

# Helping Children Learn<sup>®</sup>

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School



December 2022

Early Intervention Program  
Midwestern Intermediate Unit IV

## Introduce your child to words that describe spatial relationships

In the critical early learning years, children are developing an awareness of how they fit into the world around them. One key part of this learning involves spatial concepts, which will also be important when your child studies science and math in school.

To introduce these concepts, help your child learn about *positional words*: words that describe the position of objects in relation to other objects. As your preschooler masters simple ideas, you can gradually add more complex ones. Here's how:



- 1. Begin with spatial concepts** such as *in*, *out* and *on*. "Let's put the toys *in* the box." "I'm taking the milk *out* of the refrigerator." "Books go back *on* the shelf when we finish reading."
- 2. Move on to words such as over and under.** "The cat is *under* the bed." (Pat the bed, then point underneath it to the cat.) "The blanket goes *over* the sheet." (Touch the sheet, then cover it with the blanket.)
- 3. Continue with more sophisticated positional words**, such as *behind*, *in front of*, and *next to*. These concepts will be important when your child reaches kindergarten. You can demonstrate them with toys. Show your child how to position toy cars behind, in front of and next to one another. You can also demonstrate with family members. "Please stand *next to* your sister for the picture."

Source: L.M. Platas, "The Why and What of Spatial Relations," DREME, Stanford University.



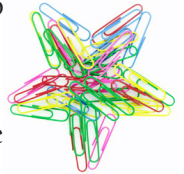
## Add an element of reading to activities

December is a busy month for lots of families. When things get busy, the best way to find time for building your child's literacy skills is to combine reading with other activities. For some seasonal reading fun with your child:

- **Snuggle up on a cold day.** Grab a blanket and stay warm as you read books about wintry weather together. If the weather is warm, have an outdoor reading picnic!
- **Mix reading with baking** and cooking. Will you be making holiday treats? Ask your child to retrieve an ingredient from the cupboard by looking for the first letter on the package. Then read the directions, and let your child help you follow them.
- **Try audiobooks.** When your eyes and hands are busy, you and your child can listen to a book and discuss it.
- **Have your child tell a tale** about something fun to do in the winter. Write it down, and let your child draw pictures to go with it. Read it aloud when your family gathers for another activity.

## Discuss doing what's right

Praise and consequences help your child learn expected behavior. But kids also need to learn that the reason to behave well is because it's the right thing to do. To help:



- **Promote** family principles. Say things like, "In our family, we use kind words and we don't hit."
- **Practice** making amends. Teach your child to apologize and ask how to fix things after making a mistake.
- **Provide** cues. "See your sister working? When we're quiet, she can concentrate."

## Give the gift of inclusion

What preschoolers want most of all is to be part of what people they love are doing. As you prepare for special activities this month, let your child help. Preschoolers can stir batter, help set the table, put stamps on envelopes and more. Run errands together and take five minutes to look at a festive display. This shows that you have time for your child, no matter how busy you are.

## Playtime is learning time

For preschoolers, play is an important way to explore, think, self-direct and learn by doing. Encourage these playful activities:

- **Making art.** This boosts creativity and builds small muscle coordination.
- **Pretending.** Imaginative play helps your child consider what could happen in a situation. Using props, like a block for a phone, involves symbolic thinking.
- **Building things.** Planning, counting and solving problems are part of the fun.



Source: M. Yogman and others, "The Power of Play: A Pediatric Role in Enhancing Development in Young Children," *Pediatrics*, American Academy of Pediatrics.



## How can I help my child build more reading skills?

**Q:** My four-year-old recognizes all the letters, and can write many of them. What comes next in learning to read? What should we be working on together?

**A:** Recognizing letters is an important part of reading readiness. But it's just as important for your child to learn to connect written letters with the sounds they make. This is called *phonemic awareness*.



Here are a few enjoyable ways to help your child practice:

- **Cut large letters** out of paper. Help your child match them with common household items that begin with the sound each letter makes. For example, your preschooler could tape B to a ball, and T to a toy truck.
- **Change the sounds of words** in silly ways, and encourage your child to catch you. You might say, "It's almost time for lunch! Let's have some macaroni and *fleas!*" If your child doesn't notice, say, "Did I say fleas? I meant *cheese!*"
- **Read rhyming books.** Rhymes help children understand that changing a sound (letter) at the beginning of a word can make a completely different word.
- **Play a guessing game.** Start making letter sounds, and see how quickly your child can blend them into a word. For instance, say, "/sss/ /kkk/ /iii/ ..." and see if your child guesses *skip*.



## Are you making it easy to learn?

Curiosity comes naturally to preschoolers, but how much they learn depends a great deal on their parents. Are you creating conditions that foster discovery and help your child strengthen skills? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you encourage** your child to use all five senses to learn about the world (while you supervise for safety)?
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you encourage** your child to ask questions and then take time to answer them?
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you provide** opportunities for your child to play with and learn from other children?
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you help** your child learn to focus attention on the task at hand—by playing with one toy at a time, for example?
- \_\_\_ **5. Do you ask** your child to problem-solve? "How do you

think we can get all these toys to fit in the basket?"

### How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are setting the stage for learning. For each no, try that idea.

"The mind once enlightened cannot again become dark."

—Thomas Paine

## Add to learning all day

Your child spends more time at home than at preschool. To enrich your time together with learning:

- **Have conversations.** Discuss daily life and ask questions that require creative thinking, like "What do you think it would be like to live underwater?"
- **Practice social skills,** like polite manners and respectful behavior.
- **Observe and explore.** Look for animal tracks outdoors. Watch the activity at a construction site from a safe distance.
- **Play games** that use school skills, like Simon Says (listening and following directions) and counting games.

## Talk about the best parts

To instill enthusiasm for preschool, spend some time each day discussing what your child likes best about it. Don't worry if the answer is "snack time." Say things like, "It's fun to eat and talk with friends, isn't it?"

When preschool is not in session, talk about things your child will enjoy sharing with the class when it resumes. "Won't it be fun to tell them about the cake you baked?"

## Promote puzzle persistence

There's a reason jigsaw puzzles are classic toys—they help children build thinking and fine motor skills and extend their attention spans. And they are fun!

Start your preschooler with a puzzle of about eight pieces. As your child works, point out progress. Look together at how the picture is developing.



Move up to more complicated puzzles at your child's pace, and return and work again on puzzles that can't be completed in one sitting. This is a skill students need when they study and do larger projects in school.

### Helping Children Learn®

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