EARLY CHILDHOOD

Helping Children Learn®

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

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Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board

April 2009

BUILDING MATH SKILLS

Explore patterns together

If you think math is about numbers—learning how to add, multiply, divide and subtract them—you're right. But that's not the entire picture. Math is also about patterns, the sequence in which those numbers repeat themselves that make the numbers meaningful. If your child can line up a red crayon, then a blue one, then a red one, and then a blue one—guess what? He's performing an essential math skill.

To help your little mathematician boost his budding skills:

- **Look for patterns at home.** Start with your child's own clothes. Can he see how the colored stripes on his favorite shirt alternate? How about the wallpaper? Kitchen floor tiles?
- **Look at the calendar.** Show your child that every month begins again with day "one."
- **Head outside.** Look for patterns in nature, like the petals on a flower. Look down, too—a brick sidewalk will have an interesting pattern.
- **Read with your child** and look for rhymes. Rhymes are word patterns.
- **Teach your child a simple sequence** like "Clap, Clap (clap twice), Jump, Jump (jump twice)." Add other motions as this gets easy, but always repeat them in the same order.

Source: Grace Dávila Coates and Jean Kerr Stenmark, *Family Math for Young Children*, ISBN: 0-912511-27-3 (The Regents of the University of California, 1-800-897-5036, www.lawrencehallofscience.org/equals).

BUILDING LANGUAGE SKILLS

Make an alphabet picture book

Making a homemade, personalized "ABC" book is a fun way to build your child's interest in reading. Help her:

- **Find objects** that represent each letter of the alphabet. Then take pictures—or make drawings—of them (*acorn* for *A*, *ball* for *B*, etc.).
- **Cut out the letters** of the alphabet from construction paper. Attach each letter, in order, to a page in the album. Then add the photos or drawings.
- **Print the name** of each object under its picture. If your child can do this, wonderful. But it's okay to do it for her, too.
- **Add a title** to the book that includes your child's name, such as "Jamie's ABC Book." Glue a picture of your child on the cover.

USING OUR SENSES

Use senses to make guesses

Gather a variety of small objects to play a fun game using your child's senses. For example, get a tennis ball, a spoon, a block and a toy car. Let your child close her eyes and hold each one. Can she guess what it is?

Now find a box with a lid. It should be big enough to hold each object. Put an object into the box and shake it around. Can your child guess what she hears? What if two objects are in the box?

Source: Steve and Ruth Bennett, *365 TV-Free Activities You Can Do With Your Child*, ISBN: 1-5806-2755-9 (Adams Media Corp., 1-800-258-0929, www.adamsmedia.com).

DEVELOPING CONCEPTS

April showers grow learning

What better time to learn about water than when it's raining? Put on raincoats and boots, and head outside—to a park or just around your neighborhood. What happens to water on a slide? (It runs downhill.) What happens when water hits the earth? (It becomes mud.) What happens on the sidewalk? In the sandbox? On the leaves? Explore these concepts together.

Source: Jennifer R. Bradford-Vernon, *How to Be Your Child's First Teacher*, ISBN: 1-56822-998-4 (Instructional Fair, 530-221-0902, www.school-tools.com).

BUILDING RESPONSIBILITY

Start making choices daily

Giving your child choices helps develop responsibility. Start with two choices. Either choice should satisfy you. On a cold day, a good choice would be between the red sweater or the blue sweater—not between the red sweater and his favorite T-shirt.

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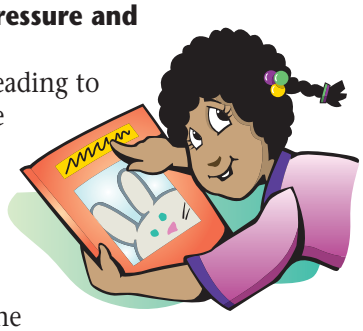
QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

How can parents encourage an interest in reading?

Q: I read to my daughter whenever I can, and she really seems to enjoy listening to the stories. I am not interested in pushing her to read, but I would like to know a low-pressure and fun way to cultivate this interest.



A: You are already doing the best thing—reading to your child whenever possible. You can take things a step further by introducing "print awareness." Print awareness is knowing that the letters on the page make up words, and the words are what you read to find out what the story is.

To develop print awareness, start with the cover of a book:

- **Say, "This is the front cover.** It's what we open to start to read the book." Have her practice opening the cover of the book.
- **What's on the cover?** (Title, author's name, illustrator's name and so on.) Show your child the words. "This book is called *The Runaway Bunny*. Here are the words that tell us the name of the book."
- **Help your child predict** from the cover. Ask, "What do you think the book will be about?"
- **Have your child keep practicing** to find words on the cover, open the front cover, identify the words, and make predictions from the pictures.

PARENT QUIZ

Is your child learning about the arts?

Art is a great way for a child to develop confidence and learn to express himself. Answer the following questions *yes* or *no* to see if you're helping your child develop an artistic side:

___1. **Do you and your child** have fun moving to music?
___2. **Do you take** your child to see plays designed for children?
___3. **Do you provide** your child with paper, markers, crayons and paint?
___4. **Do you display** your child's artwork on the refrigerator?
___5. **Do you sing** to your child and encourage him to sing?

How did you do? *Each* yes *answer means you're doing a great job of exposing your child to the arts. For each* no *answer, consider trying that idea from the quiz.*

"All the world is a laboratory to the inquiring mind."
—Martin H. Fischer

DEVELOPING THINKING SKILLS

Foster critical thinking

Moving to a higher level of thinking is an important part of your child's development. Here are some ways you can help:

- **Start with simple concepts** such as *is* and *is not*. "This *is* a ball. This *is not* a truck." Move on to more difficult concepts such as *some* and *all*. "We can have *some* of the cookies, but not *all* of the cookies."
- **Teach concepts** like *same* and *different, before* and *after,* and *now* and *later.*
- **Ask questions.** "We want to be safe. Should we buckle up *before* or *after* the car starts moving?"
- **Be patient.** Your child will not learn these thinking skills overnight.

BUILDING CHARACTER

Promote caring words

Teach your child to treat others with kindness. Even a three- or four-year-old understands that "I don't like you" or "I don't want to play with you" are hurtful words. Instead, teach him to say simple things like, "Let's play," "You're my friend" and "You're nice."

BUILDING MOTOR SKILLS

Encourage physical activity

Visit the zoo and look at the animals. Then see if your child can stretch her neck like a giraffe. Can she hop like a kangaroo? How would she move if she were a polar bear? How long can she stand on one foot like a flamingo? Give your child something active to do and you'll be helping her develop her motor skills.

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