

# Helping Children Learn®

EARLY CHILDHOOD

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School



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Early Intervention Program  
Midwestern Intermediate Unit IV

## Use manipulatives to show your child the meaning of numbers

It makes parents proud to hear their preschoolers count to 10. But there's more to learning math than reciting numbers. Children also need to understand what numbers represent.

One way to help your child grasp the meaning of numbers is to use objects—called *manipulatives*. Manipulatives don't have to be fancy. In fact, research suggests that simple items work better than toys, which your child connects with other kinds of play.

Here are some activities to try:

- **Put some popsicle sticks** on the table. Ask your child, "How many are there?" Help him touch each one as you both count aloud. Rearrange them and have him count again—there are the same number! Now, remove a few and count. Talk about how taking away some sticks makes the remaining number smaller.
- **Write the numbers 0 to 10** on index cards (one number per card). Give your child some stickers. Ask him to attach the matching number of stickers to each card. Can he put the cards in numerical order?
- **Ask your child to arrange** several objects from *biggest* to *smallest*. Then ask him to arrange them from *smallest* to *biggest*.

Source: D.T. Willingham, "Ask the Cognitive Scientist: Do Manipulatives Help Students Learn?" *American Educator*, [nswc.com/mani](http://nswc.com/mani).



## Teach the responsible order of things

When teaching your preschooler about responsibility, it's important to stress the idea that people need to finish their work *before* they play. Using the phrase "*when ... then*" can help her make the connection.

For example, you might say:

- **When you are dressed** for preschool, *then* you can have breakfast.
- **When you put** your jacket on, *then* we can go out to play.
- **When you pick up** your dolls, *then* you can play with the puzzle.
- **When you brush** your teeth, *then* we can read a story.

In time, your preschooler will recognize *when ... then* as a cue to fulfill her responsibilities so that pleasant things can happen. When she completes a task, be specific with your praise. Say something like, "Thank you for taking care of your books and putting them on the shelf. I bet you feel proud that you can do it by yourself."

Source: A. McCready, *If I Have to Tell You One More Time...*, TarcherPerigee.

## Promote a love of school

Building enthusiasm for preschool is a great way to help your child see education as enjoyable. To promote this idea:

- **Spend time** every day talking about school. Ask your child what he liked most about his day.
- **Help your child** make friends with classmates. Let him invite one to join your family in an activity.

## Guide your child's behavior

Preschoolers are learning what adults expect of them. To encourage good behavior:

- **Involve your child** in making a short list of family rules and the consequences for breaking them.
- **Be firm, fair and consistent.** Enforce your rules in a respectful and loving way every time your child misbehaves.
- **Offer choices.** Your child may fuss if you tell her she has to eat vegetables for dinner. Instead, ask, "Would you like to eat broccoli or carrots?"
- **Reward good behavior** by giving your child positive attention.



## Listen for the sounds of spring together

Help your child detect welcome signs of spring, such as the return of many animals. If you listen, you may hear the signs before you see them. Listen for the chirping of birds as they come back to your area. You may also hear the "ribbit" of the frogs and the sounds that different insects make. Listen for the sounds in the morning and right before your child goes to bed.





## How do I know if my child is well enough for preschool?

**Q:** My preschooler sometimes complains that she feels sick when it's time to go to school. I can't always tell if she really doesn't feel well, or if she just wants to stay home. She often feels better by mid-morning. What should I do?

**A:** You can't always be 100 percent sure that your child is—or isn't—sick. Make sure she gets regular medical checkups, and call the doctor if you are really concerned. But if your daughter shows no other signs of illness, try this:



- 1. Offer your child a choice.** She can either go to preschool or stay at home in bed getting well. Let her know that if she chooses to stay in bed, there will be no getting up and playing around the house.
- 2. Offer sympathy.** If your child really doesn't feel well, she needs you to love and take care of her. But don't overdo the special attention. The point is to create an environment where she can get well, not one that is so rewarding that she prefers being sick to going to preschool.
- 3. Monitor the situation.** If your child announces that she feels better a little later, tell her that you are glad. She can get up and go to preschool for the rest of the day, or continue to stay in bed. Tell her that you hope that tomorrow she'll be completely healthy and ready for school.



## Are you encouraging your child to think?

Critical thinking skills are something children develop with practice. Your child is the right age to start! Are you helping your preschooler be an active thinker? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

- 1. Do you ask** your child to retell stories in his own words and to make up his own stories about things he sees?
- 2. Do you ask** your child to tell you about his activities in sequence: What happened first, next, etc.?
- 3. Do you encourage** your child to compare and sort items by size, color, texture and shape?
- 4. Do you offer** your child choices among several acceptable options?

- 5. Do you ask** your child for his ideas and opinions?

### How well are you doing?

*More yes answers mean you are helping your child practice thinking skills. For each no, try that idea.*

*"The pleasures arising from thinking and learning will make us think and learn all the more."*

—Aristotle

## Start your child on the path to good decisions

As your child goes through school, the choices she makes—whether or not to obey rules, finish homework, etc.—will affect her education and her future. To begin teaching her to make good choices:

- **Encourage** your child to plan. For example, ask her to plan what to do when a friend comes over.
- **Ask** for your child's advice. You might ask her which of two outfits she thinks you should wear, given the day's weather. Wear the outfit she chooses.
- **Give** reasons if you must overrule a choice your child has made. "I know you'd like to watch that movie, but it's scary and it would upset you. When you are older, we'll consider it again."

## Stick to timely routines

Routines help children establish positive habits. Your child will be ready for school on time if you make sure he has an evening routine. Have him do as many morning readiness tasks as possible before going to bed in time to get plenty of sleep. To discourage dawdling in the morning, set a timer and challenge your child to "beat the clock."



## Support early reading skills

Parents sometimes get anxious if their children's reading skills lag behind some of their peers'. Don't worry—children learn to read at different rates, and your child will get there! To foster her reading skills:

- **Read stories and poems** together every day. See if she can act them out.
- **Play word games.** Say, "I'm thinking of a word that rhymes with *red*. Can you guess what it is?"

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