

Helping Children Learn

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

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BUILDING THINKING SKILLS

Good memory helps in school

Besides talking to your child about experiences every day, you can do some simple activities to help her strengthen her ability to recall. You can:

- **Read nursery rhymes and familiar stories.** Nursery rhymes contain patterns. Your child will learn to recognize these patterns, even if she is not aware that this is what she is doing. Recognizing patterns will trigger your child's memory.
- **Hide items as your child watches.** Then have her retrieve the items from the places you hid them. As she gets better at this, hide more items. Or, hide the items, and then do another activity. After some time has passed, challenge her to find the items.
- **Play the "I'm going on a trip" game.** Say to your child, "I'm going on a trip and I'm packing pajamas." Tell your child she must repeat what you said, and then add an item. Example: "I'm going on a trip and I'm packing pajamas and a toothbrush." At first your child may be able to remember only one or two items. Expand the game as she gets better at recalling.



Source: Lilliann Alice Noda, June Mori-Shida, & Nancy Chisato Adachi, *Off to a Great Start! Activities for Becoming Your Child's Best Teacher*, ISBN: 0-7802-4207-6 (The Wright Group/McGraw-Hill, www.mcgraw-hill.com).

HEALTHY HABITS

Promote health, improve attendance

Winter is the season when many children contract colds, flu, strep throat and a host of other ailments—resulting in missed days of school. While it is impossible to keep your child from ever getting sick, there are steps you can take to give him the best chance of staying healthy—and staying in school.

You can:

- **Keep** your child up to date on doctor's visits and vaccinations.
- **Have** your child wash his hands as soon as he walks in the door from school.
- **Make sure** your child wears protective clothing, especially if you live in a cold climate.
- **Avoid** exposing your child to people who are already sick.
- **Feed** your child a healthy diet rich in fruits and vegetables.
- **Make sure** your child gets 10 to 11 hours of sleep a night.

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

BUILDING RESPECT

Make respect a habit

To teach your child to be respectful, you must also be respectful to your child. To model respectful behavior:

- **Say please and thank you.**
- **Avoid sarcasm.** "Could you be any slower?" Your child does not know how to answer this type of question.
- **Apologize.** When you make a mistake, tell your child you are sorry.

BUILDING MOTOR SKILLS

Enjoy toys that build your child's writing muscles

Your child must be able to control fine muscle movements to hold and manipulate a pencil. To develop your child's fine motor skills, give toys such as:

- **Puzzles.**
- **Blocks and Legos™.**
- **Lacing** or sewing cards.
- **Beads** to string.
- **Finger** and hand puppets.
- **Pick-Up-Sticks™.**
- **A children's** play toolbox.
- **Matching** and sorting games.



Source: Tara Losquadro Liddle, *Why Motor Skills Matter*, ISBN: 0-07-140818-5 (Contemporary Books/McGraw Hill, www.books.mcgraw-hill.com).

SCREEN TIME

Computer play has benefits

Preschoolers can't learn as much from computers as they can from their own make-believe play. But computers can help your child:

- **Type** letters, draw pictures and solve problems.
- **Learn** to sit still, pay attention and follow simple directions.
- **Develop** hand-eye coordination.



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QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

How can parents discourage 'potty mouth'?

Q: Just in time for the holidays and the arrival of relatives, my son has developed a "potty mouth." Saying bathroom words amuses him—and the louder, the better. How can I stop this behavior?

A: Your situation is frustrating, but not uncommon. Around the age of four, many children let slip a bathroom word and—often to their surprise—they get a big reaction. If they say it around other children, they hear a lot of giggling. If they say it around an adult, they hear a shocked, "Don't say that!" Either way, the child is now onto something. He knows how to create a stir.

The solution is one that works well for many other four-year-old dilemmas: Tone your reaction way, way down. Instead of looking shocked, it's best to appear a bit bored. Once your child realizes that he won't get a reaction, the novelty of using these words will wear off. Here are some tips:

- **Ignore** and quickly change the subject.
- **Escort.** Without looking upset, say, "I see you want to say bathroom words again. You can say them in the bathroom. I'll take you."
- **Withhold.** Say, "I'm sorry you want to use words that are not polite. I'll be happy to continue with our story when you are using polite words."



PARENT QUIZ

Is your child's vocabulary growing?

Learning new words improves your child's social skills now and can make her a better reader later on. Answer the following questions *yes* or *no* to see if you're helping your child build her vocabulary:

- ___ **1. Do you talk** to your child constantly, using specific words to name things?
- ___ **2. Do you build** on words your child already knows by using synonyms and descriptive words? (If she says "big bird," you say "large green parrot.")
- ___ **3. Do you read** aloud and look at pictures with your child, explaining words and images?
- ___ **4. Do you play** games with your child that make her name or guess objects?
- ___ **5. Do you encourage** your child to use words to describe her feelings?

How did you do? Each *yes* answer means you're enhancing your child's vocabulary. For each *no* answer, try that idea from the quiz.

"One forgets words as one forgets names. One's vocabulary needs constant fertilizing or it will die."

—Evelyn Waugh

BUILDING RESPONSIBILITY

Make responsibility fun!

Using humor can be a great way to get a child to fulfill a responsibility—without making your child grumpy. Your child is too young to understand humor delivered with a "straight face," so always have a big smile on your face. Here are some examples:

- **You:** "Oh, no, do you hear that crying?"
Child: "What crying?"
You: "Your shirt and pants are crying because they are on the floor! Quick, please go and rescue them!"
- **You:** "Your teeth are turning purple! Maybe if you brush them right now they will go back to being white! Hurry!"

Source: Nancy Samalin, *Loving Without Spoiling and 100 Other Timeless Tips for Raising Terrific Kids*, ISBN: 0-07-142492-X (Contemporary Books, a McGraw-Hill Company, www.mhcontemporary.com).

BUILDING SELF-ESTEEM

Build self-confidence

To build your child's self-esteem is to help her feel capable, unique, valuable and loved. To do this:

- **Pay attention.** When she shows you a drawing, don't just say, "That's lovely." Point out something specific you like.
- **Focus on what** your child does right, not on her shortcomings.
- **Avoid comparing** your child to others.

LEARNING THROUGH ART

Take a trip on paper

Tired of being inside this winter? Take a field trip—on paper, that is. Ask your child to think of something he wishes he could do, such as have a picnic. Let him cut out related pictures from magazines. Paste them onto paper for a "picnic picture."



Source: Patricia Gordon and Reed C. Snow, *Super Fun for One: 366 Solo Activities for Kids*, ISBN: 08362-21619 (Andrews and McMeel, www.andrewsmcmeel.com).

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