

Helping Children Learn®

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

EARLY CHILDHOOD



September 2017

Early Intervention Program
Midwestern Intermediate Unit IV

Conversations strengthen your preschooler's growing vocabulary

In the first three years of life, your child's brain has its mightiest growth spurt. All that growth makes her brain hungry—for language! Research shows that the more words children learn in their preschool years, the better they do in kindergarten and beyond.

The best way to help your child learn words is to talk with her. Be sure to:

- **Create rituals that reinforce** words your child knows. Reread books over and over. Sing familiar songs. Play favorite spoken-word games, such as patty-cake.
- **Introduce new words.** When your child was younger, you probably spent a lot of time naming objects for her. Now, you can help her learn more complex words. Connect new words to words she already knows—"The sun is really bright today. It's *gleaming*." "I like to remember and tell you about things from when I was young. That's called *reminiscing*."
- **Strike up conversations.** Don't simply talk to your child. Encourage a back-and-forth exchange. Ask questions: What games did she play today? What would she like to do tomorrow? Take turns talking and keep it up for as long as you can. This kind of conversation not only builds vocabulary, it also strengthens your connection with your child.



Source: B. Walsh, "Smart Talk: A Conversation With Meredith Rowe About How to Lay the Groundwork for Your Child's Vocabulary Growth," Usable Knowledge, Harvard Graduate School of Education, niswc.com/smarttalk; L. Lowry, "It's Quality, Not Just Quantity, That Helps Your Child Develop Language," The Hanen Centre, niswc.com/quality.



Make a letter and sound connection

Your child will have an easier time learning to read if he understands the link between letters and sounds. Here are four things you can do at home to help your preschooler make this connection:

1. **Have him look in the mirror.** Show your child how he uses his lips, tongue and teeth in different ways to make different sounds.
2. **Read rhyming books** together. Point out words that sound similar, such as *look* and *book*.
3. **Talk about the sounds** letters make. For example, point to an S. Say, "*Sailboat* starts with the letter S. S sounds like sssssss."
4. **Be silly with music.** Sing "The Farmer in the Dell." Then change the D to a B. Now it's "The Farmer in the Bell." The meaning changes!

When your child knows the letter sounds, you can say three words—such as *hand*, *hat* and *love*—and ask him which has a different first letter.

Source: R. Wise, "5 Research-Based Reading Strategies for Teaching Phonemic Awareness: An Early Reading Skill," *educationandbehavior.com*, niswc.com/5link.

Exercise benefits learning

Physical activity strengthens your child's body. It can also help him learn. At this age, exercise should be play, not work. Think about what your child likes to do. Climb at the playground? Chase bubbles? Then, get active together.



Source: "Active Education: Growing Evidence on Physical Activity and Academic Performance" Active Living Research, niswc.com/moveit.

Teach listening and respect

At school, just like at home, your child will have to listen to and respect the adults around her. Show her how to:

- **Follow simple directions.** Develop routines, such as having your child hang her coat on a hook when she comes in. If she forgets, offer a gentle reminder.
- **Remain quiet** when others are talking. Say, "I'm speaking. Please wait until I'm finished, then it will be your turn to talk."
- **Use manners.** Friendly greetings and polite words like *please*, *thank you* and *it's your turn* help make preschool a positive place to learn.

Prepare for school success

When your child is absent from preschool, she misses a lot of fun with her class and her teacher. She misses important learning, too.



Research shows that even as early as preschool, attendance makes a difference. A study in Chicago found that the more days preschoolers missed, the less ready they were for kindergarten at the end of the year.

Set your child up for success in school. Make attendance a family priority.

Source: S.B. Ehrlich and others, "Preschool Attendance in Chicago Public Schools," The University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research, niswc.com/preK.



How can I help my child relax about preschool?

Q: My son started attending preschool a few days ago. He was very excited about it over the summer, but now he has suddenly become anxious. He keeps saying he is not going back. How can I make this easier for him?

A: Your son is having a common reaction to starting preschool. Many children have a difficult time adjusting to new experiences and routines. The good news is that, with your support, this will just be temporary.

To ease your child's transition:

- **Take the pressure off.** Starting preschool is a milestone, but making it seem like a big deal can bring on anxiety. Instead, remind your child of other places he's made friends and had fun learning, like the park and the library. Explain that he'll do these things at preschool, too.
- **Get him talking.** Ask him about things he does at school. Sometimes there is just one aspect of the preschool day that worries a child. If your child can say what's bothering him, you may be able to ease his mind.
- **Share your concerns** with the teacher. Preschool teachers are well versed in helping children adjust from home to school. Ask your child's teacher for advice.
- **Stay calm.** Your child's anxiety may upset you, but do your best to hide your nerves. Put on a brave smile and he may, too!



Are you promoting learning at home?

Preschoolers spend much more time at home than in class. Your home can be a wonderful place for your child to learn all sorts of skills. Are you making home a learning place? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

- ___ **1. Do you tell** your child about things that interest you and about new things you learn?
- ___ **2. Do you notice** your child's interests and praise her when she learns something new?
- ___ **3. Do you keep** lots of reading material around your home—such as books, magazines and newspapers—and let your child see you reading?
- ___ **4. Do you provide** your child with a variety of learning tools, such as games, blocks, paper, crayons and puzzles?

- ___ **5. Do you limit** screen time and make time each day for reading, talking and exploring?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are helping your child learn at home. For each no, try that idea.

*"No other person or outside force has a greater influence on a child than a parent."
—Bob Keesham,
"Captain Kangaroo"*

Have fun with math

Research shows that the way parents play with their preschoolers can affect their children's math success in elementary school. To support your child's math skills, play games about quantities. You can:

- **Count groups of objects.** Make a group of a few items, like blocks. Together, count the items in the group. Then say, "This pile has four blocks." Your child learns that the last number you count is the number of items in the pile.
- **Ask your child to give** you two toy cars. Then, have him give you another. Talk about how three is more than two.

Source: "Mothers' early support boosts children's later math achievement," ScienceDaily, nswc.com/mathplay.

For preschoolers, screen time is best in small doses

Doctors advise families to limit the time preschoolers spend watching TV or using electronic screens to one hour per day. They also recommend that you:

- **Select** non-violent, educational content.
- **Interact** with your child when she uses screens. Discuss the show or activity.

Source: American Academy of Pediatrics, "Media and Young Minds," nswc.com/aap.

Give your child your time

September means the return to a busier schedule for many families. But spending quality time with your preschooler is vital for his success in school. Carve out time every day to read with your child and eat at least one meal as a family. You can also:



- **Do a project together.** Bake cookies, do a puzzle—anything you both enjoy.
- **Care for a plant** or a pet together.
- **Collect something together**, like pinecones or colored stones.

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