

Helping Children Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School



March 2017

Early Intervention Program

Midwestern Intermediate Unit IV

Take steps now to increase your child's attention span

A child's ability to pay attention grows over time. Preschoolers' attention spans vary in length from child to child, and from activity to activity. Because research links longer attention spans in preschool with higher academic achievement in later years, now is the perfect time to help your child increase his attention span. Here are some things you can do:



- **Make sure your child** is well-rested. A sleepy child can't pay attention.
- **Feed him a healthy diet.** A balance of vegetables, fruits, whole grains and lean proteins gives your child the "brain food" he needs to focus.
- **Follow routines.** Knowing what to expect provides young children with a sense of order and helps eliminate distractions.
- **Encourage exercise.** Preschoolers are naturally active and need to move. Make sure your child gets some exercise every day.
- **Share attention-building activities.** Read with your child every day. Put together puzzles, sculpt with clay and play simple board games.
- **Schedule some quiet time each day.** Turn off the television, computer and tablet. A quiet environment encourages young children to relax, think and listen.

Source: D. Stipek and R. Valentino, "Early Childhood Memory and Attention as Predictors of Academic Growth Trajectories," *Journal of Educational Psychology*, American Psychological Association.



Promote discipline 'authoritatively'

No one discipline tactic works with every child. But research points to a combination of strategies known as "authoritative parenting" that has positive effects on children. Authoritative parents are warm and loving. They also:

- **Have realistic expectations.** They don't doom their children to failure by expecting perfection.
- **Teach self-control.** They encourage their children to express anger with words rather than physical outbursts.
- **Are consistent.** They choose a few basic rules and stick to them.
- **Listen to their children** and accept them for who they are.
- **Communicate clearly** and calmly, using simple instructions.
- **Support independence** by allowing their children enough freedom to grow without risking their well-being.
- **Give their children** plenty of opportunities to be responsible and make choices.

Source: A. Fletcher, "Positive Discipline and Child Guidance," University of Missouri Extension, niscw.com/authoritative.

'Can I do it?' 'Yes you can!'

Your child is more likely to try new things at school if she views herself as a capable person. To foster her self-confidence:

- **Let her help you.** If you are doing laundry and she asks if she can help, say, "Sure, hand me everything that is blue."
- **Let her entertain herself** sometimes. Offer your child things to do—books to read, toys to sort, designs to color—and encourage her to do them on her own.

Help your child practice key kindergarten skills

Your child is learning many skills in preschool that will help him thrive when he gets to kindergarten. Here are some skills you can work on together at home:

- **Communication.** Speaking up and asking questions in class can be scary. Role-play these situations with your child.
- **Finger coordination.** Kindergarten involves lots of cutting, drawing and other small-motor activities. Give him lots of practice.
- **Getting along with others.** Emphasize respect for people and things.



Spring into a science lesson

Many kinds of animals have babies in the spring, and learning about them is a perfect early science lesson for your child. To explore the animal kingdom together:



- **Read a book about animals.** Choose one with lots of pictures. How does your child's favorite animal care for its young?
- **View animals up close** at a zoo or a farm. Or look for baby birds in a nest.
- **Teach your child** that baby animals often have different names from their parents. Use pictures to help her learn *cow* and *calf*, *horse* and *foal*, and others.



What should I do when my four-year-old lies?

Q: My daughter has a hard time telling the truth. But I don't know how to react when she tells me something I know isn't true. What should I do?

A: Young children are still learning the difference between fantasy and reality. So if your child tells you something that she wishes were true, but couldn't be, it's not quite the same as telling a deliberate lie. It's practicing make-believe, another part of her development.



Honesty is a quality that children develop over several years. To encourage your child to tell the truth:

- **Be a role model.** Your child may not always listen to you. But she will mimic you. So don't let her catch you in a lie.
- **Be truthful for your child.** You see cookie crumbs on the table. If you ask if she ate cookies, she might say *no*. So, supply the truth. "I know you don't want to be in trouble. But there are cookie crumbs everywhere, including on your face. I think you ate cookies. It's OK to tell me."
- **Appreciate honesty.** Encouraging your child to tell the truth will backfire if you punish her when she does. Praise her for telling the truth, and explain what she should do differently next time.

Help your child be honest with you now, and she will grow up knowing that she can always come to you with the truth.



Are you encouraging a love of reading?

Showing your child the pleasure he can get from books builds his desire to read. Are you helping your child enjoy books and reading? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

1. **Do you let** your child pick books to read, even if he often wants the same ones?
2. **Do you visit** the library and let your child browse?
3. **Do you find** books about things your child likes—from aliens to animals to art?
4. **Do you create** pleasant reading routines, such as relaxing with books before naptime and bedtime?
5. **Do you read aloud** with enthusiasm to make books come alive for your child?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you're sharing the joys of reading with your child. For each no, try that idea.

"Children are made readers on the laps of their parents."

—Emilie Buchwald

Reading is fun when your child writes the book

Creating a book with your preschooler is an excellent way to help her build literacy skills. To get started, staple several pieces of paper together. Ask your child to:

1. **Dictate** a short story about something she likes. Write a few of her sentences on each page. Leave room for drawings.
2. **Illustrate** the story. Read her words and have her make drawings to go with them.
3. **Create** a title. Help her write the title and her name on the first page.
4. **'Read'** the book aloud to you. Urge your child to take pride in her work!

Source: E.R. Codell, *How to Get Your Child to Love Reading*, Algonquin Books.

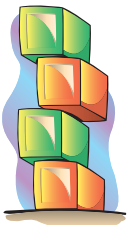
Ask about the best things

To help your child feel excited about preschool, spend some time talking with him each day about what he likes best about his time there. Don't worry if his answer is "snack time." What matters is that he's happy at school. Say things like, "It's fun to eat and talk with friends, isn't it?"

Build math skills with blocks

You can teach your child several basic math concepts just by playing with blocks together. As you play, help him learn to:

- **Recognize patterns.** Have your child stack a red block, then a green one, then a red one. Can he figure out what comes next?
- **Understand fundamentals** of addition and subtraction. As he adds another block to his tower, or takes one away, talk about the concepts of *more* and *less*.
- **Identify shapes** and how they fit or stack together. This skill is the basis for geometry and other higher math.



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