

# Helping Children Learn<sup>®</sup>

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School



March 2024

Early Intervention Program

Midwestern Intermediate Unit IV

## Expand your child's knowledge by learning new things together

One fundamental way your child learns is by experiencing new things. Many of these experiences will be more meaningful if your preschooler shares them with you. You'll both have fun, and you'll also teach your child that people are never too old to learn.



Together you can:

- **Visit places** you haven't been before. Look for museums, parks and other recreational facilities that might interest your child. Check out local service providers, such as a recycling center or an animal shelter.
- **Cook a new recipe.** Together, look through a cookbook with pictures and select a recipe to prepare. Show your preschooler how to help you set the table and clean up afterward, too.
- **Take a class for families**, such as an art or exercise class. Local community centers or parks and recreation departments are good places to find appropriate classes.
- **Read new-to-you books.** At the library, choose books by at least three authors that you haven't heard of or whose books you haven't read with your child.
- **Taste a new food.** At the market, select a food you have never tried, and encourage your child to do the same. Share a bite with each other.



## Help your child strengthen self-control

In school, behaviors like listening, concentrating and cooperating are vital for learning. Kindergarten teachers don't expect perfect behavior. But building self-control now will make learning easier when your child gets there.

To help your preschooler develop self-control:

- **Provide advance warning** when a big change is coming. Letting your child get used to the idea may prevent a melt-down.
- **Allow your child** to make decisions within acceptable limits. This gives your child some control, and teaches that it's not OK to just do whatever feels good.
- **Show that you care** when your child is upset. Offer a hug. Then encourage your child to use words to tell you what's wrong.
- **React calmly to tantrums.** Say as little as possible and remove your child from the situation.
- **Offer praise** when your child handles frustration without falling apart, or expresses feelings with words instead of physical actions.

## Play games with math

Playing board games is an effective way to help young children build math skills, according to a recent research review. When you play a board game with your child:

- **Take turns counting** and saying how many dots are on a die. Soon your child will recognize the patterns and know how many there are without counting.
- **Count out loud** while moving game pieces on a board. Say one number for each space. Do this even if a game doesn't require counting, such as Candy Land.



Source: J. Balladares and others, "The Effects of Board Games on Math Skills in Children Attending Prekindergarten and Kindergarten: A Systematic Review," *Early Years*, Taylor & Francis.

## 'Self-talk' has benefits

Studies show that when preschoolers talk to themselves out loud while doing a task, it can help them do it better than if they were silent. This kind of "private speech" can also help them focus and stay on task. Encourage your child to think out loud and talk through the steps of challenging tasks.

Source: A. Mulvihill and others, "Preschool children's private speech content and performance on executive functioning and problem-solving tasks," *Cognitive Development*, Elsevier.

## Make time easier to grasp

Understanding an abstract concept like time takes complex thinking skills. To teach your child about days, weeks, months and years:

- **Use time words.** Point to days on a calendar. "Today is Friday." "We went shopping yesterday."
- **Read books** about time, such as *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* by Eric Carle, and *Chicken Soup with Rice*, by Maurice Sendak.





## How can I tell if my child's verbal skills are on track?

**Q:** My four-year old doesn't seem as talkative as my older child was at that age. Should I be worried?

**A:** Every child is unique. Kids develop language skills at different rates, so differences between your children aren't necessarily reasons to worry. But there are some common language milestones for four-year-olds, and you can listen for them from your child.

Four-year-olds generally can:

- **Answer basic questions.** They can say their first and last names. They can give a sibling's name or the name of their street or even their address.
- **Be understood most of the time** by people outside their own families. They may not speak perfectly, but they can get their meaning across.
- **Use language in different ways.** This might include singing and reciting nursery rhymes in addition to normal speaking.
- **Ask questions** and talk voluntarily.
- **Use tenses and some prepositions.** "I played outside." "I am going to Anna's house." "My shoes are *under* my bed."

If you aren't hearing most of these things, or if you are still concerned, ask a doctor for help determining if your preschooler's skills are age-appropriate.



## Are you involving your child in reading?

Reading *with* your child means encouraging your preschooler to participate in the process. And it is an effective way to build reading skills and interest. Are you making the most of your read aloud time? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you read** together at times of day when your child is alert and interested?
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you ask** your child questions about the stories you read, and encourage your child to ask you some, too?
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you visit** the library together, and let your child browse, select and check-out books to read with you?
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you point** to frequently appearing words when you read, such as *dog*, *ball* and *end*, and ask your child to look for them, too?
- \_\_\_ **5. Do you let** your child choose books you'll read, even if it is often the same one?

### How well are you doing?

*More yes answers mean you are actively engaging your child in reading. For each no, try that idea.*

"Show me a family of readers, and I will show you the people who move the world."  
—Napoleon Bonaparte

## Catch your child's attention

Your child's ability to concentrate may vary in different situations. This is normal. To maximize your preschooler's ability to focus on learning:

- **Consider mood.** If your child is tired or hungry, it is probably better to wait to introduce a challenging activity.
- **Play to your child's interests.** If your child likes trucks, count them, read about them, discuss their similarities and differences, etc.
- **Plan "me too" activities** that relate to what a sibling is doing, such as tracing letters while an older child is writing.

## Celebrate learning progress in a special book

Making a "Things I Know" book is a great way to show what a capable learner your child is! To make one:

- **Discuss skills** your child has learned (getting dressed, reading simple words, recognizing shapes, etc.).
- **Have your child draw** pictures of the things on sheets of paper.
- **Staple the pages** to make a book. Have your child "read" it to you often.



## Support learning-readiness

What does it mean to send your child to school "ready to learn"? For preschoolers, being ready to learn includes getting enough sleep, eating a healthy breakfast and bringing necessary supplies to school. Preparing your child to learn also means being enthusiastic about preschool so your child will be, too! When families help in these ways, students have what they need to do their best in school.

### Helping Children Learn®

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.

Copyright © 2024, The Parent Institute®, a division of PaperClip Media, Inc.

P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474

1-800-756-5525 • www.parent-institute.com