

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

Social skills are key for school readiness and future success

Developing your preschooler's social skills is an important part of getting him ready for kindergarten—and his later school career. Recently, researchers in Baltimore found that kindergartners whose social-behavioral skills were "classroom ready" were less likely to be held back in third grade than kids with less-developed early skills.



To build your child's social skills:

- **Practice common social interactions.** Teach your child to greet people with *hello* and say *goodbye* before parting. Encourage him to look you and others in the eye during conversation.
- **Help him identify feelings.** Is he sad—or is he really jealous, disappointed or frustrated? Increasing your child's vocabulary of emotions is a step toward helping him recognize these emotions in other people.
- **Talk about how others feel** in certain situations. Discuss how to respond appropriately. For example, teach your child to apologize if he has hurt someone, even accidentally.
- **Model patience.** Let your child see you listening to others before you speak or allowing someone to go ahead of you in line.
- **Encourage helping.** Expect your child to pitch in at home in age-appropriate ways.

Source: "New Study Shows Social-Behavioral Readiness in Kindergartners Impacts Long-Term Success," Newswise, niswc.com/ecsel.



Help your child think about time

Time is an abstract concept. Because your child can't see it, hear it, smell it, touch it or taste it, she needs to use her higher-order thinking skills to understand it. Here are some ways to introduce your child to the concept of time:

- **Hang a calendar** in her room. Show her how to read the days from left to right. Each morning, let her cross off the previous day.
- **Help your child mark** special days, like the day of an upcoming outing, with a sticker. Then, count down to that day by making a paper chain with one link for each day. Each night, your child can tear off one link. Explain that just as the chain gets shorter, so does the amount of time before her trip to see the zebra at the zoo.
- **Use time-related words** in your conversations. "*Tomorrow*, in the *morning*, you will go to preschool. In the *afternoon*, you will go to dance class."
- **Read about time.** Your child may enjoy *A Second is a Hiccup*, by Hazel Hutchins, or *Chicken Soup with Rice*, by Maurice Sendak.

Music makes learning play

What's one thing that can help your child learn to identify patterns and build language and listening skills? Music! To make the most of it:



- **Schedule a time** each day to enjoy music with your child—in the car, during playtime, before bedtime.
- **Create new lyrics** for familiar tunes.
- **Feel the rhythm.** Show your child how to clap to the beat.
- **Move to music.** Play different styles of music and match your movements to the mood of the pieces.

Source: "Music and Your Preschooler," Kidshealth, niswc.com/playmusic.

Focus on concentration

Thinking takes effort. To help your child concentrate:



- **Allow plenty of time** for her to examine things.
- **Avoid interrupting** when she's absorbed in an activity, such as building with blocks.
- **Eliminate distractions**, such as TV on in the background.

Be clear about expectations

Before you get frustrated by your child's behavior, consider whether your expectations are realistic for kids his age, and whether he understands them. It helps to:

1. **Write** a short list of house rules.
2. **Talk** with your child about each rule. Why is it important? What exactly should your child do? What consequence will happen if he doesn't do it?
3. **Enforce** the rules consistently. This makes them easier for him to remember.

Source: G. Innis, "Boundaries and expectations are important parenting tools," Michigan State University Extension.



How can I tell if my child's language skills are on track?

Q: Once my older child learned to talk, she never stopped. But my four-year-old daughter doesn't say much. Should I be worried?

A: Not necessarily. Children develop language at different rates, and your daughter may do many things at different times than her sister did. Generally, four-year-olds can:

- **Answer basic questions.** They can give their first and last names, for example, or the name of a beloved stuffed animal. Many kids this age enjoy asking questions, too!
- **Be understood by people** outside their own families. This doesn't mean their grammar is perfect, but listeners don't usually need family members to translate.
- **Use language in a variety of ways.** They may enjoy singing and repeating nursery rhymes in addition to conversation.
- **Use some tenses and prepositions.** "I ate cookies yesterday." Or, "My jacket goes over my shirt."

Listen for these language milestones. If you are still concerned, it is always a good idea to check in with your child's preschool teacher or her pediatrician. They can help you determine if her language development is appropriate.



Are you showing your child the world?

Your preschooler needs your help to explore and learn about the world and all the things in it. Are you helping him experience new ideas, people, places and things? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

- ___ **1. Do you give** your child opportunities to meet and socialize with other children, such as playground visits?
- ___ **2. Do you use** new words to deepen his understanding? "That dinosaur with the big teeth in this picture looks ferocious."
- ___ **3. Do you take** your child to new and interesting places, such as the airport?
- ___ **4. Do you go** outside and observe the world together, and talk about what you see?

- ___ **5. Do you offer** your child new foods to try? It may take many tries before he likes them.

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are expanding your child's knowledge of the world. For each no, try that idea.

"The world's big,
and I want to have
a good look at it
before it gets dark."
—John Muir

Add some math to reading

When you read with your child every day, you're doing much more than preparing him to read independently. Research shows that reading picture books containing math concepts—such as numbers and shapes—with your child may boost his math achievement, too. Multiply your child's skills by including math stories in your reading time.

Source: M. van den Heuvel-Panhuizen and others, "Effects of reading picture books on kindergartners' mathematics performance," *Educational Psychology*, nswc.com/readmath.

Respect supports learning

Kids need a safe, calm environment to learn their best. Respect helps create that environment. To encourage respectful behavior:

- **Plan for it.** When you go somewhere with your child, talk about ways to show respect when you get there. For example, at the library your child should speak quietly and handle books with care.
- **Name it** when you see it. Thank the playmate who shares a toy with your child for being respectful.
- **Create a collage.** Look through magazines with your child for pictures of people showing respect to others. Cut them out and let her glue them to construction paper.



Encourage a love of school

Most preschoolers enjoy learning. Set your child up for a successful school career by nurturing her positive attitude:

- **Ask her questions** each day about what she's learning at preschool.
- **Show enthusiasm.** When you drop your child off, look around. Say things like, "Wow, that looks like a great book!"
- **Celebrate, don't bribe.** Reward preschool successes with an occasional treat, but don't promise one in advance.

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