

Helping Children Learn®

EARLY CHILDHOOD

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School



November 2017

Early Intervention Program

Midwestern Intermediate Unit IV

Activate your preschooler's brain by reading aloud every day

Experts have long recommended that parents read aloud to preschoolers at home. More recently, scientists have found that when young children listen to stories, the parts of their brains where meanings are made and mental pictures are created actually "light up." The more you read aloud with your young child, the more connections her brain builds to support her future reading efforts.



Here are some tips for reading aloud:

- **Find a regular time each day** to read together, whether it's bedtime, bath time, at the park, or over breakfast—whatever works for your family.
- **Talk about what you are reading.** Are there passages you've read that make you think of things in your life or your child's? Ask your child questions about the pictures and the events in the story, too. The more you engage with the material together, the greater the benefit.
- **Read about a wide range of topics.** This develops your child's background knowledge about the world.
- **Keep reading to your child** even after she goes to school and becomes an able reader herself. Choose books that are a bit above her reading level, and make sure that she also reads on her own.

Source: J.S. Hutton and others, "Home Reading Environment and Brain Activation in Preschool Children Listening to Stories," *Pediatrics*, American Academy of Pediatrics, nswc.com/neuron.



Develop skills your child can count on

Your preschooler needs your help with math as well as language skills. Research shows that the stronger a child's early math skills are, the more likely he is to do well in school. Help your child learn about:

- **Numbers.** Play a matching game together. Have your child match a number on an index card with another card that contains the same number of stickers.
- **Relative size.** Gather a group of similar items, such as pots. Help your child compare them using words like *tall*, *taller* and *tallest*, or *small*, *medium* and *large*.
- **Volume.** Give your child a set of plastic measuring cups. Help him measure things like water and pieces of cereal. Show him how two $\frac{1}{4}$ cups of water will fill the $\frac{1}{2}$ cup measuring cup.
- **Shapes.** Pick a shape, such as a circle. How many things can you and your child see that are circles?

Source: S.D. Sparks, "Do Parents See Math as 'Less Useful' Than Reading?" *Education Week*, nswc.com/talkmath.

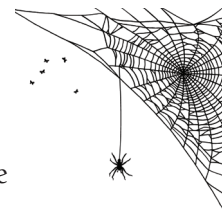
Put gratitude in writing

Children feel happy when they appreciate what they have. Making a thank-you book can promote this feeling. To make one:

1. **Have your child** finish this sentence: "I'm really thankful for _____."
2. **Have him draw** each thing he names on a separate sheet of paper.
3. **Staple the pages** together to form a book. Read it together often.

Play an observation game

The outside world is full of wonderful things for your preschooler to examine—from a crack in the sidewalk to a lacy spider web. To encourage her observation skills:



1. **Bring a camera** or drawing supplies outdoors. Say to your child, "Let's find five things we've never noticed before!"
2. **Record what she sees.** A giant squirrel nest high in a tree? Let your child take a photo or draw a picture.
3. **Talk about her pictures.** Then take turns covering most of a picture and guessing what it is.

Singing leads to learning

Music builds listening and communication skills—and it's a great way to spend enjoyable time with your child. Together:



- **Sing rhyming songs.** These reinforce word sounds. Many songs, such as *Ring Around the Rosie*, also involve active play that strengthens muscles.
- **Sing rounds.** In a round, each person sings the same melody, but begins at a different time. *Row, Row, Row Your Boat* is a good one to start with.

Source: P. Schiller, Ph.D., "Songs and Rhymes as a Springboard to Literacy," *Early Childhood News*, nswc.com/sing.



What are some fun ways to help my child learn letters?

Q: My son just turned four. Lately, he's become interested in the alphabet, and he likes to sing the ABC song. How can I encourage his interest and make learning letters enjoyable?

A: Planning activities around your child's interests is a great way to keep him excited about learning. And there are lots of fun ways to help your son learn more about the alphabet.



Here are some ideas:

- **Have a letter of the day**, or a letter of the week. If today is T day, for example, you and your child could eat tomatoes and turkey, hunt around your home for items beginning with T, like a table and a television, and pretend to chug around the room like a train.
- **Draw letters lots of ways.** Help him write them with his fingers in the sand in the sandbox or with bathtub crayons on the shower wall.
- **Add movement.** As you and your child say the alphabet, clap or stomp after every third letter. "A, B, C," clap, "D, E, F," clap, and so on. Or see if he can use his body to shape letters. Do it with him so he can see what the letters look like.
- **Look for books** that present the alphabet in a fun or silly way. Ask the librarian for suggestions.



Do you use routines to support learning?

Following routines at home can help children develop habits that lead to academic achievement. Are you using the power of routines to set your child up for school success? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

1. **Do you eat** at least one meal as a family each day?
Conversation around the table builds your child's vocabulary.
2. **Have you set** regular sleep and wake times to ensure your child gets the sleep she needs to learn and grow?
3. **Does your family get** regular exercise? Exercise makes bodies and brains strong.
4. **Do you help** your child get ready in the evening for the next day, by laying out clothes, for example?

5. **Do you set aside** time each day to read with your child?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are establishing positive routines. For each no, try that idea.

"The best thing you can give to children, next to good habits, are good memories."
—Sydney Harris

Ask questions that get your preschooler planning

When your child makes a plan and carries it out, he's using his higher-level thinking skills—even if his plan is to give his green beans to the dog. Asking your child questions can help him improve those thinking skills. Make it a point to:

- **Ask questions** that leave choices up to your child. "What are you going to build with those blocks?"
- **Ask follow-up questions.** "You're going to make a tall tower? How will you keep it from wobbling?"
- **Ask him to predict.** "What will happen if you put the big block on top?"

Source: A.S. Epstein, "How Planning and Reflection Develop Young Children's Thinking Skills," National Association for the Education of Young Children, nisewc.com/plan_reflect.

It helps to think out loud

Preschoolers do a lot of talking to themselves. And that's OK. Research shows that they perform tasks better when they talk to themselves out loud as they do them. Encourage your child to think out loud and "talk herself through" challenging tasks.

Source: A. Winsler and others, "Should I let them talk?" *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, Elsevier.

Share seasonal sensations

Autumn brings changes—from cooling temperatures to falling leaves. A trip to the grocery store can be a great way to teach your child about the colors and tastes of fall. While there:



- **Select a different variety of apples** than you usually buy. Ask your child what's different—the taste? The color?
- **Look for autumn vegetables** of many different colors, like squash, beets, brussels sprouts or red cabbage. Let her choose one to try for dinner.

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Published in English and Spanish, September through May.

Publisher: L. Andrew 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