

# Helping Children Learn<sup>®</sup>

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

EARLY CHILDHOOD



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Early Intervention Program

Midwestern Intermediate Unit IV

## Simple strategies can make your home a learning-rich environment

Your child may not be in a classroom yet, but she is learning from you all the time. And your efforts as your child's first teacher will have a long-lasting impact on her academic achievement.

One important way to help your child thrive in school is to provide a learning-rich environment at home. You don't need expensive products or special expertise. Just expose your child to literacy activities and educational materials, and interact with her in meaningful ways.

To create a learning-rich home:

- **Read together.** Cozy up and share stories. Point out new words. Run your finger under each line to show your child that text goes from left to right. Ask questions about what you read.
- **Choose toys that teach.** These should be toys your child actively plays with, rather than watches. Do puzzles to sharpen problem-solving skills. Use dominoes to help her learn about numbers. Role-play situations with dolls or puppets. Create art with crayons and paper.
- **Have lots of conversations** with your child. Discuss what is going on around her. Show her you care about what she's thinking and feeling. This teaches her to interact, builds her vocabulary and stimulates learning.



Source: C.S. Tamis-LeMonda and others, "Early home learning environment predicts children's 5th grade academic skills," *Applied Developmental Science*, Taylor & Francis.



## Use human characters as social models

Book characters provide useful examples for teaching kids about behavior. To encourage positive social skills, research suggests that books featuring human characters are more effective than those with human-like animals.

Why? Possibly because young children can "see themselves" in other people in a way they can't in animals. When a human character does the right thing, kids can relate. But they may not grasp what an animal's behavior has to do with them.

Here are a few titles to read with your child that feature humans demonstrating generosity, caring, honesty and friendship:

- **The Quiltmaker's Gift** by Jeff Brumbeau.
- **A Chair for My Mother** by Vera B. Williams.
- **The Empty Pot** by Demi.
- **Two Speckled Eggs** by Jennifer K. Mann.

Source: N.E. Larsen and others, "Do storybooks with anthropomorphized animal characters promote prosocial behaviors in young children?" *Developmental Science*, Wiley-Blackwell.

## Build math fundamentals

Building a block tower with you is fun for your child. It's also a great way to introduce him to the concepts of addition and subtraction. Ask your child to add a block to his tower, or to take away a block. Does the tower have *more* blocks now, or *fewer*? What if he adds or removes two blocks?



## Ask your child to predict

Making predictions based on what she knows builds your child's critical thinking skills. Have her make predictions about:

- **Experiences.** "What fruits will we see in the grocery store?"
- **Books.** Before you turn the page, stop and ask questions like, "What do you think will happen when Baby Bear sees his empty bowl?"
- **Routines.** "What will we do when we finish dinner?" "What do you think you'll need for your bath?"



Discuss the outcomes of your child's predictions, too. "You said you'd need soap. You're right! Soap helps you get nice and clean!"

## Strike a parenting balance

It can be a challenge to maintain discipline while encouraging your child's growth and independence. Experts advise parents to:

- **Set clear and appropriate limits.** "Hitting is never allowed. We use words like, 'I'm angry because ...'"
- **Give children opportunities** to be responsible and make choices.
- **Accept children for who they are.** Help your child feel good about himself and his strengths.

Source: K. Cherry, "Authoritative Parenting: Characteristics and Effects," Verywellmind, [niswc.com/balancing](https://www.verywellmind.com/balancing).



## My preschooler isn't always truthful. What can I do?

**Q:** My child doesn't seem to understand about honesty and lying yet. How should I react when he tells me something that I know isn't true?

**A:** At this age, children are still figuring out the difference between fantasy and reality. So when your son tells you something he wishes were true, he's not really trying to fool you. He's practicing make-believe, another part of his development.

Young children develop honesty over several years. To foster this trait:

- **Set an example.** Your child may not always do as you ask, but he will watch and mimic you. So don't let him catch you in a lie.
- **Speak truthfully for your child.** You see cookie crumbs on the table. If you ask your child if he ate a cookie without permission, he's likely to say *no*. Instead, state the truth: "I know you don't want to be in trouble. But there are cookie crumbs everywhere, including on your face. I think you ate cookies. It's OK to tell me."
- **Offer praise for honesty**—not punishment. Pushing your son to tell the truth will backfire if he gets into trouble when he does. Just say he did well to tell the truth. Then explain the behavior you want to see.

Staying calm about the truth will also pay off when your child is a teen. Knowing he can always be honest with you will help ensure his safety.



## Are you inspiring enthusiasm for reading?

The more your preschooler enjoys reading with you, the more likely she is to want to learn to read herself—and to enjoy doing it. Are you making reading together a pleasure? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

1. **Do you set up** pleasant reading routines, including relaxing with books before bedtime?
2. **Do you give** your child turns to choose what you'll read—even if she picks the same books repeatedly?
3. **Do you take** your child to the library often and give her plenty of time to browse and select books? Do you attend children's activities there?
4. **Do you look** for books about your child's interests?
5. **Do you add** expression when you read with your child, and make books come alive?

### How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are helping your child enjoy reading. For each no, try that idea.

"Reading is an adventure for the heart. It expands your mind and gives life more life."  
—Jennifer Williamson

## Leaping leprechauns!

Preschoolers love the fanciful elements of St. Patrick's Day. Try these holiday-themed learning activities with your child:

- **Read about leprechauns.** Try *Jack and the Leprechaun* by Ivan Robertson, or *How to Catch a Leprechaun* by Adam Wallace.
- **Hunt for gold.** Place gold stickers on five small items. Hide them in fairly easy-to-find places and encourage your child to look for them. Let him trade his "gold" for a green treat, such as cut-up grapes.
- **Stamp some shamrocks.** Cut the top off a green bell pepper. Press the cut end of the pepper into green paint. Let your child stamp it on paper. Have him paint a stem and then use crayons and glitter to decorate his shamrocks.

## Help your child have the confidence to wait

One way to help your child see herself as a capable person is to teach her that she is secure enough to wait. She deserves your attention, but not all of it all the time. Your child should frequently hear things like, "I need to finish reading this article. You will be fine coloring your picture while I do." The self-confidence she gains will help her feel ready to tackle other challenges.

## Create a school connection

Feeling a strong connection to school increases students' interest in learning. To foster your child's connection to preschool:

- **Encourage friendships** with classmates. Invite your child's peers to play at your home, or to meet at a playground.
- **Speak positively** about school activities. "It's neat that you have a class guinea pig. Your teacher wants the class to have fun learning about animals."



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