

Helping Children Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School



April 2019

Early Intervention Program
Midwestern Intermediate Unit IV

Explore the senses of taste and smell with your preschooler

It's easy to see how your child uses her eyes, ears and fingers to learn all the time. But her senses of taste and smell also provide important ways for her to experience and learn about the world.

These two senses are so closely connected that sometimes we don't notice which we are using. To have some fun learning more about smell and taste together:

- **Keep track of things** you and your child smell for a day. See how many items she can recognize just by smell, such as flowers, food and clean laundry. Teach her words to describe what she smells, such as *floral* or *spicy*.
- **Try to identify foods** by how they taste and smell. Have your child close her eyes and hold her nose. Place a small amount of fruit on her tongue. Can she tell what it is? Now, have her smell the food with her eyes still closed. Is it easier to guess?
- **Experiment with salt.** Salt can make sweet foods taste sweeter. Make a cup of hot chocolate with milk, cocoa powder and sugar. Then make another cup, adding a pinch of salt. Which tastes sweeter?
- **Share a fun fact** with your child: Different parts of the tongue taste certain things better. For example, the tip is sensitive to sweet tastes. The middle senses salty and sour best. And the back detects bitter best.



Encourage your child to take pride in schoolwork

When your child brings home work she has done in preschool, show her that her accomplishment matters to you!

- **Ask her to tell you** about it. How did she do it? What does she like about it?
- **Offer specific feedback.** Describe her work. "You glued the pasta neatly and made a great number 4. I recognized it right away!"
- **Proudly display her work.** Put it on the refrigerator or share it with relatives.



Strengthen language skills

Practicing oral language skills with your child helps prepare him to learn to read. Make it a point to:

- **Talk face-to-face.** This lets your child see the facial expressions that go with different ways of speaking.
- **Have him focus on you** when you are talking. Sometimes, ask him to repeat what you said.
- **Have him follow directions.** Start with a one-step direction, then move on to two steps. "Please take off your coat and hang it up."



Share appreciation for other cultures

Introducing your child to people and traditions from other cultures and countries helps him learn to get along with classmates who are different from him. To help him relate to other cultures:

- **Make a collage** together. Use magazine and newspaper photos of kids your child's age who are from other parts of the world.
- **Try traditional foods** from other cultures. Visit restaurants with your child, or look for recipes in cookbooks at the library.
- **Listen to children's songs** from many lands, such as those recorded by singer Ella Jenkins.
- **Read poems and stories** from a variety of cultures and countries, such as those collected by Floella Benjamin in *Skip Across the Ocean*.
- **Find books** that give familiar stories an international flavor, like Niki Daly's *Pretty Salma*, a version of the Little Red Riding Hood story set in Ghana, and Tomi dePaola's *Adelita*, a Cinderella story set in Mexico.

Talk trash with your child

April 22 is Earth Day. To teach your preschooler the value of protecting the environment, talk about something she understands—trash. She knows to put trash in the garbage can, but what happens next?



Explain that garbage trucks collect trash and haul it to a big dump, called a landfill. Then, talk about things people can do to keep landfills from getting too full, such as reusing things or recycling.



How are consequences different from punishment?

Q: I've heard that I should use consequences instead of punishment when my child misbehaves. But what's the difference?

A: At first, punishment and consequences may seem similar. But there are some significant differences.



Punishment is often:

- **Handed down in anger.** "You drew on the wall. Go to your room!"
- **A response to multiple offenses.** "You spilled the milk and left your blocks out—and now this! You have to learn not to be so messy."
- **Unrelated to your child's action.** How does going to his room relate to drawing on the wall?

Consequences should:

- **Show understanding.** "I know you feel bad about making art where you weren't supposed to."
- **Focus on one incident.** Don't bring up past mistakes.
- **Relate to the misbehavior.** "Now I can't take you to the park because we need to fix the wall. Help me wash it so I can repaint it."
- **Help your child learn** from his mistake. "If I draw on the wall, it will have to be fixed. That takes time, and I miss doing something fun."



Are you filling play time with learning?

It's easy to fill play time with learning—and you can do it without your child ever knowing. Are you giving your child frequent opportunities to learn through play? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

___ **1. Do you talk** and listen to your child while playing together?

___ **2. Do you teach** your child new games and look for new and different places to play?

___ **3. Do you help** your child develop large and small motor skills with activities such as running, jumping, coloring and putting together puzzles?

___ **4. Do you encourage** good manners by having her share, take turns and say *please* and *thank you* when playing?

___ **5. Do you make** time daily to read books your child enjoys?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are making play time enriching for your child. For each no, try that idea.

"Children learn as they play. Most importantly, in play children learn how to learn."

—O. Fred Donaldson

Go outside for learning fun

Experts say that playing outdoors with friends develops children's brains as well as their muscles. Let your child invite a friend or two to play in your yard or at a local park. Supervise to ensure safety, but give the kids chances to figure things out on their own. They'll learn:

- **Creativity.** Pretend play is creative thinking. Sticks become horses to ride!
- **Problem-solving.** Three children and only two sticks? Encourage them to think up a solution.
- **Social skills.** Your child will learn how to include others in his play.

Source: R. Pica, "Take it Outside!" Earlychildhood NEWS, nswc.com/ec_outdoorplay.

Words boost math skills

There's more to math than numbers!

Positional words, such as *above*, *below*, *inside* and *outside* are often used in math to describe mathematical relationships. To practice positional words with your child, ask her questions about the positions of everyday things. Is the dog *in front of* or *behind* the bowl? Does the sandwich filling go *between* the slices of bread or *around* them?



Create a special study nook

How can you increase your child's interest in learning? Give him a special place to do it in! Preschoolers love small, comfy spaces. To create a study nook:

- **Choose a small area** in your home.
- **Make it inviting.** Put down pillows. Stock it with crayons, paper and books.
- **Enjoy special "learning time"** together in his spot. Read, draw, make and use flash cards. Help your child practice writing letters and his name.

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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.

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

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