

Helping Children Learn

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

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DISCIPLINE

Avoid preschool power struggles

One of your preschooler's developmental "jobs" is to seek more control and independence. In the process, he will resist your requests. He will test rules. He will talk back. Your job is to avoid power struggles while getting your child to cooperate. Here's how:



- **Give your child some power** by giving him a choice whenever possible. "Do you want to turn off the TV or should I?" "Should Taylor get the first turn with the blocks or with the cars?"
- **Acknowledge your child's feelings.** "I know it's frustrating to wait."
- **Make it a game.** Try to "beat the clock" to get something done.
- **Make it fun.** When it's time to get dressed, let him pretend to be a superhero changing clothes.
- **State rules positively.** "Ask for what you want" (vs. "Don't grab").
- **Say, "Take turns"** instead of asking your child to share. Sharing, to a young child, can mean "giving it up."
- **Enforce rules consistently.** Otherwise, you teach your child to ignore what you say.
- **Avoid situations.** If your child refuses to go to bed when the television is on, make a rule that there's no television after dinner.

Source: Elizabeth Crary, *365 Wacky, Wonderful Ways to Get Your Children to Do What You Want*, ISBN: 0-943990-79-3 (Parenting Press, www.parentingpress.com).

READING READINESS

Increase understanding of words

Your words build your child's verbal skills. Reading books introduces her to the written word. To lay the groundwork for reading skills:

- **Help** your child see the connection between the printed words on the page and the words you say aloud. Point to the words as you say them aloud.
- **Ask** your child questions about a story that require more than a yes or no answer. Start with *who*,

what, *where*, *when*, *why* or *how*.

"What did the little boy do every night after dinner?"

- **Read** your child part of a story without showing her the pictures. Ask her to close her eyes and imagine what something in the story looks like. "The children went on a *merry-go-round*. What colors do you think the horses are?" This will help her learn what the words mean.

Source: Michael H. Popkin, Bettie B. Youngs and Jane M. Healy, *Helping Your Child Succeed in School*, ISBN: 1-880283-15-8 (Active Parenting Publishers, www.activeparenting.com).

BUILDING RESPECT

Teach respect for property

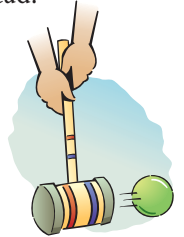
Show your child how to take special care of things that belong to others. If she borrows a toy, have her return it promptly. Make sure she treats library books very seriously. When they need to go back, have her hand the books to the librarian herself.

SCREEN TIME

Minimize television time

Avoid letting TV become your child's first request when he's bored. Instead:

- **Encourage** outside play.
- **Provide** puzzles, paper, crayons, blocks, hand puppets (draw faces on old, clean socks), dolls, toy cars—and plenty of books.
- **Help** your child choose TV programs (no more than two a day) in advance. Then make a rule that if those programs are not on, neither is the television.



TALKING AND LISTENING

Encourage listening skills

In kindergarten, your child will be expected to have certain listening skills, such as taking turns listening and speaking, and following simple directions.

When you speak to your child:

- **Say** her name and touch her shoulder.
- **Encourage** her to look you in the eyes.
- **Give** simple directions.
- **Don't** interrupt or complete her sentences for her.
- **Give** her time to think.
- **Show** interest by asking questions.



Source: Sandra F. Rief, *Ready Start School!* ISBN: 0-7352-0299-0 (Pearson/Prentice Hall, www.prenticehall.com).

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QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

How can parents help build writing skills?

Q: My daughter will enter kindergarten next fall. We have been reading together, but I am wondering if I should be teaching her to write. How can we help her at home? Do we have to make her practice her letters?

A: Fine motor development comes later for some children than others. Forcing a child this age to write, when it's a struggle for her, will only frustrate her. But the good news is that there are plenty of ways to practice these skills while your child is doing her most important "work"—playing.

To build fine motor skills:

- **Play with play dough.** Search for "homemade play dough" recipes on the Internet. You'll enjoy making your own together.
- **"Write" by tracing fingers** through shaving cream or sand.
- **Put 10 pennies on a table.** Ask your child to pick up the pennies using her thumb and finger, and without sliding the penny off the edge of the table. Let her keep any penny she is able to pick up this way.
- **Finger paint.** Try using pudding instead of paint.
- **Stack small blocks** and put together age-appropriate puzzles.

If your child wants to write, let her. Have a variety of crayons, markers, pencils and paper available where she can easily reach them. But let it be her decision—don't make writing into a chore.



PARENT QUIZ

Are you raising a polite preschooler?

Politeness is a skill that's important for your child's social success.

Answer the following questions *yes* or *no* to see if you're helping him learn to behave courteously:

1. **Do you expect** your child to have good manners and to say *please, thank you* and *excuse me*?
2. **Do you model** politeness by being polite to your child?
3. **Do you review** rules for behavior before going somewhere with your child (like "We speak quietly in the library")?
4. **Do you rephrase** something your child says that's not

polite? "I'd prefer you say, 'I don't care for that'—not 'Yuck!'"

5. **Do you praise** polite behavior? **How did you do?** Each *yes* answer means you're promoting politeness. For each *no* answer, consider trying that idea.

"Treat everyone with politeness, even those who are rude to you—not because they are nice, but because you are."

—Unknown

YOUR CHILD AND YOU

Change 'if' to 'when'

"If you pick up your toys, I'll take you to the park." Good deal? Wrong. Presented as a bribe, your child learns "If I do what Mom wants, I will get something." Instead, present it as an expectation: "When you pick up your toys, we can go to the park."

DEVELOPING THINKING SKILLS

Help your child develop a 'photographic memory'

Helping your child develop his visual memory can increase his ability to think, concentrate and learn. To do this:

- **Select** a moderately involved picture from one of your child's picture books.
- **Show** that picture to your child briefly.
- **Ask** simple questions. "What color was the cat?" "How many people did you see?" "Was it daytime or nighttime?"

Later on, decrease the amount of time your child sees a picture. Focus on details: "Did anyone have a hat on?" Or ask misleading questions: "What color was the flower?" (when there is no flower).

Sources: Serge Mikhailov, "How to Develop Eidetic Memory," www.ababasoftware.com/games/up010.htm.

EXPANDING YOUR CHILD'S WORLD

Notice nature everywhere

No matter where you live, you can find nature—a stream, field, plant or tree. Help your child think about that place.

What animals could she find there? What do they eat? Where do they sleep? When you have time, investigate the area more closely with your child.

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



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