

# 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

## Learning self-control prepares preschoolers for school success

Not all of the skills your preschooler will need when she gets to elementary school are academic. She will have a much easier time there if she can do things like wait her turn, follow directions and express her feelings in appropriate ways.

Kindergarten teachers don't expect perfect behavior from five-year-olds. But by helping your preschooler develop self-control now, you'll ensure that she is ready to do her best when she starts school.

Help your child learn how to:

- **Express her feelings** without losing control. If you see your child beginning to get upset, ask her to tell you how she feels. Help her vent her emotions in safe ways, such as by drawing a picture.
- **Wait for what she wants.** Teach your child that just because she wants something, it doesn't mean you should stop what you are doing to give it to her right this minute. Say, "Unless you are hurt or something dangerous is happening, please wait until I am finished talking to Grandma."
- **Put work before play.** Give your child responsibilities to fulfill before she gets to play. "Please put your blocks back in the bin. Then we can go outside and swing."



## Strike up a stimulating conversation

Talking with your child is an important way to build his language skills. Research shows that the back-and-forth of conversations with adults activates children's brains and improves their vocabulary and verbal abilities.

So don't just talk *to* your child—encourage him to respond. To keep the conversations going:

- **Be an active listener.** Do more than acknowledge your child's words. Add details and ask questions. "You see a dog? He has enormous ears! What do you think he's up to?"
- **Follow your child's lead.** Talk about things that interest him.

Focus on the words and objects he's focusing on at the moment. "I see you are playing with your toy car. Where is it going?"

- **Chat about everything** you do together. "We put pants on before we put on shoes. Do you know why?"

Source: R.R. Romeo and others, "Beyond the 30-Million-Word Gap: Children's Conversational Exposure Is Associated With Language-Related Brain Function," *Psychological Science*, [niswc.com/converse](http://niswc.com/converse).

## Reach out to the teachers

Regular communication with your child's preschool teachers helps all of you support her learning. Let the teachers know about situations or events at home that may affect your child at preschool (such as a new baby or a move). Tell them about how preschool is affecting your child's home life, too. Ask often about what your child is learning and how you can help at home.

## Let leaves lead to learning

Take advantage of autumn's colorful supply of fallen leaves to have some learning fun with your preschooler. Together:

- **Go outside** and collect different types and colors of leaves. Help your child sort and count them.
- **Make leaf rubbings.** Put a leaf under a sheet of paper. Let your child rub the paper with a crayon and watch a leaf appear.
- **Have a leaf hunt.** Hide a leaf indoors. As your child searches for it, tell him when he's getting *hotter* (closer) or *colder* (farther away).



## Use art to strengthen your child's attention span

A strong attention span not only helps kids stay focused on an activity, it enables them to return to it later and refocus. To work on these skills with your child, try a multi-step art project, such as making a clay animal:

1. **Help her shape** an animal out of clay. Allow the clay to dry and harden.
2. **Have your child paint** her animal, then put it aside to dry.
3. **Help your child** apply fur or eyes using glue and yarn or bits of paper.





## How can I convince my preschooler to keep trying?

**Q:** My son is willing to try new activities, but as soon as one gets challenging, he quits. How can I teach him to stick with it?

**A:** No one is good at everything the first time they try. But with some perseverance, children can learn and get better at almost anything.

To encourage your child to persist:

- **Think about what makes** your child tick. Does he love to explore outside? Does he hate to sit still? He may be more willing to count squirrels in the park than coins on a desk.
- **Help your child plan for success.** If he wants to learn to ride a scooter, what smaller steps will he have to take (learn to balance on one foot, steer, etc.)? If he struggles with a step, be his cheerleader. Say you know he will get it. Success with one step can motivate him to keep going.
- **Give him chances to practice.** When kids have opportunities to push through challenges, they see that it's worth the effort. Keep providing low-key ways for him to work on skills. Praise his progress.
- **Set an example.** Don't make everything you do look easy. Show your child that you too must keep trying and stick with difficult tasks. Send the message: "I'm not going to give up until I get this done."



## Are you making reading interactive?

Reading aloud with your child helps her prepare to read herself. And the more your child participates, the more she benefits. Are you making the most of your read-aloud time? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

1. **Do you allow** your child to choose books to read together, even if you've read them many times before?
2. **Do you encourage** your child to point out and discuss what she sees in the pictures?
3. **Do you pause** while reading to ask your child questions about the story?
4. **Do you encourage** your child to ask questions and talk about the book?
5. **Do you ask** your child to supply rhyming words or

repeated refrains in the story, and to retell favorite parts?

### How well are you doing?

*More yes answers mean you are actively engaging your child with reading. For each no, try that idea.*

*"Books are the quietest and most constant of friends ... and the most patient of teachers."*  
—Charles W. Eliot

## Boost responsible thinking

Preschoolers often have their own ideas about what to do. But to succeed in school, they will have to think independently *and* act responsibly. To teach your child to make responsible choices for himself:

- **Assign a regular chore.** Give your child a few choices and let him choose one. Show him how to do it, supervise a few times, then let him try it on his own.
- **Offer reasons.** Tell your child why you want him to do a task. "We put books back on the shelf so they won't get damaged and we can find them next time."

## Create a book that celebrates learning

Preschoolers enjoy learning activities that give them a sense of accomplishment. Making a "Things I Know" book lets your child see how far she's come.



1. **Help your child think** of things she has learned (the letters in her name, how to dress herself, different shapes).
2. **Have her draw pictures** of the things she knows on sheets of paper.
3. **Staple the pages** to make a book and let your child "read" it to you.

## Make screen time positive

To make sure your child benefits from using digital media—without spending too much time with screens—experts recommend that you:

- **Limit** screen time to one hour per day.
- **Choose** educational TV programs, and digital books without a lot of distracting special effects. Avoid violent content.
- **Take part** when your child watches TV or uses electronics. Discuss what you see.

Source: "Healthy Digital Media Use Habits for Babies, Toddlers & Preschoolers," American Academy of Pediatrics, [nswc.com/ec\\_healthy-digital](http://nswc.com/ec_healthy-digital).

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