

Helping Children Learn[®]

EARLY CHILDHOOD

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School



January 2021

Early Intervention Program
Midwestern Intermediate Unit IV

Develop your child's self-control to boost school-readiness

It takes self-control to listen and concentrate and cooperate in a school setting. In kindergarten, teachers won't expect your child to behave perfectly all the time. But building his ability to control himself now will make learning much easier when he gets there.

To encourage self-control:

- **Keep surprises** to a minimum. Give your child a little advance warning when a big change is coming. He'll behave better if he has had time to get used to the idea.
- **Offer choices.** Allow your child to make decisions within acceptable limits. This gives him a sense of control and teaches him that he can't just do whatever he wants.
- **Provide comfort.** Giving your child a hug when he's upset lets him know that you care about his feelings. When he stops crying, encourage him to tell you what's wrong.
- **React calmly to tantrums.** Just remove your child from the situation until he calms down. Say as little as possible. Don't let him think that throwing a fit is the way to get your attention or get his way.
- **Reward mature behavior.** Praise your child when he handles frustration without falling apart, or says he is angry instead of throwing his toys.



Help confidence take off

A confident child believes he can learn and be successful at the things he tries. Encourage these signs of self-confidence in your child:

- **He likes himself.**
- **He is optimistic.**
- **He feels secure** around adults in his life.
- **He takes healthy risks.**



Graphs are math pictures

Graphing is a way of showing mathematical information in picture form. Taking a survey is a fun way to introduce your child to this skill. Here's how:

1. **Pick a question**, such as "Which is your favorite pet?"
2. **Have your child draw** a dog, cat, fish and bird at the top of a piece of paper.
3. **Help your child ask** family and friends which of the animals they like best.
4. **Have your child draw** a smile under the animal each person picks.
5. **See which animal ends up** with the most smiles.



The senses are sensational for learning

Preschoolers are curious people. Show your child that she can use her five senses—*sight, hearing, touch, smell* and *taste*—to find out more about things.

Give your child an apple. Then ask her five questions:

1. **What do you see?** Have your child examine the apple and describe it in words.
2. **What do you hear?** Have your child tap the apple with a spoon. What sound does it make?
3. **What do you feel?** When she touches the apple, is it soft or hard? If you cut it, does the inside feel the same as the outside?

4. **What do you smell?** Is the odor sweet? Sour? Flowery?

5. **What do you taste?** Have her take a bite and see.

Next, challenge your child to connect sensations. If she thought the apple smelled sweet, did it taste sweet, too? What sound did it make when she bit into it?

Be sure to remind your child that she should never put anything into her mouth without asking you first!

Start the new year right

A new year is the perfect time to recommit to supporting your child's learning. This year, resolve to:

- **Plan activities** that make learning enjoyable. Look for different shapes at the park. Use spoons to tap rhythms on kitchen pots.
- **Read together** every day. Set aside a regular read-aloud time, as well as quiet time to sit together and read or look at books.
- **Make time for sleep.** Your child needs 10-13 hours of sleep each night.





How can I prepare my child for kindergarten?

Q: My child has been at home with me this year, but I'm not a teacher. What should I be doing to make sure she's ready for kindergarten in the fall?

A: You can teach your child many skills—both academic and behavioral—at home that will prepare her for school.

Help her practice:

- **Expressing herself.** Ask her to talk about herself and her experiences. (If your child is an English language learner, contact the elementary school to find out about helpful resources.)
- **Following directions.** Play Simon Says. Or have your child find a "treasure" you've hidden by giving her instructions with several steps.
- **The alphabet.** Sing the alphabet song. Point out letters and words to your child. Help her write the letters of her name.
- **Counting,** sorting, recognizing patterns and other math skills.
- **Thinking.** Play guessing games with your child. Ask her opinion.
- **Getting along.** Role-play using polite words and taking turns.
- **Self-care.** Kindergartners need to be able to go to the bathroom, wash hands and put on coats by themselves.



Are you putting mistakes in perspective?

It's guaranteed: Your child will make mistakes as he learns. Everyone does. Making mistakes can also be an effective way to learn. Are you helping your child have a constructive attitude about mistakes? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

1. **Do you have** realistic expectations for your child? Then you won't be so critical that he gets discouraged.
2. **Do you talk** to your child about what you expect?
3. **Do you ask** if your child needs help when you see he's made a mistake or is having difficulty with a task?
4. **Do you tell** your child that everyone makes mistakes?
5. **Do you say** that errors give us chances to correct ourselves and get it right the next time?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are teaching your preschooler to see mistakes as things to learn from. For each no answer, try that idea.

"Mistakes are a sign of trying, and it is always better to try and fail than to fail to try."

—Robert Washington

Add enriching activities to your reading time

The more involved your child is when you read together, the more she will get out of it. When you read a story:

- **Have your child count** the trucks, ducks or other items on a page.
- **Ask her to point** to a certain letter or word each time she sees it.
- **Give your child a word** from the book and ask her to think of words that rhyme with it.
- **Encourage her to pretend** she's the main character and act out the action.

Veggie prints are smart art

Encourage creativity and boost observation skills at the same time! Have your child dip sliced vegetables—such as carrots, peppers, cucumbers and beets—into paint and then press them onto paper. Discuss what you notice about the patterns they make. Then let him use them to make patterns of his own.



Ask thinking questions

Answering questions about ideas strengthens your child's thinking skills. Here are a few to get you started:

- **What makes someone** a good friend?
- **If you could go anywhere—even** to a different time—where would you go?
- **What would you do** if you were invisible for a day?
- **When was a time** that you felt lucky?
- **If you could give** any gift in the world, what would it be?

Source: R. Lynette and C. Noack, "20 Questions to Ask Kids," Minds in Bloom, nswc.com/ask-to-think.

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