

Helping Children Learn[®]

EARLY CHILDHOOD

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School



May 2018

Early Intervention Program
Midwestern Intermediate Unit IV

Boost your preschooler's inner motivation to learn

Offering children prizes can motivate them in the short term. But their desire to learn and achieve is more lasting when they are motivated from within. Experts say that three things feed this kind of internal motivation in children: feelings of competence, independence and connection.

To develop these feelings in your child:

- **Allow her to do things for herself.** Give her some instructions to start her off: "We put on pants one leg at a time." Then, wait until she asks for your help before offering it.
- **Offer her choices.** Let her decide which of two chores to do, or which of two ways she will do a task. Too many choices can be overwhelming, but choosing between two options increases feelings of independence.
- **Give her opportunities** to master challenges. When she learns to ride a scooter, build a sandcastle or put her clean laundry away, she feels competent and powerful. That can motivate her to face future challenges.
- **Reinforce her sense** of accomplishment. Your child cares what you think. But it matters what she thinks, too. Sometimes, ask "How did that feel?" instead of saying "You did great." Agree with her positive reactions. Say, "You must be proud of yourself!"



Source: E. Kennedy-Moore, Ph.D., "Teach Your Child to Love Learning: Keys to Kids' Motivation," PBSparents, nswc.com/cac.



Fill the summer with reading activities

Building your child's reading readiness is a year-round activity. To ensure that his language skills continue to grow over the summer, make reading activities part of your family's plans. Allow plenty of time for:

- **Daily reading.** Take advantage of lovely weather and vary the places you read. Let your child find a shady spot in the park to relax with some books. He will learn that he can read anywhere!
- **Visits to the library.** A weekly trip will give your child a constant stream of new reading material to keep reading exciting. Let him check out some old favorites, too.
- **Building vocabulary.** Talk about the things you do with your child. Each day, teach him at least one new word.
- **Listening to audiobooks.** This is a great way to make travel time go faster. It also helps develop your child's language skills.
- **Looking for words** around you. Point out words your child sees on signs.

Put non-screen options first

To keep your preschooler's screen time under control, create a list of entertaining alternatives. Include things like reading, doing a puzzle, dusting with a feather duster, jumping to the beat of lively music, and so on. When your child says, "I'm bored," have her choose an activity from the list instead of letting her use a screen device.

Try more fun ways to learn

Engage your child in learning all summer long! Try these activities together:

- **Classify** things. Say, "A fan can cool you down when you're hot. What other things can cool you down?"
- **Play board games** and card games. They help your child learn number skills and good sportsmanship.
- **Practice writing** in new ways. Let your child write his name on the sidewalk with chalk or use water to "paint" it.
- **Collect rhyming words.** Encourage your child to rhyme one-syllable words such as *cat* or *man*.



Stick with helpful routines

Following daily routines over the summer will make it easier for your child to readjust to the structure of a preschool day. Include:

- **Meal times.** Try to have meals around the same time on most days.
- **Outdoor time.** Go outside in the morning before it gets too hot.
- **Quiet time.** Plan a rest time after lunch.
- **Work time.** Have your child do daily age-appropriate tasks, such as putting toys away.



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How can I ease my child's transition to kindergarten?

Q: My son just turned five and will be starting kindergarten in the fall. What should we do this summer to help get him ready?

A: The move to kindergarten is a milestone in a child's life. To prepare your child for the transition, consider some of the major changes he will face. These include:

- **Transportation.** Will your child be walking or taking the bus to school in the fall? Get him used to his new route. Walk to school or the bus stop several times this summer. Take a bus ride if you can so he will know what that is like. Talk about bus safety rules.
- **A new sleep pattern.** If your child is used to resting during the day, full-day kindergarten will be a big change. For most kids, an early bedtime will be necessary to make up for the lack of a nap. Set a regular bedtime now that allows him to get at least 10 hours of sleep each night.
- **A new building.** Give him chances to see the elementary school from the inside. Attend a kindergarten orientation if possible. Call the school office over the summer to see if you and your child can take a tour. And plan to go to the open house before school starts so your child can meet his teachers and see his classroom.



Do you encourage scientific thinking?

Preschoolers make great scientists. They love to ask questions and learn about how the world works. Are you showing your preschooler how to think like a scientist? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

___ **1. Do you help** your child observe things in her environment? "Look at that ladybug. Let's count its spots."

___ **2. Do you ask** your child to sort things, such as clothes, toys or cans of food?

___ **3. Do you ask** your child to make predictions based on what she knows? "How do you think that squirrel will get down from the tree?"

___ **4. Do you do experiments** together? Look online or in the library for science projects for preschoolers.

___ **5. Do you help** your child draw conclusions? "Rain comes from the clouds. Where do you think snow comes from?"

How well are you doing?

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

"All the world is a laboratory to the inquiring mind."
—Martin H. Fischer

Develop academic skills

Every new thing your preschooler learns—from new information to new skills—adds to his "bank" of knowledge. This summer, help your child learn more about:

- **Language arts.** Build his mastery of the alphabet in many ways—by singing, writing and reading.
- **Math.** How many shapes does your child know? Have him point to all the rectangles or circles he sees. Count them together. Can he spot a triangle or a cube?
- **Opposite words.** Practice using words such as *above* and *below*, *together* and *apart*. To make this a game, try naming and demonstrating opposites. "This cup has *less*. This cup has ____ (*more*)."

Work together on discipline

Don't think of discipline as you against your child. Instead, foster teamwork and cooperation. If she is bouncy when you want her to focus, for example, you can say "Let's be silly for two minutes before we have to calm down."



Spend time on activities that build attention span

Children aren't born with a fixed attention span. They can learn to pay attention for longer periods. To help your preschooler strengthen his powers of concentration:

- **Have him look at a detailed picture** in a book for a minute or two. Remove the picture and ask him to tell you everything he can remember about it.
- **Set a timer for 10 minutes.** Give your child an activity he can do by himself, such as drawing. Ask him to do it until the timer rings. Help him work up to 15 or 20 minutes of independent play.

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