

# Helping Children Learn<sup>®</sup>

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

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## BUILDING ATTENTION SPAN

### Boost your child's attention span

To be successful in kindergarten, your child needs to know how to pay attention and listen when someone is speaking or reading a story. If your child is heading off to kindergarten in the fall, start working on activities to build his attention span throughout the summer.

Here's what you can do to help at home:

- **Give your child short tasks**, such as putting together a simple puzzle with just a few pieces or coloring part of a picture. When he is finished, say, "You did it!" Make tasks longer as his attention span increases. The more success he has, the more he will learn to pay attention.
- **Use a kitchen timer.** "I'm going to set this for five minutes. Please make a shape from this clay until you hear the timer beep." Slowly increase the length of time and number of tasks.
- **Keep work areas free of clutter.** Most children find it easier to concentrate on a single task when there aren't other objects around to distract them.
- **Tell your child what you expect.** "We are going to read a short storybook now. I'd like you to sit next to me and look at the book while I read."



## READING READINESS

### Reading makes summer more fun!

Get in the habit over the summer months of making reading part of your child's daily activities. Here are some ideas:

- **Gather books** to share with your child. Head to the library and check out the summer reading program. Or round up your neighbors and hold a children's book swap. That way, everyone can enjoy books that are "new to them" this summer.
- **Read books** about your activities. Before you visit a zoo or a farm with your child, read about animals together. After you come home, read about them again.
- **Make books** to read together. Cut pictures out of magazines or catalogs. How many different stories can you tell each other about the pictures?
- **Find books** that teach your child how to make or do something new—play hopscotch, care for a garden, blow bubbles, etc.

## DISCIPLINE

### Practice summer safety

Help your child learn to stay close to you when you are out. To teach your child to stay safe when out and about this summer:

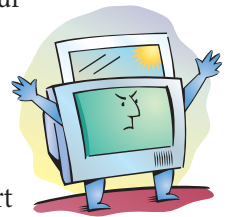
- **Be hands on.** Tell your child that she must hold your hand or let you hold on to her when you are in a busy place or crossing a street.
- **Be eyes on.** In places where you don't have to hold hands, like a playground, teach your child to stay where you can see each other at all times.
- **Point out a safe person** your child can go to if she's lost—a person in uniform, an employee or a mother with children.

Source: Carol Baicker-McKee, *FussBusters on the Go*, ISBN: 1-56145-263-7 (Peachtree Publishers, [www.peachtree-online.com](http://www.peachtree-online.com)).

## SCREEN TIME

### Don't let the TV take over

Too much TV will rob your child of a great summer gift—long days he could spend in active play. Instead of sitting him in front of the TV when you're busy, have him sort socks or pick up toys.



## BUILDING CHARACTER

### Teach your child empathy

Learning to be kind to animals can help children develop the trait of *empathy*—being aware of the feelings of others. To teach empathy:

- **Show** you value animals. Treat them kindly.
- **Put** out food for birds.
- **Plant** flowers for bees and butterflies.



## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

### How can parents keep summer filled with excitement, learning?

**Q:** My child loves the freedom and excitement of the first few weeks of summer. And then ... "I'm bored!" "There's nothing to do!" I want to resist turning on the TV, but I could use a few fresh ideas. Can you help?

**A:** If there's a downside to summer, you just named it. Children love routines. When familiar habits like going to preschool every day disappear, they may be at loose ends. Here are a few fun ideas that will keep your child busy—and also learning:

- **Water play.** Young children love small wading pools, which are usually inexpensive and widely available. Splashing and playing with containers in the water are big favorites and can give your child measuring activities. Remember the number one rule for children and water—*never* let a child out of your sight, even in water only a few inches deep.
- **Tossing.** Draw a happy face on a piece of large cardboard. Cut out a big hole for the mouth. Prop the cardboard against a chair. Give your child some rolled-up socks. Have her try to toss them through the "mouth."
- **Fort building.** Create a "fort" by throwing a sheet over a couple of chairs or a table. Tell your child to go *in*, come *out* or walk *around* the fort. She'll be having fun and learning how to follow directions.



## PARENT QUIZ

### Are you teaching your child patience?

Preschoolers can be very impatient. But they need to learn to wait and take turns to do well in school. Answer the following questions *yes* or *no* to see if you're helping your child develop patience:

1. **Do you model** patience? Do you watch what you say and do when you must wait for something?
2. **Do you play** board games with your child to encourage turn-taking?
3. **Do you praise** and reward your child for trying hard and waiting?
4. **Do you ask** your child to wait—"until the dishes are done" or "after Daddy gets home"? Do you use a timer to help him wait for a specified time?
5. **Do you help** your child develop strategies for waiting (like singing songs to pass the time)?

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

"Rivers know this: there is no hurry. We shall get there someday."  
—A.A. Milne

## BUILDING LANGUAGE SKILLS

### Share new concepts, words during mealtimes

Mealtimes are ideal for sharing with your child—not just food, but conversation. Reinforce important concepts. For example:

- **Name** and describe objects on the table.
- **Look** for like colors and shapes. Ask your child to name all the green foods. Expand by asking, "Are there any blue foods? Can you think of one?"
- **Make** comparisons. "What is bigger, one pea or one potato?"

Source: Jill Norris, *Teaching Young Children: Learn While Having Fun*, ISBN: 1-55799-876-0 (Evan-Moor Educational Publishers, [www.evan-moor.com](http://www.evan-moor.com)).

## YOUR CHILD AND YOU

### 'Silent break' calms stress

Many families are caught up in a frenzy of activity. Studies show that too much noise and activity can make children stressed and lower their ability to focus and learn. To make the most of the time you spend with your child, take a "silent break" from time to time. Have her sit, stand, walk or ride in silence for five minutes.

## BUILDING RESPONSIBILITY

### Children can show new skills to prove capability

Even a very young child can show he is capable. Here are some tips:

- **Teach him in private.** The first time you ask him to put spoons on the table, he may instead place the forks. Keep practicing.
- **Let him shine in public.** When your child has mastered a skill, such as putting a snack in a bowl, have him do it for others.



Source: Jean Illsley Clarke, *How Much Is Enough?* ISBN: 15692-44375 (Da Capo Press, [www.perseusbooks.com](http://www.perseusbooks.com)).

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