

Helping Children Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School



September 2021

Early Intervention Program
Midwestern Intermediate Unit IV

For a great preschool year, help your child learn to love learning

After so much change last year, you may be wondering what this school year will bring. Keep in mind that in every learning scenario, the things your preschooler learns at home from you will have a big effect on her educational success.

One of the most important things you can do to help your child is to foster her enthusiasm for learning. When learning seems fun and rewarding, she will be motivated to keep doing it!

To nurture this feeling, keep three factors in mind:

- 1. Your child's interest level.** If you are helping your child learn about numbers, for example, pick an activity that's challenging, but not so hard that she'll want to give up. Or let her choose among several activities.
- 2. Independence.** Give your child chances to solve some problems for herself. Simple toys that promote creativity are great for this. If your child's block tower falls down, don't tell her how to fix it. Instead, ask, "How could you make it stronger?" Then let her do it her way.
- 3. Positive feelings.** While genuine, specific praise from you is helpful, you want your child to be encouraged more by the good feelings she gets from enjoying and succeeding with a task. When she does something well, ask "How do you think you did?" Then agree with her positive review.



Pretending to read is real practice

There's no better way to begin developing your child's literacy skills than by sharing books and reading together every day. In addition to reading to him, hand your child a book sometimes and let him pretend to read to you.

Pretending to read helps children build recall skills, print awareness and confidence—all critical elements of reading readiness. To help your child access these benefits:

- **Pick a book** with simple pictures and rhythmic or rhyming text.
- **Read it** to your child often.
- **Point out pictures** while you read and ask your child to tell you what they show.
- **Pause before reading** a repeated or rhyming word. See if your child can say it.
- **Omit more words** until your child is telling the story.
- **Ask your child** to "read" the story. Don't worry if he changes the words.

Source: C.M. Cassano and S.M. Dougherty, *Pivotal Research in Early Literacy: Foundational Studies and Current Practices*, Guilford Press.

Keep a dialogue going with your child

Research shows that chatting back and forth with your preschooler builds pathways in his brain that help him think and learn. Try to:

- **Discuss everything** you do together. Describe your actions and feelings. Encourage him to do the same.
- **Focus on words** and objects that your child is focused on at the moment.
- **Ask open-ended questions**, such as "What do you think that bird is saying?"

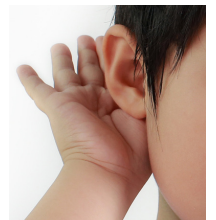
Then follow up on what your child says. Ask questions and add details. The more back-and-forth exchanges you have, the better.

Source: R.R. Romeo and others, "Beyond the 30-Million Word Gap: Children's Conversational Exposure is Associated With Language-Related Brain Function," *Psychological Science*, Association for Psychological Science.

Emphasize listening, too

Listening ability is just as vital for students as language skills. To encourage attentive listening:

- **Make eye contact** and smile when speaking to your child.
- **Explain that listeners** should stay quiet and avoid jumping around while others are speaking. Talk about why.



Routines are reassuring

Your child is experiencing new things every day. Following a morning and bedtime routine will help her feel more secure—and let her practice key skills and responsibilities.

Wake your child at the same time each morning. Have her eat breakfast, get dressed and brush her teeth. In the evening, help her choose clothes for the next day, wash up and put on pajamas. Then enjoy a bedtime story together.





How can I help my child catch up on social skills?

Q: Due to the pandemic, my son hasn't done a lot of playing with other kids. Now in preschool, his teacher says he either argues with or avoids his classmates. What can I do to help?

A: Your child is not the only one whose social skills haven't had much opportunity to develop. To make interacting easier for him:

- **Play with your child.** When he starts playing with his toys, join in. Encourage him to interact with you. Or think of a pretend game to play together. For example, the toy vehicles all have personalities and are going on an adventure together.
- **Talk with your child** about his experiences with other kids. If he says, "Anthony wouldn't play Superheroes with me," you could ask, "Did Anthony want to play something different?" Explain the importance of taking turns. You child could first play what another child wants to play, and then ask him to play what your child would like to play.
- **Consider scheduling** playdates with one classmate if conditions allow. Before a child can do well in a group, he must master one-on-one interactions. An outdoor get-together will let the children spread out. Keep it short and supply toys for each child. Don't forget to wash hands!



Are you easing separation anxiety?

For children who have spent the past year and a half almost entirely with their parents, separating—even for a few hours of preschool—may be challenging. Are you building your child's self-confidence and ability to handle new situations? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

- ___ **1. Do you listen** when your child expresses her feelings, and tell her you understand?
- ___ **2. Do you avoid** showing any anxiety or sadness you might be feeling?
- ___ **3. Do you talk** with your child about what she'll be doing while you are apart?
- ___ **4. Do you tell** your child when you will return, and make sure to arrive on time?
- ___ **5. Do you say** goodbye with a hug and a smile and avoid lingering?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are helping your child adjust to separation. For each no, try that idea.

*"The best preparation for tomorrow is doing your best today."
—H. Jackson Brown, Jr.*

Explore the world of math

Math isn't only for school. Show your child that math is all around him and it's a useful part of everyday life! Together:

- **Hunt for a "shape of the day."** Show your child a shape. "This plate is a circle. What other circles can we find?"
- **Estimate.** Say, "I think we can walk to the mailbox in 10 giant steps. Let's see." Then help your child count the steps as he takes them.
- **Point to numbers** you see on buildings, street signs, book pages and clocks. Talk about how numbers can help us find our way and keep track of many things.

Make paying attention fun

Children find it easier to pay attention to activities that interest them. So to develop your child's attention span, choose an activity she enjoys. Then look for ways to extend the time she's focused on it.

For example, if she likes story time, try reading a longer



story over a period of several days. Each day, remind her where you are in the story. Then explain that tomorrow you are going to read on to find out what the characters do next.

Exercise for body and mind

In a recent study, researchers found that a link between physical fitness and thinking ability—seen in older children and adults—is also present in preschoolers. In several tests, four-year-olds with higher cardio fitness scored higher on academic ability tasks.

Help your child forge this critical body and brain connection by making exercise and fitness a priority for your whole family.

Source: S.A. Key and others, "Six-Minute Walking Test Performance Relates to Neurocognitive Abilities in Preschoolers," *Journal of Clinical Medicine*, MDPI.

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