

# Helping Children Learn<sup>®</sup>

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School



January 2022

Early Intervention Program  
Midwestern Intermediate Unit IV

## Help your child develop skills that support success with reading

Parents of young children often worry if they see kids the same age whose reading readiness skills seem to be farther along than their child's. But preschoolers tend to develop these skills at different rates and comparisons aren't necessarily meaningful.

Instead, help your child build the skills that will help him learn to read. Here are several ways to do it:

- **Read aloud every day.** Read poems and stories and street signs and food labels. Include reading in all kinds of activities you do together.
- **Play word games.** Say, "I'm thinking of something that is red." See if your child can guess what you're thinking about. Or see how many words he can think of that rhyme with red.
- **Teach your child to tell left from right.** Show him how printed words are read from left to right across a page.
- **Help him learn to identify common shapes** like circles and squares. This is the skill he'll need in order to see the difference between the letter d and the letter b, for example.
- **Talk about beginning sounds.** Say a word like mailbox and emphasize the *mmm* sound. Say that *mmm* is the sound of the letter M. Have your child repeat the sound.



## Set resolutions together

New Year's resolutions teach your child that he can take action to improve himself or situations around him. Help him set a few to reinforce positive habits. He could resolve to:

- **Wash his hands** after coming inside, using the bathroom and before eating.
- **Be nice to classmates** who look sad or lonely.
- **Treat belongings** with care.
- **Talk to a trusted adult** if he needs help or is scared.

Source: "Healthy New Year's Resolutions for Kids," American Academy of Pediatrics.

## For fun building school skills, play board games

Playing age-appropriate board games with your child is a great way to help her practice math skills such as counting and develop her social skills at the same time.



Remind your child that nobody wins all the time. Make a point of cheering her on when she plays fair, follows directions and takes turns—not just when she wins.

Source: R.Y. Bayeck, "Examining Board Gameplay and Learning: A Multidisciplinary Review of Recent Research," *Simulation and Gaming*, SAGE Journals.



## Investigate the world of science

Research shows that kids who have more knowledge about the world when they enter kindergarten achieve more in elementary school science than kids who start with less. Harness your child's natural curiosity and help her:

- **Observe small details,** like the seeds in an apple or different kinds of tree bark. Have her draw pictures of what she sees and keep them in a "science notebook."
- **Learn about the weather.** Why do we feel colder when the wind blows?
- **Find out about states of matter.** Put some snow or ice in a pan. Bring it inside to show how the warm air melts it into water. Put the pan in the freezer and show how the cold air makes the water solid again.
- **Predict which plastic toys** will sink and which will float during bath time. Help your child test her theories.

Source: P.L. Morgan and others, "Science Achievement Gaps Begin Very Early, Persist, and Are Largely Explained by Modifiable Factors," *Educational Researcher*, SAGE Publishing.

## Model attentive listening

It may be tempting to tune your preschooler out when he's talking and talking and not making much sense. But giving him your full attention shows him how to be a good listener. To demonstrate:



- **Be patient.** It can take time for children to put their thoughts into words.
- **Ignore distractions** like your phone.
- **Ask questions** and restate your child's points to verify your understanding.



## Bedtime battles are wearing us out. What can I do?

**Q:** My preschooler is grouchy in the mornings and tired in the afternoons. But she resists going to bed every night. I know she needs more sleep to learn well. How can I make this easier for both of us?

**A:** Doctors recommend that four-year-olds get between 10 and 13 hours of sleep every 24 hours. Your child is showing signs of sleep deprivation. And you are right, lack of sleep can cause mood issues, problems paying attention and other learning problems.

To help your child establish healthy sleep habits:

- **Check her room** for toys or other distractions that may be keeping her awake. Remove screen devices, whose light can affect her sleep.
- **Count backward to bedtime.** If your preschooler needs to wake up at 7 a.m., count backward at least 10 hours. Then set bedtime an additional 15 minutes earlier so your child has time to fall asleep.
- **Create a soothing bedtime routine.** Spend the hour before your child's bedtime getting her ready for bed. Have her take a warm bath and brush her teeth. Play some soft, relaxing music. Talk about the best parts of the day. Read a bedtime story. Then kiss her good night and lights out.
- **Be consistent.** Your child may resist at first. Stick with your routine every night, and she'll likely adjust in a couple of weeks.



## Are you giving your child room to grow?

It's important to strike a balance between protecting your child and encouraging the independence that helps him learn and grow. Are you balancing safety and freedom? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you join** in your child's play often, and also ask him to play independently some of the time?
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you supervise** when your child plays with friends, but avoid hovering?
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you allow** your child to try to solve minor problems before stepping in to help?
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you show** interest in your child's opinions, and respect when you disagree?
- \_\_\_ **5. Do you let** your child make choices among options that are acceptable to you?

### How well are you doing?

*More yes answers mean you are fostering safe, independent growth. For each no, try that idea from the quiz.*

"Behind every young child who believes in himself is a parent who believed first."

—Matthew Jacobson

## Encourage decision making

As your child goes through school, she will make decisions that affect her education and her future (*Will I study for this test? Should I take the harder class?*) Providing lots of decision-making practice from now on will help her learn to make good ones. In addition to offering your child choices, you can:

- **Ask her advice.** "What should we make with this meat, tacos or hamburgers?"
- **Involve her in planning.** If your child will be meeting a friend to play, help her think of activities they could do.
- **Help her consider consequences.** "I know you want to watch that movie, but it's scary and it would upset you. Let's choose one that makes you feel happy."

## Loving care aids learning

Research shows that a nurturing home life can reduce the effects of adversity in early childhood on kids' ability to learn. Whatever your circumstances, nurture your child by:

- **Showing your love.**
- **Singing songs** together.
- **Reading together** and playing number and letter games.
- **Asking your child to help** the family, such as by doing age-appropriate chores.

Source: University of Maryland School of Medicine, "Low-income preschoolers exposed to nurturing care have higher IQ scores later on," ScienceDaily.

## Practice next-step thinking

Playing What Comes Next? with your child helps him learn to draw conclusions from what he sees. Make an observation about a task or situation, then ask him to tell you what comes next. When you are dressing to go out, for example, say "It's time to leave and it's raining. What do we need to bring with us?"



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Published in English and Spanish, September through May.

Publisher: Doris McLaughlin.

Publisher Emeritus: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.

Editor: Alison McLean.

Production Manager: Sara Amon.

Translations Editor: Victoria Gaviola.

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1-800-756-5525 • www.parent-institute.com • ISSN 1527-1005