

Helping Children Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School



December 2019

Early Intervention Program
Midwestern Intermediate Unit IV

For your preschooler, playtime is productive learning time

Adults tend to think of play as just having fun. But studies show that play is also an important way that preschoolers learn. When children play, they explore, think and test boundaries. Their curiosity leads to learning.

Different kinds of play enhance learning. Encourage your child to:

- **Pretend.** Pretending strengthens his imagination. Puppets and costumes prompt him to wonder, "How would someone feel in this situation?" "What might they do or say?" Using a prop to represent another item (such as a block for a phone) is an example of "symbolic thinking."
- **Build things.** Building encourages your child to plan, count and solve problems. Blocks, boxes and puzzles are all great for this.
- **Play games.** Game play builds sportsmanship and social skills. Physical games, such as Simon Says and Red Light, Green Light, also develop your child's motor skills. Board games teach him to take turns and can help him learn colors, letters, numbers and words.
- **Make art.** He'll boost creativity and strengthen hand coordination.
- **Sing,** play instruments and move to the beat of music. These activities improve listening, language skills and rhythm.



Source: M. Yogman and others, "The Power of Play: A Pediatric Role in Enhancing Development in Young Children," *Pediatrics*, The American Academy of Pediatrics, nswc.com/playtime.



Reinforce your child's recall skills

Your child's memory is vital for learning. To sharpen her ability to recall what she hears and sees, talk to her about her experiences every day.

In addition, try these activities:

- **Read nursery rhymes.** These contain repeated patterns your child can learn. Recognizing the patterns will trigger her memory of what comes next.
- **Hide a few items** as your child watches. Then have her retrieve the items from their hiding places. As she gets better at this, hide more items. Or, after doing the hiding, switch to another activity before asking your child to find the hidden items.
- **Play "I'm going on a trip."** Name an item you'll pack for your trip. Your child must repeat what you said, and then add something. Expand the game as your child gets better at recalling.
- **Ask your child to teach you.** After she learns a new skill, have her teach it to *you*. This will help her remember the steps to follow.

Give your child your time

Holiday preparations can make December a busy month. Keep in mind that what your child wants and needs most is time with you. So as you do errands, take five minutes to stop and admire a colorful display together. Make his favorite lunch and share it with him. Show your child you always have time for him—no matter how busy you are.



Help your child be a poet

Your child doesn't have to be able to write actual words to enjoy the writing process. To encourage her interest, help her compose a winter poem. Here's how:

1. **Write five sentences** that begin with "In winter, I [sense] ____." Write a different sense (*see, hear, taste, touch, smell*) in each sentence, followed by a blank.
2. **Observe winter** together, inside and outside. Bring the poem. Help your child think of words to fill in the blanks. Write down what she says.
3. **Help your child** think of a title for the poem and write her name as the author. Encourage her to add illustrations.



Source: "Instant Poetry! A Writing Exercise," Education.com, nswc.com/winter-poem.

TV interferes with sleep

A recent study found that preschoolers exposed to more than one hour of TV a day got 22 minutes less sleep at night than other kids. And preschoolers with TVs in their bedrooms got even less sleep.

Children who get enough sleep have an easier time learning new things and behaving well. To help your child get 11-13 hours of sleep every 24 hours, don't leave the TV on around him, and keep his room screen-free.

Source: University of Massachusetts at Amherst, "Preschoolers who watch TV sleep less," ScienceDaily, nswc.com/sleepTV.



My child is acting up. Could the season be the reason?

Q: The preschool teacher says that my child has suddenly become distracted and chatty, and often just doesn't listen. Could holiday excitement cause this change in behavior?

A: If there are no other changes in your child's life or in the school routine, the answer to your question could indeed be: "It's December." Special events, sugary treats, advertising frenzy and other holiday trimmings can easily overstimulate a preschooler.

To minimize the effects of holiday havoc on your child:

- **Stick to routines.** Resist the temptation to take your child to a holiday event on a school night. Put away the big tin of cookies from Grandma. Your child needs sleep and regular, nutritious meals.
- **Blow off steam.** Give your child plenty of outlets for physical energy. Unless it's dangerously cold, bundle up and go outside for a little while each day.
- **Cut back on screen time.** It can have a negative effect on attention span, and your child can do without all those toy commercials. Instead, spend plenty of relaxed, one-on-one time together.

Your child will likely settle back into a successful routine in January. But if problems continue, consult her teacher or pediatrician for advice.



Are you teaching your child new words?

Increasing your child's vocabulary helps prepare him for success in reading. The preschool years are a critical time to do this. Are you helping your child learn and use new words? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

1. **Do you use** specific words for items you refer to when talking to your child? "I'm flipping eggs with the *spatula*."
2. **Do you build** on words your child knows by using different words that mean the same thing? When he says "big dog," say, "Yes, it is *large*."
3. **Do you explain** words and images to your child when you read aloud?
4. **Do you play** word games, such as showing an object and asking your child to name it?

5. **Do you encourage** your child to name his feelings with words like *excited* and *angry*?

How well are you doing?

More *yes* answers mean you are enriching your child's vocabulary. For each *no*, try that idea.

"The limits of my language ... means the limits of my world."
—Ludwig Wittgenstein

Reading adds to activities

One of the best ways to find more time for reading with your child is to combine it with other activities. For December reading fun:

- **Take it on the road.** Listen to audiobooks as your family travels to visit friends or relatives.
- **Mix it into cooking.** Read recipes to your child. Have him retrieve ingredients from the pantry by looking for their first letters on package labels.
- **Share it with family.** Ask family members to write and share a memory from when they were your child's age. Have your preschooler tell a tale about something he would like to do this month. Write it down, then read it to him.

Teach some laundry lessons

Doing laundry is work for adults. But for your preschooler, it can be a fun opportunity to learn! Try these activities together:



- **Match socks** to make pairs.
- **Make up rhymes.** "Sam likes this shirt that's blue. Do you like it, too?"
- **Practice buttoning,** zipping, snapping and making outfits.

There's no end to learning

Learning doesn't have to stop when preschool takes a vacation. To build skills and feed your child's brain over winter break:

- **Visit the library.** Take note of special holiday activities and hours.
- **Explore.** Give your child a new experience—a museum visit, a bus ride, etc.
- **Exercise.** Create a safe, indoor obstacle course to build your child's motor skills.
- **Ask questions** that encourage thinking. "What would it be like to live in a tree?"

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