EARLY CHILDHOOD

Helping Children Learn®

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

November 2023

Early Intervention Program
Midwestern Intermediate Unit IV

Sharpen your child's observation skills while learning about nature

There's a whole world outside for your child to learn about, and observing is a powerful way to do it. Explore nature together and encourage your preschooler to examine everything from a tiny insect to the bark of the tallest tree.



To boost your child's interest while developing observation skills:

1. **Search for new** and unusual things. Say, "Let's see if we can find 10 things outside that we've never noticed before!"
2. **Create lasting images.** Take photographs or draw pictures of the new things your child finds. "The rain made little puddles in that rock!" or "That's a really big spiderweb!" Let your child help record the finding.
3. **Look at the pictures together** when you get home. Review and talk about what is in them.
4. **Play a game.** Take turns covering most of each picture. Can your child guess the subject of the picture by what's still visible? Challenge other family members to figure it out, too.
5. **Find out more.** Go online together and see what else you can learn about the things your preschooler observed outside. At the library, look for children's books about nature that include pictures and information about similar things.

Take thinking skills to the next level

To encourage thinking in more complex ways, help your preschooler consider the relationships between things. Introduce your child to these concepts:

- **Classification.** Sorting and classifying are essential in science. At home, you can use toys to help your child learn how to group things that are alike. Ask your child to put toy animals in one pile and blocks in another. Then have your child regroup items by size, or color.
- **Similarities and differences.** Give your child two items, such as a banana and book. Ask how the items are different (*one is to eat, and one is to read; one is natural, one is man-made*). Then ask how they are the same (*they both begin with the B sound; they both have outer covers to protect what's inside*).
- **Cause and effect.** Discuss how one thing happens as the result of another—and encourage your preschooler to make predictions. For example, "If I'm not careful, the cereal pours too fast into the bowl. What do think happens then?"

Sing for language learning



Studies show that music can help children develop language comprehension skills. Singing is a great way to enjoy language and music with your child. Have some fun singing:

- **Nursery rhymes.** Combining nursery rhymes with movement, like when playing *Ring Around the Rosie*, builds muscles, too.
- **Rounds.** In a round, each person sings the same song, but starts at a different time. Try *Row, Row, Row Your Boat*.
- **Favorite songs** of yours. Your child will enjoy sharing music with you while learning to sing along.

Source: M.C. Pino and others, "The Association between Music and Language in Children: A State-of-the-Art Review," *Children*, MDPI.

Stay aware and in touch

Monitoring your preschooler's learning progress—by talking about what your child is learning, reviewing work and practicing concepts at home—is important. Families are often the first to raise concerns about their child's learning. This is helpful to teachers. You might say, "Sam is having trouble identifying shapes. How can we help?"

Make evenings screen-free

Preschoolers are not too young to begin developing healthy digital media habits. In addition to limiting digital activities, teach your child this screen rule: *Watch and play only during the day.*



Nighttime use of digital media can disrupt sleep. Bright lights and excitement aren't part of a calm evening routine. Instead, read books, play soothing music, or have a quiet conversation.

Source: "Healthy Digital Media Use Habits for Babies, Toddlers & Preschoolers," American Academy of Pediatrics.

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Q&A How can I help my child do more things independently?

Q: My preschooler would rather wait for me to do everything than do it alone. Unless I take charge, nothing gets done. I'd like to have my child take on more responsibilities, but I'm not sure how. What should I do?



A: Fostering responsible independence is an important way to prepare your child for success in school. You can begin by assigning a few tasks related to your preschooler's care or activities. Keep your child's abilities in mind—a job that's too difficult may just be frustrating. Tasks preschoolers can do for themselves include:

- **Getting dressed.**
- **Putting dirty clothes** in a hamper.
- **Pouring a drink** of water or milk.
- **Preparing simple food,** such as a bowl of cereal.
- **Tidying up toys** after use.

Show your child the specific steps involved in doing each task a few times. Then, stay nearby to answer questions while your preschooler tries doing the job alone. Stay calm if your child makes mistakes, and don't redo your child's work—feeling that you are disappointed in the outcome can make your child feel incapable. Instead, thank your child, praise effort and make a suggestion or two for next time.

Parent Quiz Are you sharing the value of giving?

It's the time of year when giving—both giving thanks and giving gifts—takes center stage. Through giving, children learn to care for and connect with others. Are you helping your child learn about giving? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

___**1. Do you explain** the reasons for giving to others?

___**2. Do you include** your child in the activities you do to help others?

___**3. Do you help** your child give? Preschoolers can make gifts and do nice things for others.

___**4. Do you encourage** giving year-round, not just at holidays or birthdays?

___**5. Do you teach** your child that feeling and showing gratitude is the way people give back after receiving gifts?

How well are you doing?

More yes *answers mean you are helping your child become a giver. For each* no, *try that idea.*

"When we give cheerfully and accept gratefully, everyone is blessed."
—Maya Angelou

Turn to books to build your preschooler's vocabulary

Research shows that reading aloud is a powerful way to expand children's word smarts. When you read, your preschooler hears:

- **Unfamiliar words.** Children are three times more likely to hear an uncommon word in a book than while talking with family.
- **New ways** to use familiar words.
- **The patterns** of grammar and sentence structure.

Source: D. Massaro, "Two Different Communication Genres and Implications for Vocabulary Development and Learning to Read," *Journal of Literacy Research*, SAGE Publications.

Point out the right choice

You can help your preschooler make better decisions by offering timely reminders of appropriate behavior. Say, for example, that you've established a "No hands in the fish bowl" rule, but your child still does it. The fish bowl may be tempting enough to make your preschooler forget the rule. Rather than scolding afterward, step in right *before* your child gets to the fish bowl. Say, "Remember, we use our eyes to see the fish, but not our hands to touch."

Allow for some downtime

Children need regular unstructured time to play and learn in their own ways. Even boredom can motivate kids to imagine, tinker, draw and create.



Plan for some unrushed family time, when you and your preschooler can just putter around the house together. Listen to music. Take a walk. Do anything you and your child enjoy that has no particular goal.

Source: E. Ofgang, "How Downtime and Free Play Help Students Learn," Tech&Learning.

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Published in English and Spanish, September through May.
Publisher: Doris McLaughlin.
Publisher Emeritus: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.
Editor: Alison McLean.
Translations Editor: Victoria Gaviola.
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P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474
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