

Helping Children Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School



February 2024

Early Intervention Program
Midwestern Intermediate Unit IV

Blast off with your child for fun exploring the solar system

Doing science activities together is a great way to help your child learn about the world. But why stop at the world? Here is a school week's worth of ways to introduce your preschooler to the whole solar system!

- **Monday: Look at books** and pictures of the sun and planets. You might read *There's No Place Like Space!*, by Tish Rabe, in which the Cat in the Hat takes a tour of the solar system. You can find amazing photos online at solarsystem.nasa.gov.
- **Tuesday: Draw or print** a picture of the sun and each planet. Refer to books or websites before coloring them in. What do scientists know about how each planet really looks?
- **Wednesday: Make a book.** Staple your pictures together. Help your child add a caption to each page. Your preschooler might copy the planets' names, or dictate details for you to write.
- **Thursday: Create a model solar system.** Use items such as fruit and balls to represent the sun and planets. Help your child line them up in the order they appear in the solar system.
- **Friday: Bake planet cookies.** Let your child shape the dough into planets. Decorate them together with details that show what you've learned.



Start now to promote responsibility

Teaching responsibility to young children takes time—and patience. Preschoolers do a lot of the learning by trial and error. But with your support, your child will learn that responsible effort and behavior get results.

To start instilling responsibility:

- **Make expectations clear.** Explain the rules or steps you want your child to follow. Talk about what will happen if your preschooler doesn't follow them. If your child slips up, follow through.
- **Offer safe new challenges,** such as pouring milk on cereal. If your child spills, don't scold. Just show how to clean up the mess,
- and talk about how to pour a little more slowly tomorrow.
- **Give your child** opportunities to make choices (among limited options you approve) and live with the results.
- **Build on success.** As your child becomes more responsible, adjust your rules and expectations.

Source: M. Purcell, "Building Responsible Kids," Psych Central.

Celebrate love and learning

Share love and sharpen your child's school skills at the same time with these Valentine's Day learning activities. To build:

- **Observation skills,** go on a "heart hunt." Take a walk in nature or in town with your child. Who can find the most hearts?
- **Language skills,** help your child think of rhymes for valentine (*fine, mine, shine*) and day (*play, say, way*).
- **Reading skills,** read books together about Valentine's Day and love. Try *I Love You Because You're You*, by Liza Baker, or *Ollie's Valentine* by Olivier Dunrea.



Get set for kindergarten

It won't be long now before your child starts kindergarten. In the next few months, check in with the preschool teachers to ask about your child's progress. Ask about literacy, math and social skills. Also ask what skills you and your child should work on together to maximize kindergarten readiness.

Spark your child's curiosity

Curiosity motivates learning and helps kids do better in



school. To nurture your child's curiosity:

- **Offer safe** opportunities for your child to discover things independently.
- **Ask questions,** rather than supplying answers. "Where could we race these toy cars so they will go really fast?"
- **Set an example** by trying new things. "This game looks fun. Let's try it!"
- **Show excitement** when your child figures something out without help.

Source: P.E. Shah and others, "Early childhood curiosity and kindergarten reading and math achievement," *Pediatric Research*.



My child is so self-critical. How can I turn this around?

Q: My preschooler says things like “I am the slowest runner,” and “My letters are sloppy.” I’m also seeing more reluctance to try things. What should I do?

A: It’s common for preschoolers to begin comparing themselves to others. They can look around and see how classmates are doing things. It sounds like your child is making comparisons and worrying about falling short.

To bolster your child’s confidence:

- **Discuss effort.** Explain that before anyone can get good at something, they have to try it and keep trying. With effort, people can improve. Praise your child for showing effort: “Look how hard you worked on that!” or “You always try your best!”
- **Avoid comparing people.** Don’t judge your child—or anyone else—by others’ achievements. Instead, point out your child’s progress. “Your letters are so much easier to read now!”
- **Put mistakes in perspective.** Tell your child that people can learn from mistakes and get smarter. Say things like, “Sometimes things don’t work out. Let’s think about what you could do differently next time.”
- **Make time for fun.** Every day, do something with your child that you both enjoy. Children need time away from work, just like adults do.



Do you help your child get enough sleep?

A good night’s sleep helps children stay alert enough to learn and reinforces memory of learned information. Are you making sleep a priority in your child’s schedule? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

1. **Do you help** your child get at least 10 to 13 hours of sleep every 24 hours? preschooler sleeps as much as you can?
2. **Do you maintain** a reasonable bedtime for your child, and stick to it consistently?
3. **Do you keep** up a relaxing bedtime routine for your child, such as bathing, brushing teeth and reading?
4. **Do you have** a digital curfew, and turn off screen devices at least an hour before your child’s bedtime?
5. **Do you reduce** noisy distractions in the area where your

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are making sure your child gets the sleep that is vital for learning. For each no, try that idea.

“Not getting enough sleep or enough high-quality sleep can lead to problems focusing on tasks and thinking clearly.”

—National Institutes of Health

Boost reading participation

The more involved children are during read aloud time, the more they get out of it. When you read a story aloud:

- **Have your child** count the trucks, ducks or other items on a page.
- **Ask your child** to point to a certain letter or word each time it appears.
- **Choose a word** from the book and ask your child to think of words that begin or end with the same letter.
- **Encourage your child** to pretend to be the main character and act out the action.

Questions help your child tackle problem-solving

Thinking is a crucial step in problem-solving. Help your child think problems through by asking questions, like:



- **What’s going on?** Try to get your child to state the problem.
- **What do you** want to do about it?
- **What might happen** if you did that? Help your child consider consequences.

Don’t worry if your preschooler can’t find a solution. What’s important is thinking about it instead of simply asking you for answers.

Organize with pictures

As your child goes through school, strong organizational skills will make the job of being a student easier. Here is a drawing activity to help your child develop them:

1. **Draw pictures together** of items your child is responsible for putting away, such as socks, books, etc.
2. **Post the pictures** where the items go.
3. **Have your child refer** to the pictures when it’s time to put the items away.

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