

Helping Children Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School



November 2022

Early Intervention Program

Midwestern Intermediate Unit IV

Make memory-building a fun part of daily activities together

The ability to remember things they see and hear is a fundamental skill for students of all ages. It helps preschoolers fill a reservoir of knowledge they can draw on to help understand new things. And when your child gets to elementary school, a strong memory will make recalling and applying new information easier.

To strengthen your child's memory:

- **Discuss daily experiences.** Ask your preschooler follow-up questions like, "What did you see when you played in the sandbox?"
- **Read and reread rhyming books.** Nursery rhymes contain patterns kids learn to recognize. Ask your child to supply the next rhyming word.
- **Play Find the Hidden Objects.** Hide a few items while your child watches. Then have your preschooler "find" them. When this is easy, add more items. Or hide the objects and then do another activity. After some time, ask your child to find them.
- **Play memory word games,** like "I'm going to Grandma's House." Name an item you'll take with you. Your child should repeat what you said, then add something. Keep taking turns and adding items.
- **Let your child play teacher.** After your preschooler learns a new skill, say, "Now it's your turn to teach me. How do you do that?" This will help your child remember the steps to follow.



Assign a chore to instill responsibility

Preschoolers are not too young to learn about responsibility. Giving your child a chore or two helps instill this essential school trait. And being part of the group effort of maintaining your home also helps your child feel like a capable and important member of the family.

Children who are at least three years old are usually able to:

- **Help set and clear** the table. Have your child start with the forks, spoons and napkins. Gradually expand the job to include plates and cups.
- **Help with laundry.** Your child can put dirty clothes in a hamper or clean clothes in drawers.
- **Feed dry food** to family pets and give them fresh water.
- **Dust low surfaces** with a rag or feather duster.
- **Help with cooking tasks,** such as stirring or pouring cool ingredients.
- **Pick up toys.** Have your preschooler pick them up every day before bedtime.

Make reading enjoyable

It may be tempting to compare your child's reading readiness with other children's. But kids learn to read at different rates. Instead, encourage your child to enjoy reading and developing skills. Try to:

- **Read together every day.** Run your finger under the words as you read them. Point out frequently used words.
- **Look for words everywhere**—on signs, in games, etc. Ask questions like "Can you find a word that starts with B?"
- **Take a break** if you sense your child is frustrated. Reading with you should be fun.

Be honest for your child

Young children learn to tell the truth over several years. To encourage it, tell the truth for your child. Instead of asking "Did you eat a cookie without asking?" (your child will probably say *no*) say, "I know you don't want to be in trouble. But there are cookie crumbs everywhere, even on your face. I think you ate cookies. It's OK to tell me."



Fingers are handy for math

Research shows that when young children use their fingers to learn numbers, it helps them understand math concepts. Encourage your child to:

- **Hold up the number** of fingers that match a number from 1-10 that you say. Then have your child repeat the number.
- **Trace single digit numbers.** Write down a number and have your child use a finger to trace over it.
- **Play matching games.** Ask your child to hold up three fingers on each hand, and touch them together.



Source: "Math at Your Fingertips! Easy Counting Activities Using Number Gestures," Development and Research in Early Math Education, Stanford University.



How can I help my child get into the attendance habit?

Q: I haven't always been consistent about getting my four-year-old to preschool. For example, I have OKed staying home when my child has been caught up in play or a TV show. Now I realize that I have put a bad habit into motion. What can I do to fix this before kindergarten?

A: You are right that letting your child skip preschool on a whim sends the wrong message. It's best for your child to start kindergarten knowing that school is a non-negotiable part of the weekday routine. The elementary school will expect your child to be there, except for an excused illness or family emergency.

But in the end, absences from school do not cheat the school. They cheat a child of learning and make problems later on in school more likely.

To improve the attendance habit:

- **Make it clear that you are excited** about what your child is learning in preschool.
- **Explain that kids have to go to school** unless they or their family members are sick—really sick, not pretend sick.
- **Aim for regular attendance** for the rest of the school year.

Good luck! Habits can be hard to break, but ending this one is truly in the best interest of your child.



Are you encouraging careful listening?

From now until your child graduates, listening will be an important part of learning in school. Are you finding creative ways to help your child practice listening skills? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

1. **Do you tell** sentence-by-sentence stories together? You make up the first sentence, then your child makes up the next one, etc.
2. **Do you play** games that require careful listening, such as Simon Says?
3. **Do you give** your child two or three step directions? "Please go in the kitchen, get a spoon and bring it to me."
4. **Do you challenge** your child to mimic a rhythm you are clapping out?

5. **Do you go** outside and take turns naming the sounds you can hear with eyes closed?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are teaching your child to listen attentively. For each no, try that idea.

"The difference between hearing and listening is paying attention."

—Ruth Messinger

Demonstrate ways to care

Many character traits of successful students are based on a foundation of caring. Children who are caring use kind and respectful words. Because they care, they are reliable, responsible and honest. To foster a caring attitude in your preschooler:

- **Offer sympathy.** Show that you understand your child's feelings, even if they result in behavior you must correct.
- **Talk about the feelings of others.** "Your sister looks a bit sad. Do you think she might like to play with your cars?"
- **Use real-life examples.** If your child does something hurtful, talk about why it wasn't caring, and what to do instead. Give specific praise when your child acts in a caring way.

Include music in each day

Making music and listening to it supports creativity and a lot more—from pattern recognition to self-regulation, language and social skills. To enrich your child's day:

- **Play lively music** during family chore time to keep everyone moving.
- **Listen on the go.** Sing along to the car radio with your child.
- **Make up silly songs** together, and songs to help your child remember things.

Source: D. Wolf, "Why Making Music Matters," Carnegie Hall.

Mark time on a calendar

Help your child learn how to use a calendar to keep track of time.

Post a calendar in a visible spot. Explain that just like books, calendar pages are read from left to right. Let your preschooler mark special days with stickers. Then each morning, ask your child to cross off the day before. This helps your child learn that *yesterday* is over, and *today* has begun.



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