

# Helping Children Learn<sup>®</sup>

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

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Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board

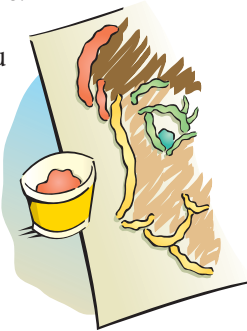
February 2010

## YOUR CHILD AND YOU

### Play cultivates important skills

Play is the natural way for your young child to learn valuable life skills. Studies confirm that the most important element in play is *you!* Your interaction will virtually guarantee that your child will learn as she grows. You'll help develop her curiosity and also boost her thinking, social and motor skills. Plus, the attention you give your child will boost her self-esteem. You can:

- **Tailor play** to her likes and skill-building needs—to develop concentration, communication skills, kindness, etc. The more you play, the more you learn about your child.
- **Match play** to your child's personality. Don't insist your active child sit still for long times playing a board game.
- **Pretend.** Pretend to fly to the moon while stuck in traffic.
- **Play with objects** that can be taken apart, manipulated and reassembled. Include puzzles, beads, blocks, clay and play dough.
- **Run, climb, jump** and throw together. Be silly—bounce, chase and sing.
- **Give your child** opportunities to give and receive directions.
- **Be patient** as your child learns to wait, share and take turns.
- **Include quiet activities** so your child isn't over-stimulated.



Source: Susan Kettmann, *The 2,000 Best Games & Activities: Using Play to Teach Curiosity, Kindness and Other Essential Life Skills*, ISBN: 1-4022-0194-X (Sourcebooks, Inc., www.sourcebooks.com).

## MAKING TIME COUNT

### Daily family dinner is key to success

Studies confirm: Children who regularly sit down to dinner with their families are healthier and get better grades than those who don't. To make mealtimes a time for learning and growth:

- **Let** your child help you make menus for the week and create a grocery list.
- **Have** your child help measure ingredients.
- **Show** him how to set and clear the table.
- **Turn off** the TV. Ignore phone calls, text messages and email.
- **Make** mealtime fun. Put dinner in a box or bag. Lay out a blanket inside or outside for a box picnic. Laugh a lot. Take pictures!
- **Teach** good manners.
- **Keep** talk positive. Have each family member tell one good thing that happened in their day.
- **Take** a walk after dinner.

Source: Carleton Kendrick, "Family Dinners: The Recipe for Connectedness," Family Education, <http://life.familyeducation.com/dinner/family-time/29528.html>.

## WORKING WITH YOUR SCHOOL

### Use tips from experts

To make your child's early school years the best they can be, follow these guidelines from kindergarten teachers:

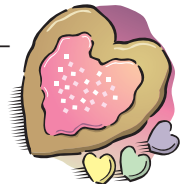
- **Follow** a routine at home. Children thrive when they have a regular time to eat, sleep, play, do chores, etc.
- **Start** mornings with a healthy breakfast.
- **Stay** up to date on school news.
- **Don't** overschedule your child. Make sure he's not too tired to learn.

Source: Sharlene K. Johnson, "Back to School from A to Z," *Parents* (Meredith Corp., www.parents.com).

## LEARNING THROUGH ART

### Valentine's Day offers opportunity for learning

Your child can benefit from making her own Valentines—the process is creative and works fine motor skills.



Consider:

- **Handprints.** Dip your child's hand in nontoxic red paint and print on heart-shaped doilies.
- **Cookie dough.** Let your child decorate heart-shaped cookies to give.

## TALKING AND LISTENING

### Get closer with questions

Want a good relationship with your child when he's older? Then make sure you do lots of talking with him now. Start by asking questions like these—and listening carefully to the answers:

- **What** is your favorite toy? Why?
- **What** is the silliest thing you ever saw?
- **Who** is your best friend? Why?
- **Is** there anything you are afraid of?
- **What** is the best thing that ever happened to you?



## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

### Should kindergartners know how to read?

**Q: My son will attend kindergarten in the fall. He was excited, but now he is worried because he does not know how to read. Should I also be worried? How can I ease his mind?**

**A:** The short answer is: No! It's true that with today's emphasis on early academics, more children read before kindergarten. Some parents also want children to read early. But many experts disagree with this early push. Research shows that an early push to read does not mean a child will be ahead in the long run. Rather, most children—whether they read early or not—are on a similar level by third grade. And third grade is also when most school districts begin state testing.

Tell your son clearly that kindergarten teachers do not expect their new students to be reading. First, he will learn letters and sounds. Later, once students master this important pre-reading task, some reading may begin. By then, he should be ready.

You can also ask your son's pre-K teacher to share this message with him. Sometimes children take advice better from teachers than parents!



## PARENT QUIZ

### Are you showing how books 'work'?

When you're reading to your preschooler, she should be learning a basic understanding of the nature of books. Answer the following questions *yes* or *no* to see if you're helping your child develop basic book smarts:

- \_\_\_ 1. **Do you read** to your child every day?
- \_\_\_ 2. **Do you show** your child that you're reading from left to right and from top to bottom of the page?
- \_\_\_ 2. **Do you point out** letters and words as you make their sounds, and note how pictures relate to the story?
- \_\_\_ 4. **Do you encourage** your child to open books and turn pages?
- \_\_\_ 5. **Do you ask** your child to "read" to you? She might recite the story as she remem-

bers it or make one up based on the pictures.

**How did you do?** Each yes answer means you're promoting book awareness. For each no answer, try that idea from the quiz.

*"Reading is a basic tool in the living of a good life."*

—Mortimer J. Adler

## BUILDING SELF-ESTEEM

### 'I love you' is just as meaningful in gestures

Children love to hear the words, "I love you." But you can say it in other ways that don't have to be verbal. Make up a signal that shows love. It can be silly, such as wiggling your fingers. Use it whenever your child needs a funny pick-me-up.

## BUILDING RESPONSIBILITY

### Practice safety habits

Start teaching your child the responsible way to cross the street. Encourage him to:

- **Stop, look and listen.** Reinforce this rule regularly. "Stop! Look both ways—do we see a car coming? Listen—do we hear a car coming?" When it's clear, say "all clear," and grasp your child's hand before crossing the street.
- **Walk.** It may seem like running makes sense—after all, you want to cross the street quickly. But you both are much more likely to trip and fall.

## DEVELOPING CONCEPTS

### Hands-on activities teach children concept of time

Time. You can't see it, hear it or touch it. Understanding time requires higher-order thinking skills. Start with activities to help your child learn the concept of "a day."

For example:

- **Get** your child a calendar. Each evening, have her cross off the day.
- **Make** a paper chain to count down to a special event. Each night, have your child tear off one link.



Source: Carol Wright, *A Parent's Guide to Home and School Success: Kindergarten*, ISBN: 1-55254-169-X (Brighter Vision Publications, [www.brightervision.com](http://www.brightervision.com)).

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