

# Helping Children Learn<sup>®</sup>

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School



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Early Intervention Program  
Midwestern Intermediate Unit IV

## You are a valuable player on your child's preschool team

Your child has a long school career ahead. And you have a big role to play in it. It takes teamwork between families and schools to help children learn and thrive.

To set the tone for teamwork and help ensure your child has the best possible year in preschool:

- **Stay up to date** on school news. Read everything that the school and your child's teachers send you. If you have questions or concerns, contact the director.
- **Inform the teachers** about your child's likes and dislikes, strengths and challenges, and any changes at home or situations that are affecting your child. You are the expert on your child, and sharing your knowledge helps teachers meet your preschooler's needs.
- **Make it clear** to your child that you and the teachers are on the same team. Don't say negative things about the teachers or the school in front of your child.
- **Follow routines at home.** Children are better able to learn when they have a regular time to eat, sleep, play, look at books, etc.
- **Encourage playing by the rules.** Talk about the rules at school and the reasons for them. Explain that rules keep people safe and make it easier for everyone to learn. Never tell your child you think a rule is silly.



## Support learning in everyday ways

Research shows that the more families engage with and nurture their children at home, the better those children do when they start school. To help your child develop into a healthy, happy student:

- **Play together.** Laugh and have fun with your preschooler. Play games and put together puzzles. Dress up in old clothes and put on a silly show. Stack a tower of blocks and knock it down. Sing along to favorite songs.
- **Make art.** Squishing clay, coloring and finger painting are educational activities for children. Put down some newspapers to control mess and let your child create.
- **Make fitness fun.** Play catch with your child. Climb at the playground. Skip and jump. At the same time, talk about what a good time you are having.
- **Show that you care** about learning. Ask your child questions about daily activities. Talk about things you are learning, too.

Source: K.L. Bierman and others, "Parent Engagement Practices Improve Outcomes for Preschool Children," PennState and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

## Reading boosts resilience

The events of the past two years have many families facing challenging circumstances. Reading aloud together is a great way to help your child cope—and also gain school skills. One recent study shows that reading aloud at home can triple children's resilience at school. When choosing things to read, go for variety. Introduce your preschooler to:

- **Fictional stories** that encourage your child to imagine.
- **Poetry** that rhymes.
- **Nonfiction books** that show that reading is a great way to learn new things.

If you aren't comfortable reading in English, don't worry. Reading aloud in any language improves children's reading readiness.

Sources: University of South Australia, "Reading builds resilience among at-risk kids," ScienceDaily; K.B. Roberts, "Reading's Best Language," UDaily, University of Delaware.

## Add listening to discipline

Preschoolers need rules and limits to learn how to behave. They also need loving discipline. When enforcing limits, allow some give and take. Your child has opinions. Take time to listen to them. Then stand your ground and stick to the rules.



## Sleep helps learning ability

Sleep helps your child control emotions, pay attention and remember material with accuracy. Preschoolers need 10 to 13 hours daily. To establish positive sleep habits:



- **Have your child** go to bed and wake up at the same time each day.
- **Make your child** feel safe. Allow a night light if your preschooler wants one.
- **Help your child** get plenty of exercise and fresh air during the day.



## Is critical thinking a skill I can help my child learn?

**Q:** I keep hearing about the importance of critical thinking for school. Is this something preschoolers can learn at home? What exactly does it involve, and what can I do to encourage it?

**A:** Much of critical thinking has to do with imagining, figuring and questioning. Most preschoolers do these things every day, naturally. So now is a great time to start helping your child strengthen these skills at home.

To promote critical thinking:

- **Ask questions** about your child's work. "What is the bird doing in your picture?" "Why did you decide to give the sun a face?"
- **Give your preschooler a chance** to try to solve problems. For example, if your child's shirt is on backward, stand in front of a mirror together. Say, "Uh-oh, where is the design on your shirt?" Allow your child time to realize what went wrong and take care of it.
- **Discuss the stories** you read with your child. Ask questions about the plot and the characters. Questions that inspire critical thinking start with phrases like, "How do you know that ...?" or "What might happen if ...?"
- **Provide time each day** for your preschooler to play alone with simple toys like blocks. This encourages your child to think creatively and experiment with new approaches when something doesn't work.



## Family meals feed minds

Regular family mealtime can do more than nourish your child—it can also support learning. To make the most of mealtime:

- **Plan together.** Let your child help you choose a menu and make a shopping list.
- **Cook together.** Let your child help measure ingredients and stir.
- **Prepare together.** Count utensils and show your child how to set the table.
- **Talk together.** Have every family member share one good thing about the day.



## Interact during screen time

Today's children are surrounded by screens—on TVs, phones, toys and more. It's important to fill your preschooler's day with lots of active, screen-free playtime. But you can also make screen use more productive. The key is your participation.

When you co-view screen media with your child and talk about it together, your child gets more out of it. Choose age-appropriate, educational content. Then help your child understand and apply the concepts. Face-to-face interaction with you strengthens bonds and encourages active learning.

Source: J. Garey, "The Benefits of Watching TV With Young Children" Child Mind Institute.



## Are you increasing your child's vocabulary?

The years between three and five are prime time for language development. Expanding your child's vocabulary now also boosts reading readiness. Are you helping your child learn and use new words? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you teach** your child new words that mean the same thing as familiar ones? When your child says "big cat," say, "Yes, it is *enormous*."
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you use** specific words for things rather than general ones when talking to your child (*zucchini*, not *vegetables*)?
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you play** word games together, such as pointing to an object and having your child name it?
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you explain** words and pictures when you read aloud with your child?

- \_\_\_ **5. Do you ask** your child to use words to describe feelings and sensations? (*Glad, chilly*, etc.)

### How well are you doing?

*More yes answers mean you are adding to your child's vocabulary. For each no, try that idea.*

"Good words are worth much, and cost little."

—George Herbert

## Spark interest in writing

Skill-building is more exciting when it's fun! To encourage your child's desire to write:

- **Create a special writing box.** Fill it with crayons, pencils, washable markers, lined paper and plain paper.
- **Make tasty letters.** Together, form the letters of your child's name from pieces of cooled cooked spaghetti or pretzel sticks.
- **Get sparkly.** Help your child use glue to write letters on paper. Shake glitter on top.

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