

Helping Children Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School



February 2017

Early Intervention Program
Midwestern Intermediate Unit IV

Use family time to teach your child when to talk and when to listen

The ability to listen to others and wait for a turn to speak is a critical skill that will prepare your child for success in elementary school. After all, kids can't learn if 25 students are talking at once!

When you model and teach polite speaking and listening skills at home, you increase the likelihood that your child will use them throughout her school career.



Your family can practice these skills during:

- **Story time.** Reading with your child motivates her to learn to read. But it also teaches her to listen and pay attention. After you read, have your child retell the story by looking at the pictures. Ask questions, such as "Can you tell me which part of the story you liked best?"
- **Mealtimes.** Sharing meals with family teaches kids valuable speaking and listening skills, so make family meals a priority in your home. When you eat together, give each person a chance to tell something about his or her day. Don't allow others to interrupt while someone else is talking.
- **Playtime.** Games such as Red Light, Green Light have been around forever because they are fun and they require children to listen carefully. Play Name That Tune by singing a song your child likes using the syllable "la" instead of the words. See if she can guess the song. Playing board games also encourages turn-taking, talking and listening.

Source: C. Wright, *A Parent's Guide to Home and School Success: Kindergarten*, Brighter Vision Publications.



Telling time starts with basic concepts

Before your child can tell time, he has to understand what time is. Here are some guidelines for explaining time and teaching your child how to tell it:

1. **Talk about days.** Help your child understand that *today* is now, *yesterday* is what happened before he went to sleep last night, and *tomorrow* is what it will be after another night's sleep.
2. **Discuss times of day.** You might say, for example, that *morning* is the time between waking up and lunch.
3. **Use before and after.** Say, "Before you brushed your teeth this morning, you ate breakfast. After you got dressed, we went outside to play."
4. **Introduce the clock.** Teach your child that the short hand is the *hour hand*, and the long hand is the *minute hand*. When he knows these, start teaching him the times on the hour. "See, the minute hand is on the 12, and the hour hand is on the 1. That means it's one o'clock."

Help your child choose to do the right thing

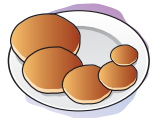
Young children behave well to earn parents' approval and avoid negative consequences. As they get older, they begin to behave well because it's the right thing to do. To foster your child's desire to do what's right:

- **Be a role model.** If you always tell the truth, chances are your child will, too.
- **Express your expectations.** "In our family, we use kind words."
- **Provide cues.** "Look at your sister. She's doing homework. When we're quiet, she can concentrate. Then when she's finished we can ask her to play."

Source: I.R. Florez, "Developing Young Children's Self-Regulation through Everyday Experiences," *Young Children*, niswc.com/behave.

Serve a sweet lesson in size

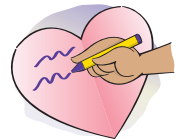
To teach your child the concept of size, help him compare items around him. Use words like *bigger*, *smaller*, *shorter* and *longer*.



One fun way to help him practice is to make pancakes of all sizes. Arrange them in order from smallest to largest. Which one does your child want to eat first? The smallest pancake or the biggest one of all?

Build skills with valentines

Sending valentines helps your child express caring for others. And if she makes her cards herself, your child can strengthen her fine motor skills. Focus on:



- **Cutting.** Using scissors builds small muscles in the hand. It also helps your child with eye-hand coordination.
- **Pasting.** Pressing down to make something stick strengthens hand muscles.
- **Drawing and writing.** If your child can't write her name, have her try just the first letter. Help her write the rest.



My preschooler won't go to bed. What can I do?

Q: My four-year-old is cranky in the mornings and tired in the afternoons. But he fights going to bed every night. I know he needs more sleep to learn well. How can I make this easier for both of us?

A: Your son is showing signs of sleep deprivation. Children his age should get between 10 and 13 hours of sleep every 24 hours. Lack of sleep can lead not only to mood issues, but also to:

- **Problems paying attention.** Studies have found that some children who seem to have attention disorders are actually sleep-deprived.
- **Problems learning.** Your child must be rested for his body and brain to perform optimally.

Here are some strategies to help you put your child on a healthy "sleep diet":

- **Count backward.** If he needs to be up at 7 a.m., count back at least 10 hours, then set bedtime 15 minutes earlier so he has time to fall asleep.
- **Establish a bedtime routine.** Spend your son's last hour awake getting him ready for bed. A warm bath, putting on pajamas, brushing teeth, reading a story, kissing good night and lights out!
- **Check his room** for toys or other distractions that may be keeping him awake. Move them to another room. Never put a TV in your child's room.
- **Be firm and consistent.** Your child may resist at first. Stick with your routine and he should adjust in a week or two.



Are you teaching respect for rules?

Teaching your child to follow rules at home makes it easier for her to adapt to rules at preschool. Are you using effective discipline to help your child learn to follow rules? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

1. **Have you established** just a few important rules? Explain them in simple words your preschooler understands.
2. **Do you enforce** house rules consistently so your child knows what you expect?
3. **Are your expectations** appropriate for your child's age? Rules shouldn't be too lenient or too tough.
4. **Do you react calmly** when your child misbehaves and provide her with a good behavior role model?

5. **Do you praise** your child's good behavior more often than you notice her mistakes?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you're helping your child learn to follow rules. For each no, try that idea.

"Don't worry that children never listen to you; worry that they are always watching you."
—Robert Fulghum

Chores reinforce traits that lead to school success

Doing regular chores teaches your child about responsibility. He also learns that he can contribute to the well-being of the people around him. This understanding will help him thrive in preschool and beyond.

If your child is at least three years old, consider assigning him a chore such as:

- **Setting the table.** Start with forks, spoons and napkins.
- **Dusting.** He can wipe low tables and shelves.
- **Sorting and matching** clean socks.
- **Picking up toys** on a daily basis.

Get in touch with learning

Sight and hearing are important senses preschoolers use to learn. But so is touch. To give your child some hands-on learning:



- **Help her make letters** and shapes out of play dough.
- **Help her count** pieces of dried cereal. She can move each piece from one pile to another as she counts.

Find activities that fit

Preschoolers learn a lot from visiting new places and having new experiences. When choosing new activities to try, think about:

- **Ability.** Can your child lift a bowling ball? If not, bowling may frustrate him.
- **Temperament.** A high energy child may love a gym class. A quiet child may be happier with a short museum visit.
- **Cost.** Preschoolers' attention spans and behaviors vary widely. Check online or in the newspaper for free or low-cost activities to avoid having to leave before getting your "money's worth."

Source: C. Baicker-McKee, Ph.D., *Fussbusters on the Go*, Peachtree Publishers.

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