

Helping Children Learn

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

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DISCIPLINE

Correct, teach with calm authority

"To discipline" means "to teach." And you are your child's first and best teacher. When you teach your young child, remember that only a small portion of your communication depends on your actual words. You convey much more with your tone of voice and nonverbal cues.

Angry shouting, of course, doesn't model the self-control you want to teach. It may even make your child more rebellious. But you don't want to smile and beg your child to behave either.

To find a firm, confident and calm middle ground:

- 1. Go to your child** when she's misbehaving. Don't shout across the room. Get down on her level.
- 2. Keep your face relaxed** as you speak.
- 3. Speak in a quiet, authoritative tone.** Don't threaten, bargain or put her down. You are displeased and stern—not angry.
- 4. Identify the inappropriate behavior.** "Throwing toys is not permitted."
- 5. Hold your child** by the arms so she cannot turn away from you. You need to have eye contact to get her attention.
- 6. Model respectful words.** Your child needs to hear *please*, *thank you* and *excuse me* in a gentle voice.

Source: Julia Manning-Morton, "Good Practice in Early Communication," The National Literacy Trust, www.literacytrust.org.uk/talktoyourbaby/goodpractice.html.



TALKING AND LISTENING

Build listening skills with fun activities

It is impossible to overestimate how much good listening skills help kids at school. Teachers use words to communicate important lessons all day long. To help your child listen as well as possible:

- **Read to her every day.** Ask questions about the story. If it's an old favorite, stop just before finishing a familiar line and see if your child can say it for you.
- **Give your child instructions.** Start with one-step directions, such as, "Please get your shoes." Make instructions more complex (two or three steps) when your child is ready.
- **Play listening games.** "Simon Says" is a classic. Players should only follow directions that start with "Simon Says." ("Simon Says hop three times!")

Source: Claudia Jones, *Parents are Teachers, Too*, ISBN: 0-913589-35-7 (Williamson Books, an imprint of Ideals Publications, 1-800-228-7709, www.idealspublications.com).

BUILDING RESPONSIBILITY

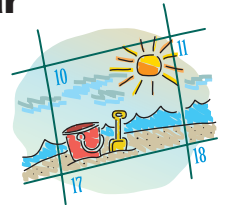
Help your child expand capabilities this summer

Encourage your child to master some tasks this summer. Have him learn to use the bathroom, wash his hands and dress himself independently. Children take different amounts of time to master skills. Encourage your child to do what he can, and teach him to say, "Would you help me, please?"

BUILDING MATH SKILLS

Practice basic math with a summer calendar

Summer is a great time to learn about the passage of time and to review counting skills. Make a calendar for June, July and August. Then with your child:



- **Mark important dates** and events—birthdays, Father's Day, vacation trips.
- **Write in some activities** your child wants to do next week, next month.
- **Review the calendar daily** to count how many days are left until the activity you've marked.

DEVELOPING THINKING SKILLS

Observe with your child

Children are natural scientists, full of curiosity. On a sunny day:

- **Ask** where shadows come from.
- **Step** on your child's shadow. "I'm standing on your leg!"
- **Play** tag with each other's shadows.
- **Trace** shadows on the sidewalk with chalk. Check them again later.



Source: Marlene Barron, *Ready, Set, Explore: 60 Playful Science Activities for You and Your Child To Share*, ISBN: 0-471-10273-3 (John Wiley & Sons, 1-877-762-2974, www.wiley.com).

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

How can parents promote safety?

Q: My five-year-old is so active and adventurous that I am always worried he is going to get hurt! How can I teach safety without squelching his spirit this summer?

A: You have a valid concern. According to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, injuries happen more in summer than any other time of the year. And you also make a good point about not over-restricting your child. Children learn a lot by exploring and testing new skills.

So, compromise by using common sense. Let your child play and explore, but practice prevention. Always:

- **Be vigilant around water.** Never turn your back on your child—even if he can swim and even if the water is shallow.
- **Remember the sun.** Apply sunscreen to your child before he goes outdoors. Reapply often. Try to avoid the sun between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m.
- **Make sure playground equipment is sound.** It should be surrounded by wood chips or mulch, not concrete or asphalt.
- **Insist that your child wear a helmet** and other protective gear when appropriate.
- **Use caution around tools!** It is best to always have an eye on your child when a grill or lawnmower are in use.

Have a safe summer filled with fun and learning!



PARENT QUIZ

What did your child learn this year?

Many children and parents are nervous about first grade, which is always more academically rigorous than kindergarten. Review the kindergarten year with your child. Answer the following questions *yes* or *no* to see if your child got the most out of kindergarten:

- ___ 1. Does your child know her letters and the sounds they make?
- ___ 2. Does your child know how to print letters?
- ___ 3. Can your child count groups of items? Does she know the concepts of *less* and *more*?
- ___ 4. Does your child know to listen to the teacher and follow class routines?
- ___ 5. Does your child practice social skills, such as making friends?

How did you do? Each yes answer means your child has mastered the basic skills taught in kindergarten. For each no answer, consider working on that idea in the quiz.

“For children play is serious learning. Play is really the work of childhood.”

—Fred Rogers

BUILDING MOTOR SKILLS

Use motor skills in summer

Your child will need to keep building motor skills this summer for such school basics as walking through the halls and holding a pencil. Some ways to practice:

- **Visit the playground.** Find one with an obstacle course.
- **Turn on some music** and move to it with your child.
- **Let your child** be the leader as you walk, run, crawl, roll, jump and hop.

Source: Carol Stock Kranowitz, *The Out-of-Sync Child*, ISBN: 0-399-52386-3 (Perigee, 1-800-788-6262, www.penguinputnam.com).

DEVELOPING CONCEPTS

Talk about beginnings, middles and ends

Children may not naturally understand that stories have beginnings, middles and ends. To teach this concept, read a favorite book. Then talk about its parts. “What happened in the *beginning*?” “And then what happened?” “How did the story *end*?” Real life stories can be examples too: “This is the *beginning* of our trip to Grandma’s house.” “We’re in the *middle* of traveling.” “We’re at Grandma’s! This is the *end* of our trip.”

Source: “Preschool Indoor Fun: Activities for Parents and Young Children,” Gayle’s Preschool Rainbow, www.preschoolrainbow.org/parent.htm.

LEARNING THROUGH MUSIC

Create a ‘kitchen band’

For children who love music, the kitchen can be the best room in the house. It’s usually filled with “musical instruments,” like:

- **Maracas.** Shake plastic containers filled halfway with dried beans or pasta. (Supervise since these foods are a choking risk.)
- **Drums.** Turn an empty oatmeal box upside down and beat with a wooden spoon.



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