EARLY CHILDHOOD

Helping Children Learn®

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

November 2018

Early Intervention Program
Midwestern Intermediate Unit IV

Now is the perfect time to build your child's science skills

Curiosity drives preschoolers to ask questions, collect information and test ideas all the time. That's great, because research shows that kids who have more knowledge about the world when they enter kindergarten achieve more in elementary school science than kids who start with less.

Take advantage of this critical time! To help your child observe, measure and predict things about the world around him:

- **Inspect things up close.** Together, look at a snail in its shell, ants in the grass, veins in leaves or seeds in an apple. Show your child how to use a magnifying glass to get a closer view. Ask him to describe what he sees, and write down what he says in his own "science notebook."
- **Wash and learn.** Let your child play with measuring containers in the bathtub. Together, see how many cups it takes to make a pint, or how many tablespoons make a half-cup. While your child plays, say the names of the measurements, such as *teaspoon* or *gallon*.
- **Take a field trip.** Visit the park or the zoo. Ask your child questions about animals you see. "Why do you think giraffes have long necks?" "Where do squirrels sleep?" See if you can find the answers.

Source: P.L. Morgan and others, "Science Achievement Gaps Begin Very Early, Persist, and Are Largely Explained by Modifiable Factors," *Educational Researcher*, niswc.com/sciencegap.

Help your child delight in reading

When your child gets pleasure from reading, she's more likely to want to read more and more—and that develops her literacy skills. To make reading with you a daily source of comfort and enjoyment:

- **Choose books** your child likes. At the library, look for books about things that interest her. "Here's a book about spaghetti!" Let her select some books herself.
- **Consider timing.** It's important to read with your child every day, but it shouldn't feel like a chore. Choose a time when she seems to enjoy books most, such as after lunch or before bed.
- **Get cozy.** Your child may like to share a comfy chair with you, or relax on pillows on the floor. Suggest that she hold a stuffed animal, so it can listen, too!
- **Bring the story to life.** Use a different voice for each character. Read with emotion.
- **Stop and talk** about the story and the pictures. Ask your child to predict what will happen next.

Show your child the right way to listen

The way you listen to your child teaches him how to be a good listener, too. When listening to your child:

- **Give** him your undivided attention.
- **Allow** him time to put his thoughts into words—even if they don't make sense.
- **Notice** his body language. "You look sad. Did something happen to you?"

Strong muscles support success in school

Lots of school activities—from writing to paying attention—require your child to use and control her muscles. To help her build these "motor skills," have her:

- **Cut with safety scissors** (under your supervision).
- **Pick up pennies** from a table (supervise this, too).
- **Roll and catch** a ball.
- **Pretend to be** different animals. Have her hop like a frog and jump like a kangaroo.

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*, niswc.com/cut.

Encourage early writing

Children do a lot of "pre-writing" before they can write actual words. To encourage this important process, if your child is:

- **Scribbling,** ask him about what he's drawing (but don't say "What is it?").
- **Making lines** for "writing," ask what it says. Write it down and read it to him.
- **Writing letters** that don't make up words, ask him what the words are. Write the correct letters below your child's writing. Read them together.

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Q&A How can I teach my child to play nicely with others?

Q: The teacher says that during free play, my preschooler either argues with the other children or avoids them. How can I help my daughter learn to interact with other kids?

A: Educators know that social skills make a big difference in how well children function at school. Many preschoolers need a little help developing these skills.

To make social interactions easier for your child:

- **Talk with her** about her experiences with other kids. If she says, "Nina wouldn't play dolls with me," ask, "Did you both want to play with the same doll?" If so, talk about sharing. If Nina wanted to do something else, suggest that your child could play what Nina wants first, then ask Nina to play what your daughter would like.
- **Play with her.** Get on the floor with your child and her toys. When she begins to play, join her and encourage her to interact with you. Or think of a pretend game you can both play. "Let's have a teddy bear picnic!"
- **Invite a friendly child to play.** It's easier for some children to play with one child, rather than a group. Limit visits to an hour or two, and make sure there are enough toys for both children. Plan something fun for the last 15 minutes, such as a puppet show or a special snack.

Parent Quiz Are you balancing freedom and safety?

Encouraging your preschooler's independence helps him explore and learn—but you must also protect him from harm. Are you giving your child room to grow safely? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

___**1. Do you play** with your child often and also ask him to play independently sometimes?

___**2. Do you allow** him space when he plays with friends? Supervise, but don't hover.

___**3. Do you offer** your child choices between appropriate options? "Would you like peas or carrots for dinner?"

___**4. Do you let** your child try to solve minor problems before you step in to help?

___**5. Do you show** interest in your child's opinions?

How well are you doing?

More yes *answers mean you are fostering appropriate independence. For each* no, *try that idea.*

"It is not what you do for your children, but what you have taught them to do for themselves, that will make them successful human beings."
—Ann Landers

Begin at the beginning

Before she can see a process through, your preschooler must understand the basic concepts of *beginning* and *end*. Here are three ways to help:

1. **Identify daily examples.** Remind your child about the beginning and end of a meal, bath or story.
2. **Play board games** with pathways that pieces must travel from beginning to end.
3. **Create simple mazes** on paper. Guide your child's pencil from the beginning of the maze through to the end.

Variety keeps exercise fun

Experts say that an hour of exercise a day not only benefits your child's health, it can also improve his ability to focus. Find creative ways to exercise with your child. Go apple-picking, rake leaves and jump in the piles, climb the stairs in a tall building to get a birds-eye view of your town. The more fun you have, the more your child will see exercise as an enjoyable thing to do!

Source: J. Howard, "How much exercise your kid needs, based on the latest research," CNN, niswc.com/moveforfun.

Differences make us human

Respecting people's differences isn't just a nice thing for kids to do. Accepting that all people have their own thoughts, feelings and needs helps children get along with others—and makes the world a better place.

- **Talk to your child** about differences. People come from different cultures; children have different likes and dislikes. Let her know that it is OK to be different.
- **Talk about ways** people are all the same. Read books about kids from other cultures and point out similarities: love of family, enjoyment of music, etc.

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