

Helping Children Learn®

EARLY CHILDHOOD

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School



May 2019

Early Intervention Program
Midwestern Intermediate Unit IV

Simple activities this summer can help ensure school readiness

The transition from preschool to kindergarten is exciting. Your child is really on his way! Make the most of the summer to help your child be as ready as he can be to start elementary school.

Kids do better in kindergarten when they are able to:

- **Express** themselves clearly.
- **Listen** and pay attention.
- **Cooperate** with others.
- **Understand** how books work.
- **Think** and solve problems.

To strengthen your child's skills:

- **Have lots of one-on-one conversations.** Encourage your child to talk and use new words. Ask him questions about things he sees during the day. Ask him to retell stories and name common objects.
- **Model sharing, respect and cooperation.** Take turns with your child using items. Listen attentively when he talks. Ask for his help.
- **Read together daily.** Let your child hold the books and turn the pages. Give him frequent opportunities to "read" to you, too.
- **Encourage curiosity and creativity.** "That's a great question!" "What could you use to make a garage for your toy car?"



Source: "Family Engagement and School Readiness: Building on Family Strengths to Promote Success," U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, nswc.com/readiness.



Experiment with light and shadow

Shadow play is a great way to help your child learn about measurement, time and space. Best of all, shadows are freely available in every possible size and shape! On a sunny day, grab a piece of chalk and a few small items, and head outside to a safe patch of pavement. Then try these ideas with your child:

- **Draw an X** on the sidewalk. Have your child stand on the X. Draw an outline of her shadow. Repeat at different times of day. Measure each of the shadows you draw. What can your child tell you about what she sees?
- **Hold up a few items.** As you turn them in the sun, ask your child to describe the changes in the shapes of their shadows.
- **Have your child** hold a crayon and crouch down. What does the crayon's shadow look like? Have her stand up and hold the crayon up high. What's the difference?
- **Read books** about shadows, such as *Moonbear's Shadow* by Frank Asch.

Source: "Fun at Home with Preschoolers: Play with Light & Shadow," Illinois Early Learning Project, nswc.com/shadowplay.

Enrich your read-aloud time

When you read aloud to your child, pause from time to time to include activities that develop his pre-reading skills. Help him:

- **Identify words that start** with the same sounds: *moon/muffin*, etc.
- **Identify words that rhyme:** *sit/fit*, etc.
- **Use the pictures** to make predictions about the story.

Help your child volunteer

Preschoolers are not too young to make a difference in the world! Volunteering with your child develops her concern for others. She'll also learn that her work matters. To teach her the importance of contributing to the community:

- **Read books and stories** about people making a difference around them.
- **Introduce your child** to "helpers" like police officers and librarians.
- **Select a project** or two to do together this summer. Match your child's interests—if she loves the outdoors, see if you can help clean up a park.



Give your child a chance to think about what to do

Giving your child an order—"Put your toys in the toy box right now!"—may result in your child doing what you say. But it doesn't do much to engage his brain.



Instead, try, "I am going to set the timer for three minutes. I want you to put away as many toys as you can before it rings." Now your child has time to think: "It's time to put the toys away. What should I put away first? Where should I put my toys?"

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How can I teach my child to play without me?

Q: I spend most of my weekends playing with my preschooler. We read, build with blocks, sing songs and play outside. I love our time together, but I want her to learn to play on her own, too. How can I make that happen?

A: By the time a child is four, she should be able to play on her own for short periods of time. In fact, kids often have their best creative moments when their parents aren't looking over their shoulders.

To encourage independent play:

- **Be there for your child** when it counts. If she really needs your attention, give it to her for a few minutes. Then suggest a fun activity she can do on her own. Like many children, your child may play alone best after spending some one-on-one time with you.
- **Fill a box or basket with special toys**, games and supplies. Bring it out only when you want your child to entertain herself. Include some favorite items, like picture books, toy animals or puzzles.
- **Work side-by-side.** If your daughter wants to be with you but you have tasks to do, give her some "work" of her own. If you are doing paper-work, give her a notebook and crayon. If you are cooking, give her some pots and wooden spoons to play with or clean kitchen towels to fold.



Are you planning a summer of learning?

A little advance planning will help you provide your child with a summer filled with opportunities for learning fun. Answer *yes* or *no* to the statements below to make sure you are covering all the bases.

My summer plans for my child include:

- ___ **1. Childcare.** Have you looked into camps and programs that offer a variety of activities?
- ___ **2. Reading.** Have you checked out the children's activities at the local library?
- ___ **3. Family outings.** Are you planning visits to museums as well as plenty of outdoor fun?
- ___ **4. Arts and crafts.** Have you stocked up on supplies such as construction paper, glue sticks and crayons?

- ___ **5. Unstructured time.** Are you allowing time for your child to play and just be a kid?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean your child's summer activities will help him learn and thrive. For each no, try that idea.

"A love of learning has a lot to do with learning that we are loved."

—Fred Rogers

Capture the summer in a special picture book

Summer is a perfect time to encourage your preschooler's interest in writing. To make it fun, help her create a picture book about all the new experiences she is having.

- 1. Give your child** a sheet of paper. Ask her to draw a picture of something that she did recently on the top half.
- 2. Have her describe** her picture to you. Write what she says on the bottom half of the paper.
- 3. Repeat all summer long.** Staple the pages together to make a special book you can read together again and again.

Source: B. Johnson, *Never Too Early to Write*, Maupin House Publishers.

Encourage perseverance

In kindergarten, your child will be expected to complete the tasks he's given. He won't be able to quit if he gets bored or frustrated. To help your child learn perseverance:

- **Let him struggle a bit.** If you always jump in to help, he won't keep trying.
- **Encourage him to think** about what else he could try to solve a problem.

Boost your child's powers of observation

One of the ways scientists discover new things is by carefully observing nature. Preschoolers are naturals at learning this way, too. To help your child practice:



- 1. Choose a nearby tree** to observe together. Take notes and have your child draw pictures of how it looks in summer.
- 2. Revisit the tree** in the fall, winter and spring, and observe again.
- 3. Compare your notes** and pictures, and talk about the seasonal changes.

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