

Helping Children Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School



May 2023

Early Intervention Program
Midwestern Intermediate Unit IV

Physical activities help keep your child healthy & build motor skills

Take advantage of the warm spring and summer weather and head outside to help your preschooler strengthen gross motor skills. Well-developed muscles, bones and joints are the “drivers” of these skills. And research links children’s ability to control their muscles with success in the classroom.



Exercise is a practical way to build motor skills—and it also helps your child reduce stress, sleep better and maintain a healthy weight.

Encourage your preschooler to:

- **Run, walk and skip.** Try an energetic game of follow the leader.
- **Ride a big wheel or scooter.**
- **“Play” a sport,** by kicking a soccer ball or bouncing a basketball, etc.
- **Play interactive games,** such as hopscotch and tag.
- **Take on challenges,** like having a balancing contest or trying to touch a right hand to a left knee while marching.

Children are more likely to exercise when parents do it with them, so put on your sneakers and jump right in!

Source: M. MacDonald and others, “Relations of Preschoolers’ Visual-Motor and Object Manipulation Skills With Executive Function and Social Behavior,” *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport*, Taylor & Francis.



Roll and slide into scientific discovery

Does a toy car roll or slide down a ramp? How about a building block? This playful science experiment gives your child an early introduction to physics.

1. **Gather a baking sheet** and some small objects, such as a crayon, toy car, remote control, bottle top, etc. Prop the baking sheet against a couch to make a ramp.
2. **Ask your child** to predict which of the small items will roll and which will slide if pushed down the ramp.
3. **Let your child** test to see which predictions were accurate.
4. **Ask questions.** What do rolling objects have in common? *They*

have round or curved sides. What about sliding objects? *They have flat sides.* Can some items roll and slide, depending on how they are placed on the ramp? *A crayon slides if your child points it straight down the ramp. A bottle top rolls if it’s on its side.*

5. **Encourage your child** to collect more objects, make predictions and experiment.

Source: “Roll or Slide?” WGBH Educational Foundation.

Memory sharing improves emotional well-being

In a recent study, preschoolers whose parents discussed shared memories in detail with them grew into teens who were better able to process and talk about significant life events.

Talk with your child about experiences you’ve shared. Mention specific images, feelings and actions. Ask questions so your child can take part in the memory building. “Remember when we flew a kite? It was so windy! We ran fast to make the kite fly high in the sky. What colors was our kite?”



Source: “Sharing memories sets children on a path to better well-being,” ScienceDaily.

Serve learning at mealtime

Mealtimes are perfect for filling your child with knowledge as well as healthy food. Have your preschooler sort utensils or count plates. Fold napkins together and talk about wholes, halves and quarters. Introduce new words in your conversations, and encourage your child to express ideas by listening attentively. The bonding that takes place over family meals benefits children socially and academically.



Boost chore cooperation

Children learn responsibility by having responsibilities. To motivate your preschooler to tackle chores willingly:

- **Offer a choice** of tasks.
- **Schedule a family** work time.
- **Make a game of it.** Set a timer, or work to music.
- **Talk about how good** it feels to complete a necessary task.



My child shuts down when tasks get hard. What do I do?

Q: My preschooler is willing to try new things—until they become challenging. Then it's quitting time. How can I convince my child to keep trying without a meltdown?

A: No one is good at everything the first time they try. But with some perseverance, children can learn and get better at almost anything. And that feels great!

To encourage your preschooler to persist:

- **Consider your child's personality.** Does your preschooler love to explore outside? Hate to sit still? Plan activities accordingly. Your child—maybe more willing to count ducks at a pond than coins on a table.
- **Plan small steps to achieve big goals.** A child who wants to learn to ride a scooter, for example, will need to learn to balance on one foot, steer, etc. If your child struggles with a step, be a cheerleader. "I know you can get this!"
- **Encourage practice.** Keep providing low key opportunities for your child to work on skills. Celebrate progress. Success with one step can motivate kids to keep going.
- **Model persistence.** Don't make everything you do look easy. Show your child that you too must keep trying and stick with difficult tasks. Send the message, "I'm not going to give up until I finish this."



Are you expanding your child's world?

Familiar places and activities make preschoolers feel comfortable. But they also need new experiences in order to learn and grow. Are you helping your child have new learning adventures? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

- ___ **1. Do you make** it a family practice to try new things, such as foods and games?
- ___ **2. Do you take** your child to interesting new places, such as museums and parks?
- ___ **3. Do you refresh** your child's supply of things to read often by visiting the library or swapping books with friends?
- ___ **4. Do you ask** your child to participate in new activities at home, such as gardening or washing cars?

- ___ **5. Do you arrange** for your child to meet and play with new friends?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are helping your child learn more about the world all around. For each no, try that idea.

"A child's world is fresh and new and beautiful, full of wonder and excitement."

—Rachel Carson

Provide chances to think

Thinking takes practice, and it's important to give your child opportunities and time to do it. To encourage thinking, help your child:

- **Plan.** Instead of saying "Put your toys away right now," try, "I'm going to set the timer for three minutes. I want you to put as many toys away as you can before it rings." This gives your child time to think about what toys to put away first to make the job go faster.
- **Problem-solve.** If your preschooler says "I can't get my shoe on," don't jump in and do it. Instead, ask, "What would happen if you loosened the laces?"

Boost elementary readiness

Children do better in kindergarten if they already have some basic skills. These include the ability to:

- **Express** themselves clearly.
- **Compare** and contrast two objects.
- **Locate** print on a page and understand how books work.
- **Connect** letters to the sounds they make.



Making daily time for reading, sorting and having conversations together will help your child be ready for kindergarten.

Rely on routines all summer

Family schedules often change in the summer months, and that's OK. Just keep in mind that it's easier for children to readjust to a school schedule in the fall if you maintain routines for:

- **Bedtime.** Set a time and stick with it.
- **Morning readiness.** Get dressed, brush teeth, comb hair, eat breakfast, etc.
- **Screen use.** Uphold limits and screen-free times, such as mealtimes.

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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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