

Helping Children Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School



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Early Intervention Program
Midwestern Intermediate Unit IV

Encourage your preschooler to ask all kinds of questions

Preschoolers ask a lot of questions. And while that can sometimes be frustrating for parents to deal with, it's a very positive thing. Research shows that young children ask questions for three important reasons:

1. **To learn** about the world around them.
2. **To connect** with the people around them.
3. **To get permission** or help to behave appropriately.

When your child asks questions, he is not simply taking knowledge in, he is actively trying to engage and find out more.



To encourage your child to be a curious, active learner:

- **Play guessing games.** Ask your child to think of an object in the room that you can both see. Tell him you will figure out what it is by asking questions. "Is it a toy? Is it furry? Can you wear it?" When he understands the game, reverse roles and let him ask the questions.
- **Categorize.** Name a category, such as animal sounds. Ask your child, "What does a cow say?" "Which animal says *oink*?" If he answers correctly, it's his turn to ask you a question.
- **Read books** that contain questions, such as *Are You My Mother?* by P.D. Eastman. Point out that asking questions helps us learn things.

Source: S. Briggs, "The Importance of Kids Asking Questions," InformEd, Open Colleges.



Foster your child's artistic creativity

Creativity, problem-solving, spatial reasoning and self-expression are just a few of the things your child learns by making art. To aid the process:

- **Offer a variety** of supplies. Look for things around the house: fabric scraps, coffee filters, paper towel tubes, etc. as well as paper, crayons and glue.
 - **Set out newspapers** or a plastic sheet so it's OK if your child makes a mess.
 - **Ask questions** to help your child get started. If she wants to draw a rabbit but doesn't know where to begin, ask, "What are the different parts of a rabbit? What kind of tail does it have?"
 - **Ask your child** to tell you about what she's making.
 - **Be patient.** Some preschoolers don't like to get their hands dirty or sticky, for example. That's OK. Introduce new materials slowly.
- The process of creating matters more than the final product. Whatever the results, display your child's art proudly. Send it to relatives.

Involve your child when you read together

The more your child participates in your reading time, the more he'll get out of it. Here are some ways to encourage him:

- **Let your child choose** what you'll read. It's OK if it is the same book day after day.
- **Have him turn** the pages. Ask him to tell parts of familiar stories.
- **Ask him to make** sound effects. What does the train in the book sound like?
- **Give him time to ask** questions and make connections to things he knows.
- **Let your child set** the pace. If he wants to skip a few pages, that's OK.

Set up a few house rules

Creating family rules together is an effective way to help your child learn what is expected of her and how to behave properly. Talk together about the importance of having rules. Then discuss a short list of rules your family will follow.



Once you establish your rules, be sure to praise your child whenever she follows them. She'll soon realize that she gets more attention by behaving than misbehaving.

Make a visible time chain

Time is an abstract concept. Your child can't see it, hear it or touch it.



To help him understand the passage of days, make a paper chain to count down to a special event. Use one link for each day between now and the event. Then every night, have your child tear off one link. Explain that as the chain is growing shorter, so is the amount of time until the special day he is looking forward to.



How can I make outdoor exercise fun for my child?

Q: My preschooler is not the “outdoorsy” type. But I worry that she isn’t getting enough exercise in our apartment. The weather is starting to improve—can you suggest ways to promote outdoor fitness that won’t make her unhappy?

A: Getting outdoors gives your child more opportunities for gross motor activities like walking, running and jumping. These help her develop muscles that support her as she moves through her day, and give her the energy she needs to learn.

To make outdoor exercise appealing:

- **Put the emphasis on spending time together.** Say things like, “I just love being with you. Please keep me company while I take a short walk.” Or, “Let’s take go see if we can find any animal tracks at the park.”
- **Combine exercise with other activities.** Tell your child you are going outdoors to have fun counting—then count stairs as you climb them, sticks as you pick them up and put them in a basket, etc.
- **Play games** that involve movement. Classics like Simon Says are perfect. Take turns giving each other directions such as “Simon says run over and touch that tree.” This game also helps sharpen kids’ listening skills.



Foster community spirit

When you volunteer as a family, your child learns that her work matters to the people around her. For the best experience:

- **Talk about helping.** Police officers, fire fighters and librarians are all community helpers. Discuss how your child can also make a difference.
- **Choose a project** that your child will enjoy, such as cleaning up a park or making a recording of yourselves singing songs to send to a sick friend or neighbor.
- **Help your child recognize** the good feelings that come from helping others.

Head out for shadow play

Shadows are freely available in every shape and size, and experimenting with them is a fun way to help your child learn about light and space. On a sunny day:

- **Take a few** objects outside, such as a ball a block and a crayon. Move them in several ways, and have your child call out the shadow shapes he sees.
- **Have your child** hold a crayon and crouch down. What does its shadow look like? Now have him stand up and hold the crayon high over his head. Talk about how its shadow has changed.



Are you sticking with helpful routines?

Routines reduce stress and help children establish positive habits. Are you using routines to support health, communication and learning? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

- ___ **1. Do you maintain** regular sleep and wake-up times that ensure that your child gets enough rest?
- ___ **2. Do you read** with your child every day?
- ___ **3. Do you eat** at least one meal together each day? Fancy cooking isn’t necessary. Two-way conversation with your child is the key.
- ___ **4. Do you make** exercise a family priority? Find activities you and your child like, such as playing catch, moving to music or riding bikes.
- ___ **5. Do you give** your child a regular chore to do and a process to follow each time?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean your routines are helping your child learn and thrive. For each no, try that idea.

“Success is the product of daily habits, not once-in-a-lifetime transformations.”

—James Clear

Turn attention to emotions

Sometimes, parents are so busy helping their preschoolers learn and do so many things that the children’s emotional needs get overlooked. Take time to:

- **Appreciate** your child’s imagination.
- **Talk about** your child’s joys and fears.
- **Compliment** your child’s strengths.

Being around caring, respectful adults helps kids become caring, respectful students.

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