

Helping Children Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School



December 2023

Early Intervention Program
Midwestern Intermediate Unit IV

Family routines can improve your child's kindergarten readiness

Studies show that preschoolers who follow positive routines at home have a head start when they get to kindergarten. Routines help children learn what is expected of them and make them feel secure.

The benefits increase the more routines you establish. Research links family routines to improved student behavior, relationship skills, literacy skills, math skills and physical and emotional health.



To give your preschooler a boost in school, create routines for:

- **Family meals.** Sharing daily meals gives your child an opportunity to connect with family, and practice conversation skills and manners. It's also the ideal way to teach your child to make healthy food choices.
- **Reading.** A relaxed daily reading routine with you nurtures your child's well-being as well as vocabulary and print awareness.
- **Sleeping.** A good night's sleep is critical to learning and self-control.
- **Creativity.** Regular time for art-making and imaginative play frees your child to explore, test and problem-solve.
- **Playing games.** Include frequent time for playing games together to help your child learn about teamwork, taking turns, rules and more.

Source: K.L.P. Turnbull and others, "Family routines and practices that support the school readiness of young children living in poverty," *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, Elsevier.



Foster fitness indoors in bad weather

Preschoolers need physical activity to build muscles, bones, confidence and brainpower. But winter weather can make getting it a challenge. To make sure your child gets daily exercise, enjoy these indoor activities together:

- **Obstacle Course.** Create a safe layout that requires climbing *over* pillows, crawling *under* chairs, reaching *up* to pull a dangling piece of yarn, bending *down* to put a toy in a box, sliding *along* the floor on a towel, etc. Say the words as you do the actions.
- **Hula Hop.** Jump in and out of a hula hoop. Your child can do it with two feet—or one, if ready—all around the circle.
- **Balloon Volleyball.** Line up chairs to make a "net" and bat a balloon back and forth from one side to the other.
- **Follow the Leader.** Take turns leading each other in big movements—waving arms, taking giant steps, climbing pretend ropes, etc.
- **Silly Skating.** Take off shoes, put on some music and go skating—carefully!—on the kitchen floor.

Build a reading foundation

Several activities benefit children at every stage of reading development. To give your child a strong base to build on:

- **Read a variety** of types of materials together: poems, stories, nonfiction, instructions.
- **Play** with letters. Use magnet letters or letters cut out of paper. Help your child arrange them into different words.
- **Expose your child** to new words in ways that make it clear what they mean. "This apple tastes so good! It's *luscious!*"
- **Encourage your child** to participate. When you read a familiar favorite, ask your preschooler to "read" along.



Move ahead after setbacks

As preschoolers explore and try new things, it's only natural that they will experience some failures. To aid recovery when this happens, acknowledge your child's feelings. Then, remind your preschooler that most skills take practice to master. Be encouraging: "You tried something new, that's great. Let's try again soon—I know you will get the hang of it if you keep trying."

Strengthen fine motor skills

Control of small hand muscles is necessary for writing and manipulating objects. Here are just a few of the many fun ways to strengthen these skills. Have your child:



- **Peel stickers** and stick them to paper.
- **Squeeze and form** clay into shapes.
- **Zip, snap and button** clothing.
- **Put together** puzzles.



What are some ways to help my child enjoy math?

Q: I want to show my child that math can be fun. We already do lots of counting. What are some other things we can do?

A: Math is fun, because it helps people do so many things! Build on your child's counting skills by showing the meaning behind the number when you count. Demonstrate that each number actually represents something. Start with low numbers—here is *one* book, you have *two* eyes. You can also say things like, "1-2-3-4! That's how many candles are on your cake because you are four years old."

Here are a few other ideas:

- **Talk about shapes.** The sandwich is a square. Cut in half, it becomes a triangle or a rectangle. The birthday cake is a circle. If these are easy, go on to more advanced shapes—a stop sign is an octagon.
- **Play estimation games.** "I think you can finish your sandwich in 10 bites. How many do you think it will take? Let's count and see."
- **Play board and card games.** Your preschooler gets to practice counting while moving a game piece around the board. A card game such as "Go Fish," where each player tries to collect matching cards, teaches children to recognize numbers.
- **Encourage your child to solve** math-related problems, such as "How can we cut up this pizza so we each get a fair share?"



Are you boosting pre-reading skills?

Most preschoolers are ready to learn about letters and words, as long as the activities are enjoyable. Are you helping your child take the first steps to becoming a reader? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

1. **Do you give** your child toys with letters on them, such as blocks, and talk about the sounds the letters make?
2. **Do you write** your child's name on belongings, and help your child write it, too?
3. **Do you label** items in your home with the words for them (*sofa, table, bed*) and read the words together?
4. **Do you explain** that a letter or combination of letters represents each sound in a word?
5. **Do you play** word games together, such as matching

pictures of items with the first letter in each item's name?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are helping your child learn early reading skills. For each no, try that idea.

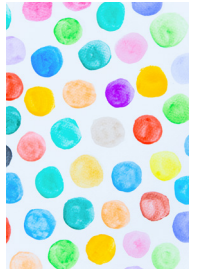
"Children are made readers on the laps of their parents."

—Emilie Buchwald

Explore art in new ways

Making art is a hands-on way for your child to learn about patterns and textures. Here are two ideas to try:

- **Lots of dots.** Instead of painting with lines, show your preschooler how to paint with dots. Draw a shape, then have your child use a cotton swab to cover the shape with dots of paint.
- **Touchable art.** Have your child mix salt or sand into paint. What happens? Brainstorm other things your artist could add to make paintings really pop.



Reinforce polite speaking and listening during visits

Will your family's December plans include a visit to someone's home? Use the opportunity to help your child practice saying *hello* and *goodbye* and other polite words—*please, thank you, you're welcome* and *excuse me*.

To encourage respectful listening, say something like: "Mrs. Jones is my friend and this is her house. Please follow her instructions while we're here."

Nip trouble in the bud

Hearing from a teacher that your child is misbehaving isn't pleasant. But by acting quickly, you can almost always turn things around. Here's how:

- **Hear the teacher out.** Something is preventing your child from learning well.
- **Work together.** It's likely the teacher has seen this problem before and has suggestions for handling it.
- **Talk to your child.** Say "The teacher and I want to help you." Explain that following rules isn't always easy, but it is something everyone must do so preschool can be a happy place to learn.

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