EARLY CHILDHOOD

Helping Children Learn®

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

October 2023

Early Intervention Program
Midwestern Intermediate Unit IV

Exercise with your preschooler to foster health and learning

Regular exercise not only helps keep your preschooler healthy—it also can help your child do better in school. Studies show that children who exercise have better motor skills, hand-eye coordination, balance and focus. They also have better listening and memory skills, and may fidget less in class.

Physical activity levels in preschoolers are linked to their parents' activity levels. Your child takes cues from you, so to encourage exercise, lead the way.

To increase the active fun in your child's daily routines:

- **Explore the outdoors.** Research shows that children with regular access to the outdoors get more exercise. Visit local parks and playgrounds and walk all around looking for things you have never noticed before. Pretend to be horses and see who can gallop faster to reach a nearby tree.
- **Trade screens for active play.** Turn all devices off for a period of time each day. Your child may then be more willing to join you in a game of tag or Follow the Leader.
- **Serve some after-dinner exercise.** Rather than reaching for dessert, reach for a ball. The good feeling you and your child will get from kicking it around together lasts longer than a cookie.

Source: S.L. Barkin and others, "Parent's Physical Activity Associated With Preschooler Activity in Underserved Populations," *American Journal of Preventive Medicine,* Elsevier.

Introduce your child to math pictures

Your child is familiar with pictures that illustrate stories. Explain that graphs and charts are pictures of mathematical information. To reinforce the idea, help your child create some simple charts and graphs. Here are two to try:

1. **A weather chart.** Help your child make a calendar by drawing a square for each day of the month on a sheet of paper. Then each day, your child can record the weather by drawing a sun, a cloud or a raindrop in the corresponding square. At the end of the month, help your child use the chart to count the number of sunny, rainy and cloudy days.
2. **Survey results.** Pick a question, such as "Which pet do you like best?" Have your child draw options—such as a dog, a cat and a fish—then ask family and friends to say which pet they prefer. Your child can then draw a smile underneath the pet each person picks. When everyone has voted, your child can count the smiles to see which is the most popular pet.

Focus on attention span

Children with a longer attention span in early childhood have more success in school later on. To boost attention span:

- **Ask your child** to look at a detailed picture for one minute. Take it away. What can your child tell you about the picture?
- **Encourage solo** play. Give your child a simple puzzle, blocks or clay to use alone for a few minutes. Slowly increase the time.

- **Read together.** The ability to listen to and follow a story is a foundation for the skills your child will need in school.

Source: D. Stipek and R. Valentino, "Early Childhood Memory and Attention as Predictors of Academic Growth Trajectories," *Journal of Educational Psychology*.

Set a goal for responsibility

Learning well involves responsibility. Help your child set a learning goal at the beginning of the week. It might be to learn to write a few letters, or to zip up a jacket. Write the goal down, and provide chances to practice. At the end of the week, celebrate if your child reaches the goal. If not, say that with more practice, your child will get there.

Art sparks creative thinking

The final project doesn't matter when your child is making art. What does is that your child is thinking creatively and learning to:

- **Take risks.** "I'm going to use my hands instead of a brush."
- **Experiment.** "I mixed red and blue and it made purple!"

- **Solve problems.** "I want to put in the sun, but I don't have yellow. I'll use orange instead."

Source: "Children's Art," Better Kid Care, PennState Extension.

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Q&A How can I help my child feel happier about preschool?

Q: My child has recently become anxious about going to preschool. When school started last month, my child was so excited. But now I keep hearing "I don't want to go." What could be going on, and how can I help?

A: Your child's shifting feelings are common. Many children have difficulty adjusting to preschool. But with your support, your child's anxiety will likely be temporary.

To help your preschooler adjust:

- **Reduce the hype.** Beginning preschool is a milestone. But making too big a deal of it can backfire. Just offer reminders of other places your child has made friends and had fun learning. Say that preschool is similar.
- **Talk with your child.** See if you can get your child to tell you what it is about preschool that is worrying. You may be able to offer an explanation that will ease your child's mind.
- **Stay calm and cheerful.** Put on a brave face at drop-off time, and your child may, too.
- **Consult the teachers.** Share your concerns and ask for more advice if needed. Preschool teachers are experienced in helping kids adjust.

Parent Quiz Are you encouraging learning at home?

Preschoolers generally spend more time at home than anywhere else. With your help, that time will include lots of learning opportunities. Are you making your home a learning place? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

___**1. Do you tell** your child about things that interest you and about new things you learn?

___**2. Do you encourage** your child's interests and offer praise when your preschooler tries something new?

___**3. Do you read** together daily, and let your child see you reading to yourself often?

___**4. Do you give** your child tools for learning, such as paper, crayons, blocks and puzzles?

___**5. Do you make sure** that your child spends much more time on screen-free learning activities, such as reading, investigating and creating, than passively watching screens?

How well are you doing?

More yes *answers mean you are promoting learning in your home. For each* no, *try that idea.*

"Education is not preparation for life; education is life itself."
—John Dewey

Demonstrate reading basics

One important way to support reading readiness is to help your child understand how reading works. When you read a book together:

- **Show your child** that print is read from left to right, one line at a time.
- **Point to each word** as you read it.
- **Make letter connections.** "This word is *hop.* Hop starts with the letter H. That's the same letter your name starts with, Henry. What other words start with the letter H? What sound does H make?"

Start your preschooler on a path to student success

Attitude and behavior make a big difference in school. To support success, help your preschooler learn to:

- **Share,** and to ask nicely when wanting to use someone else's belongings.
- **Be considerate.** Prompt your child to say things like "Excuse me" and "It's your turn now."
- **Complete tasks** with a positive attitude—even when your child may not feel like doing them.

Be a preschool partner!

Preschool is the start of a long school career. And it's the perfect time to establish the family-school partnership that will benefit your child. Make it a point to:

- **Talk with the teachers** about your child's progress.
- **Ask what you can do** at home to reinforce what your child is learning.
- **Show interest** in things your child tells you about school.

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