

Helping Children Learn®

EARLY CHILDHOOD

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School



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Early Intervention Program
Midwestern Intermediate Unit IV

Activities from games to art develop preschoolers' motor skills

Parents often focus on ways to develop their young child's academic skills. But research shows that children's motor skills (the way they use their bodies) also play a part in their performance in school.

One study links preschoolers' ability to control their large muscles (gross motor skills) with better social skills in the classroom. Greater control of small muscles (fine motor skills) is linked to an increased ability to control impulses, and organize thoughts and behavior.



To develop your child's motor skills, try these activities together:

- **Play active games.** If it's too cold to go outside, play Simon Says indoors and have your child jump up and down, hop or march in place.
- **Issue a challenge.** Ask your child to touch his right hand to his left knee while he's marching. Or if you are outdoors, have him kick a ball that's rolling toward him without stopping it first.
- **Do some art.** Cutting with safety scissors, painting and drawing all help your child build coordination in the small muscles of his hands.
- **Sew with shoelaces.** Threading laces through large beads or holes punched in cards can lead to beautiful designs—and fine motor skills.

Source: M.P. Dharshini, "Kids With Better Fine And Gross Motor Skills Do Better At School, Study Shows," Medical Daily, nswc.com/motor.



Try teacher-tested discipline strategies

Do you find yourself raising your voice to your child more than you'd like? Are you relying on one approach to discipline even when it isn't working well? Consider these discipline strategies preschool teachers use:

- **Pay more attention** to appropriate behavior than misbehavior. Sometimes kids misbehave just to get noticed. So, focus on what your child does right and follow up with a big hug. She'll realize she gets more attention for acting right than acting up.
- **Change the scene.** Teachers sometimes move students to another room to help them calm down. A brief walk outside with you might do more to improve your child's behavior than a scolding would.
- **Offer timely reminders.** You may have told your child many times not to wipe her dirty hands on the kitchen dish towel, but she still does it. She needs you step in before she gets to the towel, not afterward. Say, "You have peanut butter on your fingers. Please wash it off in the sink."

Play High Card/Low Card

Play a simple card game to help your child learn more about numbers: Divide the number cards from a deck of cards between you. Each of you turn the first card from your pile face up. Can your child say which card shows the bigger number?



Leave room for discovery

Preschoolers need opportunities to learn by discovering things for themselves. To guide your child to learning:

- **Ask, don't tell.** "Where can we race these cars so they will go really fast?"
- **Model interest.** "Wow, did you know we can make this cool picture with this puzzle? Shall we put some pieces together?"
- **Show excitement** when your child figures something out on his own.



Source: D.S. Weisberg and others, "Guided Play: Principles and Practices," *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, Association for Psychological Science, nswc.com/guideplay.

Go 'ice fishing' for science

For some wintry science fun, gather ice cubes, a bowl of water, a "fishing rod" made from a stick with yarn tied to one end, and some salt. Help your child:

1. **Put the ice cubes** in the bowl of water.
2. **Dangle the yarn** in the water, then move it so its end lies across an ice cube.
3. **Sprinkle salt** on the ice cube and yarn.
4. **Count to 15 slowly.** Hold the rod steady so the yarn stays across the ice.
5. **Lift the rod carefully.** Did your child "catch" the ice?

The salt melts a little of the ice. When it refreezes, it traps the yarn in the ice.

Source: "Ice Fishing," Science Fun for Everyone! nswc.com/ice.



How do I teach my child to make the right choices?

Q: My daughter's preschool class is learning about making choices. The teacher wants us to work on this at home, too. What types of choices are appropriate for me to offer a four-year-old?

A: Learning to make decisions helps kids gain self-control and independence. Letting your child make decisions for herself may also reduce arguments between you.

This doesn't mean she gets to do whatever she wants, though. You are in charge of keeping her safe. Ask yourself, "Is this something my child can decide?" Your answer will often be *no*. But with your guidance, she could choose such things as:

- **Which outfit to wear.** Give her a choice of two.
- **What to eat for lunch,** from a list of choices you approve.
- **Which to do first** before going to bed, brush her teeth or her hair.
- **What activity to do** next when a friend visits. First the guest gets a choice, then your child does, and so on.

Your child will also have to learn to live with her choices. Help her understand that when she makes mistakes, she learns what not to do next time.



Are you building reading readiness?

Reading aloud with your preschooler every day develops his vocabulary, builds his knowledge and helps him get ready to read himself. Are you making reading together an enriching experience? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

1. **Do you read** different kinds of books together, including fiction, nonfiction and poetry?
2. **Do you take** your child to the library often to find new books and participate in activities?
3. **Do you reread** books your child likes, even if you are tired of them?
4. **Do you point out** common words to your child as you read, such as *the*, *is* and *go*?
5. **Do you pause** and ask your child questions as you read,

and give him time to ask you questions, too?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are putting your child on a path to reading success. For each no, try that idea.

"Books are the plane and the train and the road. They are the destination and the journey. They are home."

—Anna Quindlen

Helping out at home builds skills and confidence

Asking your preschooler to help you do tasks at home is a great way to teach responsibility. Your child could help set the table. Or you could ask her to count the cans of soup in the cupboard so you know how many to put on the shopping list. Activities like these help your child:

- **Learn to listen** to directions and remember what she hears.
- **Learn new skills** and improve with practice.
- **Realize that she** is an important part of the family.

Be sure to thank your child for her help!

Get creative with winter decorations



Whether you are celebrating a holiday this month or just enjoying winter, make some decorations with your child. Help him:

- **Cut seasonal shapes** out of paper—candy canes, stars, mittens—and thread them on a piece of yarn for a garland.
- **Create snowmen** by gluing different sizes of paper plates together.
- **Make snowflakes** by arranging and gluing cotton swabs to paper.

When you read to your child, talk about writing

Use the time you spend reading aloud to your child to build her interest in writing, too. Tell her the books she loves were written by real people who love stories, just as she does. Read the "About the Author" pages out loud. Then, ask your child, "If you wrote a book, what would it be about?" Have her draw a picture for the cover and help her write her name at the top!

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