

Helping Children Learn®

EARLY CHILDHOOD

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School



November 2020

Early Intervention Program
Midwestern Intermediate Unit IV

Encourage interest in books and the way reading works

Children need a combination of skills and knowledge before they are ready to read. Reading with your preschooler helps his brain make critical connections that will help him learn to read himself. Here are four important ways you can support reading readiness:



- 1. Read aloud every day.** Listening to books exposes your child to words and the way they fit together into grammatical patterns. Making reading time an enjoyable occasion for the two of you will also build his interest in reading. Read a variety of materials, and let your child choose what you'll read sometimes.
- 2. Demonstrate how reading works.** As you open the book, say, "We read from the left side of the page to the right side of the page. Then we begin again on the left." Point to the sides of the page as you speak.
- 3. Point out letters.** Explain that each letter represents specific sounds. Talk about how the letters combine to make the words you are reading. Show your child familiar letters, such as the ones in his name. "Avenue starts with the letter A. That's the letter your name starts with, Alex."
- 4. Move on to words.** When he can recognize letters, look in the text for words your child will see over and over, such as *you*, *boy* or *love*.

Source: "Book Knowledge and Print Concepts," National Center on Early Childhood Development, Teaching and Learning, niscw.com/readyread.



Motor skills support academic success

Preschoolers love to move, but they need to learn to control their bodies to master certain skills. Research links motor skills to school success factors such as attention, following directions, impulse control and social skills.

Strengthening motor skills isn't complicated. There are lots of ways to do it at home. Have your child:

- **Pick up coins** off a table (super-vise this to avoid choking risk.)
- **Dress dolls** and action figures.
- **Finger paint.**
- **Roll and catch a ball.**
- **Squeeze and form clay** or play dough into shapes.
- **Cut with safety scissors.**
- **Build with blocks.**
- **Lace tennis shoes.**
- **Mimic animals** (hop like a bunny, balance on one leg like a flamingo).

Source: M. MacDonald and others, "Relations of Preschoolers' Visual-Motor and Object Manipulation Skills With Executive Function and Social Behavior," *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport*, Taylor & Francis.

Play time is learning time

Playing is one of the most important ways preschoolers learn. Fill your child's playtime with chances to:

- **Create.** Collect items like fabric scraps and cardboard tubes your child can use.
- **Build.** Encourage your child to experiment with blocks and see what happens.
- **Pretend.** Act out stories and imagine exciting, funny or sad situations.

Plan some quiet moments

Preschoolers often seem to have only two volume settings: loud and louder. Kindergartners, though, need to sit quietly and listen for short periods of time. To help your child practice:

- **Establish a signal,** such as holding a finger to your lips.
- **Use a code phrase,** like "Let's play the quiet game."
- **Sandwich quiet times** between periods of noisy activity. Let your child get her wiggles out, and say that she'll have another chance after quiet time is over.



Start teaching about time

Time management skills help students succeed in school. To introduce your child to the basics of these skills:

- **Set a timer** for activities sometimes. "Let's draw pictures for 10 minutes."
- **Make a large wall calendar.** Help your child mark certain days to remind him of regular activities. "We call Grandma on Saturdays."
- **Give your child an alarm clock.** Help him set it to allow plenty of time to get ready for breakfast.





How can I get my child to do more self-care?

Q: My four-year-old is perfectly content to be waited on. I'd like her to do more things for herself, but I'm not sure how to make this happen. What should I do?

A: Encouraging independence and responsibility is an important way to prepare your child for success in school. You can begin by assigning her some chores. Take her abilities into consideration—a job that's too hard may just frustrate her. Here are a few suggestions of age-appropriate tasks for preschoolers:

- **Getting dressed** by herself.
- **Putting away** books and toys.
- **Clearing her plate** after a meal.
- **Pouring a cup** of water or milk.
- **Preparing a simple** lunch, such as a cheese sandwich.
- **Hanging up her towel** after a bath.
- **Putting dirty clothes** in a hamper.



Keep in mind that your child may need help learning some of these skills. Show her the specific steps involved a few times, and stay nearby to answer questions when she attempts them herself. Don't get upset about mistakes or redo a task she doesn't get quite right—that can make her feel you are disappointed in her. And be sure to praise your child for her new skills and thank her for being responsible and helping the family.



Are you teaching the value of giving?

Preschoolers tend to be self-centered people. One way to help them learn to care about others and connect with them is through giving. Are you nurturing this positive social skill in your child? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

- ___ **1. Do you talk** with your child about the reasons for giving to others?
- ___ **2. Do you include** your child in activities you do to help others, such as collecting and donating items to charities?
- ___ **3. Do you help** your child make cards and gifts he can give to others for birthdays and celebrations?
- ___ **4. Do you make** giving to others a year-round family commitment, and not just something for holiday times?

- ___ **5. Do you praise** your child when he gives or shares?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean your child is on the way to becoming a person who cares for others. For each no, try that idea.

"No person was ever honored for what he received. Honor has been the reward for what he gave."

—Calvin Coolidge

Observe and learn outside

Grow your child's knowledge of the natural world by exploring an outdoor area near your home. To encourage her to observe and think about what she sees:

- 1. Say** "Let's find 10 things that we've never noticed before."
- 2. Take** pictures of the things she spots. "That's a beautiful pinecone!"
- 3. Look** at the pictures when you get home, and talk about what's in them.
- 4. Play** a game: Cover most of a picture and see if your child can guess what she's looking at. Then it's her turn!



Ask your child to describe

Show your preschooler a common object, and he can probably name it. To build his language skills further, ask him to tell you as much as he can about it. Ask questions like:

- **What color is it?**
- **What shape is it?**
- **What do we do with it?**

The goal is to have a conversation, so don't worry if he doesn't respond correctly. Just supply the answer and keep using the words he's learning.

Listen to the sound of music

Children love music, and sharing it with your child is a wonderful way to develop her listening skills. To promote listening:

- **Learn rhyming songs.** Ask your child to listen carefully to the sounds the words make. Can she guess the rhyming word?
- **Sing rounds.** In a round, each person sings the same melody, but starts at a different time.
- **Share favorites.** Ask your child to listen to the lyrics of a song you love so you can sing it together.

Helping Children Learn®

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.

Copyright © 2020, The Parent Institute®, a division of PaperClip Media, Inc.

P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474

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