

Helping Children Learn®

EARLY CHILDHOOD

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School



April 2020

Early Intervention Program
Midwestern Intermediate Unit IV

Use fun activities to teach letters and encourage interest in reading

Letters are the building blocks of words. Learning to recognize them is a critical step on your preschooler's path to reading and writing readiness. And when you provide a variety of creative ways to learn, your child's interest in reading is likely to grow along with his skills.

To teach letter recognition:

- **Play with food.** Create letters from tasty supplies such as circle-shaped crackers and small, straight pretzels. Let your child break up the foods to form letters, too.
- **Jump the alphabet.** Write letters on paper plates. Put the plates on the floor. Call out a letter and ask your child to jump on that plate.
- **Write with light.** Use the beam of a flashlight to draw a letter on a wall or ceiling in a dark room. Can your child follow the beam and figure out the letter? Take turns making letters and guessing.
- **Put pieces together.** Draw part of a letter, such as a circle or diagonal line. Let your child add to it, eventually making a letter, such as P or W. Offer hints as needed. Then switch roles and let him draw the first line.
- **Match big and small.** Write letters in uppercase and lowercase on a sheet of paper (start with the letters of your child's name). Have your child draw lines from each lowercase letter to its uppercase match.



Practice social communication skills

Children use their communication skills to establish friendships at school. Speaking to peers can be a challenge for shy children, who often don't say much—even when they have large vocabularies.

Research shows that knowledge of words doesn't always improve social communication. So if shyness is keeping your child from making friends, she may need to strengthen other communication skills. To help:

- **Role-play** having conversations. Remind your child to make eye contact and speak clearly.
- **Help your child read cues.** Pretend to be bored by what she's

saying. Does she notice? Say, "Did you hear me sigh when you kept talking? If someone does that, they are probably done listening."

- **Change the topic.** While chatting with your child, start talking about something else. Can she make the switch? Adaptability is key for social communication.

Source: "Building social communication skills in shy children helps with peer likeability," Yale-NUS College, niswc.com/ec_shy.

Care for the Earth together

On Earth Day, April 22, show your child that taking care of the planet is something everyone—even preschoolers!—can and should do. Teach him to:

- **Reduce.** Turning off the lights when he leaves a room reduces energy waste.
- **Reuse.** He can flip a piece of paper over and draw another picture.
- **Recycle.** Help him turn cardboard boxes and tubes into toy spaceships, telescopes, bowling pins, etc.



Avoid a praise problem

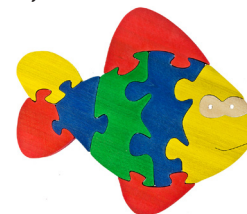
Studies show that praising your child's intelligence isn't the smartest idea. When children are frequently praised for being smart, they feel pressured to prove it—and are more likely to cheat. To keep your praise positive:

- **Avoid labeling your child.** If she feels her identity is tied to a label, like the "smart one" or the "athletic one," she may try to preserve it at all costs.
- **Focus on effort** instead of talent. "Yay! You kept looking until you found it!"

Source: L. Zhao and others, "Praising Young Children for Being Smart Promotes Cheating," *Psychological Science*, SAGE Publications.

Jigsaw puzzles develop thinking and concentration

The learning value in jigsaw puzzles makes them a great activity for your child. As he puts pieces together, your preschooler is building fine motor skills and learning to think logically and visually. Puzzles can also help lengthen children's attention spans. Start your child with simple puzzles of about eight pieces and move up at his pace.





How can I help my child learn to be a better sport?

Q: Losing a game, or not being chosen first, really upsets my daughter. I sometimes let her win to avoid dealing with her fits—which I know is wrong. What should I do instead?

A: It's disappointing when someone else wins or is chosen earlier. Disappointment doesn't feel good, but it's important to help your preschooler learn to accept it and move on. Here's how:



- **Talk about what it means to be a good sport.** Don't assume your child knows. Say that good sports respect fellow players. When they win, they don't gloat. When they don't win, they don't pout.
- **Let her experience losing.** No one wins all the time. When your child loses, help her put her feelings into words, rather than tantrums.
- **Acknowledge her feelings.** Let your child know you understand. Encourage her to say, "I'll try again another time." Then have her switch to a different activity for a while.
- **Emphasize effort.** Tell your child that win or lose, she can always feel proud if she's done her best.
- **Focus on the fun.** Games are meant to be enjoyable. Remind your child that if she has a good time playing, she's a winner.



Are you encouraging your child to care?

Caring is an important quality in a student. A preschooler who cares about people and things will be more likely to care about doing well in school. Are you encouraging your child to be caring and kind? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

- ___ **1. Do you set** an example of caring behavior by helping your child and others and showing them respect?
- ___ **2. Do you teach** your child to thank others, both in person and by writing notes?
- ___ **3. Do you encourage** your child to do acts of kindness for others, such as offering to share a toy?
- ___ **4. Do you help** your child consider others' feelings? "Jim seems sad to be alone. Let's ask him to join our game."

- ___ **5. Do you show** your child how to take care of living things, such as plants or pets?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are raising your child to be thoughtful and caring. For each no, try that idea.

"As the sun makes the ice melt, kindness causes misunderstanding, mistrust and hostility to evaporate."

—Albert Schweitzer

Prepare your child for responsible independence

Putting your preschooler in charge of doing some tasks on her own helps her learn the responsibility and independence she'll need in school. To set her up for success, try this four-step process:

- 1. Model the skill.** Have your child watch you do the task a few times.
- 2. Repeat it together** several times. You can each do part of it, or take turns.
- 3. Let your child solo.** Supervise, but let her handle the task herself. The goal isn't perfection; it is to make her feel capable.
- 4. Make the task routine.** Have your child perform it around the same time each day. Soon it will become a habit.

Everyone has a heritage

Sharing family history and traditions with your child helps him appreciate who he is. As you share what's special about your family, point out that other people have different backgrounds and traditions that make them special, too. Encourage your child to make friends with kids from other cultures. Help him appreciate their differences—and recognize the things they have in common.

Ask questions to prompt thinking about math

Children who succeed at math don't just memorize math facts. They learn to think mathematically. To get your child thinking in math terms, ask questions like:

- **How many are there?** Help her count items as she points to them.
- **Which is more,** your *whole* cookie or my *half* cookie?
- **What can you** see that is square?
- **How can we solve** this problem?



Helping Children Learn®

Published in English and Spanish, September through May.

Publisher: Doris McLaughlin.

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

Editor: Alison McLean.

Staff Editors: Rebecca Miyares & Erika Beasley.

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