

Helping Children Learn

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

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WORKING WITH YOUR SCHOOL

Get involved now to get the best education for your child

The beginning of the school year (and the beginning of your child's school career) is a great time to get involved in your child's school. Research shows that the more parents work with their child's school, the better the school is—and the better their child does in school.

To get involved:

- **Introduce yourself to your child's preschool teacher** right away. Don't wait until a conflict arises. Tell the teacher about your child's likes, dislikes, strengths and challenges.
- **Find out what your child will be learning.** Ask the teacher how you can reinforce at home what your child is learning at preschool.
- **Get a copy of the school's activity calendar.** Note times you can meet with your child's teacher and other school staff. Attend as many of these events as you can.
- **Help out with school activities.** Chaperone field trips. Raise funds. Provide refreshments. Volunteer your talents, such as gardening, language translation or computer skills.

Don't feel guilty if you don't have a lot of time to give. Tell the teacher you're eager to help. Ask her for tasks you might do at home. Keep a positive attitude, and show your child that his education is important to you.



READING READINESS

Discuss letter sounds with your child

In elementary school, your child will learn the sounds letters make. To prepare her for this.

- **Read rhymes.** Since rhymes contain words that sound alike, they train your child to notice similar sounds.
- **Try tongue twisters, too.** "Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers" is a good one. Your

child may not be able to repeat a tongue twister. But she'll enjoy listening to you.

- **Talk about your child's name.** You might say, "A is for Anna. And A is for apple, too." Emphasize the A sound. Do other activities with her name that she enjoys, such as making letters out of clay or cookie dough.

Source: Jo Fitzpatrick, *Phonemic Awareness*, ISBN: 1-5747-1231-4 (Creative Teaching Press, www.creativeteaching.com).

DISCIPLINE

Waiting builds patience

Some parents drop what they're doing to meet a child's needs. But it's important to teach your child that sometimes she may have to wait a minute. In school, for example, her teacher will not always be able to put her first. Waiting can build patience, courtesy and independence.

BUILDING SOCIAL SKILLS

Teach about friendship

Children learn how to be friends by playing together. Next time your child has a friend over:

- **Make** sure everyone shares.
- **Do** silly, fun activities together.
- **Draw** or take pictures as reminders of the good time.



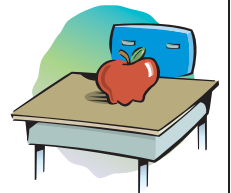
Source: Jackie Silberg, *Games to Play with Toddlers*, ISBN: 0-8765-9234-5 (Gryphon House, www.gryphonhouse.com).

IMPORTANCE OF ATTENDANCE

Get off to a good start!

Few habits are more important to your child's school success than coming to school on time every day. Good attendance is critical because:

- **It gets your child** in the right routine. Attendance becomes more important every year, as lessons become more difficult.
- **You are sending** your child to school to learn. If she's not there, she won't learn what's being taught.
- **It's the law.** Once your child reaches elementary school, she has to attend unless she has a legal excuse (like illness).



Source: Rosemarie Clark, Donna Hawkins & Beth Vachon, *The School-Savvy Parent*, ISBN: 1-57542-072-4 (Free Spirit Publishing, www.freespirit.com).

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QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

How can parents offer children choices?

Q: I know that giving children choices improves behavior and teaches responsibility. But how and when should I give my child options?

A: You're right—giving children choices helps them learn about responsibility. But it can be tricky to figure out when to offer these choices—kids can take a while to make up their minds, and you may not have all day to wait. Keep these things in mind:

- **Give two choices.** Too many alternatives can overwhelm kids. Then they can't make any decision at all. Make the options appealing and reasonable.
- **Don't be sarcastic.** For example, ask, "Would you like milk or water to drink?" not, "Are you going to have something else, or live on orange juice?"
- **Be patient.** Give your child time to make up her mind. If she takes too long or repeatedly begs for a third option, let her know that if she doesn't make a choice, you will. As a last resort, make the decision for her.



Source: Jim Fay & Charles Fay, Ph.D., *Love and Logic Magic for Early Childhood: Practical Parenting from Birth to Six Years*, ISBN: 1-9304-2900-2 (The Love and Logic Press, Inc., www.loveandlogic.com).

PARENT QUIZ

Are you teaching your child to listen?

Listening is an important skill for school success. Answer the following questions *yes* or *no* to see if you're using fun ways to develop your child's listening skills.

- ___ **1. Do you ask** your child to identify sounds he hears in the house? In the car? At a store?
- ___ **2. Do you send** your child on "missions" to bring you items? (Add more items each time!)
- ___ **3. Do you clap** a rhythm with your hands and ask your child to clap back the same rhythm?
- ___ **4. Do you play** "Simon Says" with your child?

- ___ **5. Do you make** animal sounds for your child to identify?
How did you do? Each yes answer means your child is having fun learning to listen. For each no answer, try that idea from the quiz.

"A child's life is like a piece of paper on which every person leaves a mark."

—Chinese proverb

DEVELOPING THINKING SKILLS

Encourage concentration

Focusing on one activity at a time teaches preschoolers to concentrate. To keep your child engaged, try:

- **Sign language.** Create "secret codes" that require your child to think about them and remember them.
- **A "feely" bag.** Put a few familiar objects into a bag and have your child identify each one without looking.

Source: Lee Hausner and Jeremy Schlosberg, *Teaching Your Child Concentration*, ISBN: 0-89526-394-7 (Lifeline Press, www.regnery.com/lifeline/lifeline.html).

WHEN YOU NEED HELP

A positive attitude can ease anxiety about school

At the beginning of the school year, kids (and parents!) often experience separation anxiety. Even if you're sad to say goodbye at school, act confident. Your child can pick up on this and take it to heart. "Mom says school is great. Maybe it will be fun."

MAKING TIME COUNT

Turn walks into adventures

You and your child are walking around the block again. But it doesn't have to be the same old thing. Put some zip in your trip with these ideas:

- **Notice new things,** such as flowers, animals, signs and home decorations.
- **Switch it up.** If you usually walk in the morning, take an evening walk. If it's always sunny when you walk, try a walk in the rain.
- **Find funny ways to walk,** such as on tiptoe, backwards or in slow motion.
- **Make matches.** Bring something that is a certain shape or color. What can your child find that matches it?



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