EARLY CHILDHOOD

Helping Children Learn®

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

January 2024

Early Intervention Program
Midwestern Intermediate Unit IV

Encourage attentive listening by showing your child how it's done

Listening skills will be just as important to your child's success in school as language, reading and math skills.



Be a role model of attentive listening for your preschooler. Give your full attention when your child speaks to you. Make eye contact. Smile and nod. Restate what you hear to confirm that you understand.

To further strengthen your child's listening skills:

- **Speak in a voice that helps** your child listen. Don't speak too fast or too loud.
- **Combine sight and sound.** Talk about what you are doing as your preschooler watches you do it.
- **Give your child multi-step directions.** "Please go to the closet, get your mittens and put them on."
- **Play listening games.** Stand behind your child and make familiar noises, like jingling keys. Can your child tell what you are doing without looking?
- **Talk about respectful listening.** Explain that your child shouldn't make sounds or jump around when listening. Also, explain why it's not acceptable to talk when others are talking.

Offer fun ways to practice writing

It's common for preschoolers' first efforts at writing to look like scribbles. Writing letters and numbers neatly takes muscle control—and that takes practice to develop.

To encourage your child's interest in writing, keep appealing writing tools handy, such as crayons and washable markers. Then create lots of opportunities for your child to practice. Here are just a few:

- **Have your child** write favorite words, such as *Mom*, *dog* and *me*.
- **Ask your preschooler** to help when you are writing. If you are making a grocery list or sending a greeting card, have your child write a few words.
- **Send "mail."** Put a shoebox by your child's bedroom door and use it to exchange letters. Your child can write words or scribble and tell you what it says.
- **Caption pictures.** Have your child describe a drawing. Write the description underneath it. Let your child "write" under your writing.

Make a reading connection



In order to read, children must learn to connect letters with the sounds they make. Movement can help. In a recent study, children who were taught a whole body movement to go with each letter-sound combination learned better than kids who sat still. You can also:

- **Use a mirror.** Show how your child's mouth, tongue and lips move in different ways to make various letter sounds.
- **Read rhyming books.** Clap together when words use the same letters to make the same sounds, such as *cat* and *mat*.

Source: University of Copenhagen, "Whole-body learning can boost children's letter sound recognition—the first step toward reading," ScienceDaily.

Work together on discipline

Don't think of discipline as you against your child. Instead, foster teamwork and cooperation. If you want your preschooler to focus instead of bouncing around, for example, you can say, "Let's be silly for two minutes before we have to calm down."

Point out math in your day

Doing everyday math-rich activities together is a simple way to build your child's math smarts. Involve your preschooler when you:



- **Bake.** Scooping a half-cup of flour or handing you two eggs exposes your child to concepts like *fractions* and *quantity* in a yummy way.
- **Handle cash.** Say, "This gallon of milk costs $4.30. We need four one-dollar bills, one quarter and one nickel."

Source: B. Mutaf-Yildiz and others, "Frequency of Home Numeracy Activities is Differentially Related to Basic Number Processing and Calculation Skills in Kindergartners, *Frontiers in Psychology*.

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Q&A What do preschoolers need to know to stay safe?

Q: My four-year-old knows some safety rules, like holding hands when crossing the street. What other safety measures should children know before starting kindergarten?



A: Your child is a great age to learn the importance of safe behaviors. You can teach your child to follow safety rules at home, and safety is usually part of a kindergarten curriculum, too.

To promote safety now and going forward, help your preschooler learn to:

- **Follow basic safety rules,** such as: Stop and listen when your name is called; Stay out of water unless there is an adult present; Walk, don't run, when holding something sharp, etc.
- **Say proper names.** In addition to their own first and last names, children need to be able to give the full names of their parents and caregivers. Rehearse this together. "You call me Dad, but what is my name?"
- **Recite a home address and phone number.** Turning this information into a little song can make it easier for your child to remember. Talk about when it's OK to share personal information, and with whom.
- **Dial 911 in an emergency.** Be specific about what is an emergency. Your child should dial 911: Anytime you say to, if there is a fire, if your child is talking to you and you are physically unable to talk back, etc.

Parent Quiz Are you making changes manageable?

When your child likes to do things the same way every time, changes can be challenging. But changes, both expected and unexpected, are part of life. Are you helping your preschooler adapt? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

___**1. Do you provide** an overall sense of security by following routines whenever possible?

___**2. Do you predict** changes and recognize that even small ones can seem like a big deal to your child?

___**3. Do you discuss** upcoming changes with your child before they happen?

___**4. Do you stay calm** when unexpected changes are necessary, and demonstrate how you problem-solve?

___**5. Do you teach** your child that change can be positive?

How well are you doing?

More yes *answers mean you are helping your child adjust to life's changes. For each* no, *try that idea.*

"Continuity gives us roots. Change gives us branches, letting us stretch and grow and reach new heights."
—Pauline R. Kezer

Help child's play feel real

Pretending is part of childhood. But research shows that when it comes to real-life tasks, children prefer reality to make-believe. Consider kid-friendly swaps that help your child feel capable of doing a real job, like:

- **Cutting fruit.** Handing a child a sharp knife is a bad idea, of course. But what if you let your child cut a banana into slices with a plastic knife?
- **Playing music.** Your child may get a greater thrill out of beating a full-sized tambourine than a toy one.
- **Gardening.** Let your child use a real hand spade to help you pot a plant for the windowsill.

Source: B. Bower, "When it's playtime, many kids prefer reality over fantasy," Science News.

Ask your child to think



Answering questions about ideas develops preschoolers' thinking skills. Get the process started by asking your child questions such as:

- **When was a time** when you felt lucky?
- **What will you** remember about preschool when you are older? Why?
- **What makes** someone a good friend?

A new year is a fresh start

This January, recommit to supporting your child's learning in effective ways. You can:

- **Set and stick to bedtimes** that allow enough rest. Preschoolers need 10-13 hours of sleep each night.
- **Have a regular read-aloud time,** as well as quiet time to sit together and read or look at books.
- **Plan activities** that make learning fun. Search for shapes outdoors, tap rhythms on pots with spoons, explore a new place.

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Published in English and Spanish, September through May.
Publisher: Doris McLaughlin.
Publisher Emeritus: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.
Editor: Alison McLean.
Translations Editor: Victoria Gaviola.
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P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474
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