhyme with the rest. (Don't expect your child to read the words.)
- **Have your child listen** to the sets of words and pick out the word that doesn't rhyme.



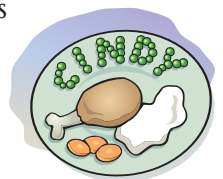
Source: "NEA's Read Across America: A Nation of Readers Under One Hat," Dr. Seuss Enterprises, www.seussville.com/seussentennial/events2.html.

BUILDING SELF-ESTEEM

Celebrate success at dinner

A good time to celebrate your child's achievements is at dinner with the whole family. Try these ideas:

- **Dedicate a food.** "This is Sarah's spaghetti, in honor of how well she picked up her toys."
- **Let your child use** a special plate when she learns a new skill.



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QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

How important is attendance during preschool?

Q: I sometimes let my son stay home from preschool when he's engrossed in his toys or a TV show. Recently, with the weather getting a bit warmer, he has asked to stay home more and more so he can play outside. He'll be going to kindergarten in the fall, and I'm wondering if I've put a bad habit into motion.

A: Unfortunately, letting your son skip preschool when he is not sick is not a good message to send. It's best for your child to start kindergarten with the mindset that he'll go to school each day. In kindergarten, the school will expect an enrolled child to attend every day, except for illness or a pressing family matter. Remember: Your child can't learn if he's not in school to get instruction. Start today to:

- **Tell your child you are excited** about what he learns at school.
- **Tell him he will have to go to school** unless he is sick—really sick, not pretend sick.
- **Aim for perfect attendance** for the rest of the school year.

Habits can be hard to break, but breaking this one will truly contribute to your child's future success in the years to come.



PARENT QUIZ

Can your child control anger?

Kids who manage their anger can focus on doing well in school. They also get along better with classmates and teachers. Answer the following questions *yes* or *no* to see if you're helping your child handle her anger:

1. **Do you model** how to remain calm when upset?
2. **Do you teach** your child to take three deep breaths to maintain calm when she's angry?
3. **Do you show** your child how to respond when someone makes her angry?
4. **Do you show** your child how to express anger by using "I" statements? ("Susie, I wish you wouldn't do that.")
5. **Do you praise** your child when she demonstrates self-control?

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

"It's not what is poured into a student that counts, but what is planted."

—Linda Conway

BUILDING RESPONSIBILITY

Foster a helpful spirit

Young children love to "help"—even if what they are doing doesn't seem so helpful to you! This is a time to lay the groundwork for responsibility. To encourage this:

- **Use the word "help"** in your request. "Can you help the family by ... ?" Your child will feel she is making a valuable contribution.
- **Pay close attention.** Does she pick up something you drop? Help her sister clean her room? These are helpful, responsible behaviors. Say, "Thank you! It was so helpful when you ..."

Source: Robert Brooks, Ph.D. and Sam Goldstein, Ph.D., *Nurturing Resilience in Our Children*, ISBN: 0-658-02110-9 (The McGraw-Hill Companies, 1-877-833-5524, www.books.mcgraw-hill.com).

BUILDING MATH SKILLS

Bag up a book of numbers

Teaching children to count is important. But it's just as important to help them understand that numbers represent "how many." To teach this, write down numbers and match them to things. For example, draw the number three and put three blocks under it. Do the same with other numbers.

Source: Pam Schiller and Lynne Peterson, *Count on Math: Activities for Small Hands and Lively Minds*, ISBN: 0-87659-188-8 (Gryphon House, Inc., 1-800-638-0928, www.gryphonhouse.com).

YOUR CHILD AND YOU

Create an 'outside play kit'

Be prepared to spend some time with your child in outside play. Have a few toys ready to go in one spot, such as a basket or plastic tub. For example:

- **Sidewalk chalk.**
- **Bubbles.**
- **Plastic spray bottles** filled with water.
- **Jump ropes.**



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