

# Helping Children Learn<sup>®</sup>

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

Moore Public Schools



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## Help your preschooler combine independence and responsibility

A child who can think and act independently is displaying *autonomy*. Studies show that this trait, when combined with responsibility, improves performance in school. Autonomous, responsible students also tend to make friends more easily.



To encourage responsible autonomy in your preschooler:

- **Give your child** a regular chore to do. It might be feeding a pet, watering a plant or setting the table. Demonstrate how to do the chore first, and do it together a few times. Then, let your child try it alone.
- **Be realistic about your child's abilities.** Try to see things from your preschooler's point of view. A four-year-old isn't ready to think through complex decisions or handle tasks that have more than a few steps.
- **Provide choices.** Within limits, let your child decide what clothes to wear, what task to do next or what book you'll read together.
- **Explain the reasons** why you want your child to do something. For example, it's important to pick up toys so they won't get stepped on and broken and so no one will get hurt.
- **Offer praise** when your child has behaved responsibly. But avoid using bribes in advance like, "I'll give you a cookie if you pick up your toys."

Source: A.C. Vasquez and others, "Parent Autonomy Support, Academic Achievement, and Psychosocial Functioning: A Meta-analysis of Research" *Educational Psychology Review*, Springer Science + Business Media.



## Activate large and small motor skills

Well-developed motor skills help children manipulate their muscles. In school, your child will use fine (small) motor skills to read and write, and gross (large) motor skills to exercise and control movements.

To strengthen small motor skills, have your child:

- **Draw, paint and color** with large crayons, pencils and brushes.
- **String large beads** onto yarn.
- **Turn pages** of books.
- **Pick up coins** from a table (supervise to prevent swallowing).
- **Squeeze water** out of a sponge.

To build large motor skills, try these activities together:

- **Pretend to be animals.** Charge like a rhino, waddle like a duck, leap like a grasshopper.
- **Roll and catch** a large, light ball.
- **Play Simon Says**, and have your child jump, reach and march.
- **Walk on** a board on the ground.

## Encourage pre-writing

Preschoolers go through several stages on the way to writing. If your child is:

- **Scribbling**, say, "Tell me about your picture." Write down what your child says and read it together.
- **Writing lines** or random letters, say, "Tell me what this says." Write the correct words below your child's marks.
- **Writing beginning** and ending consonants, such as DG for *dog*, say, "Yes, D and G make sounds in the word dog." Write the whole word and sound it out together.



## Enjoy some mealtime math

Making math a natural part of daily activities increases your child's comfort with it. To add math to mealtime:

- **Place a baby carrot** on your child's plate. Say, "Here is one carrot." Add two more. Ask, "Now how many do you have?"
- **Show that napkins** folded in half are triangles (or rectangles). Ask, "What shape are they when you unfold them?"



## Act to reinforce reading

When you read a story together, encourage your child to act it out. This boosts comprehension and memory of the narrative by helping your child connect the words on the page and real actions. Pause and take turns acting out a scene you just read. Physically crawling, for example, can help your child understand and remember the meaning of the word *crawl* in the story.

Source: K.A. Bernstein and others, "Gesture like a kitten and you won't forget your tale: Drama-based, embodied story time supports preschoolers' narrative skills," *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, Elsevier.



## How should I treat sickness I'm not sure is real?

**Q:** When it's time to leave for preschool, my 4-year-old sometimes complains of not feeling well. I can't always tell if my child is really sick, or just wants to stay home and play. Often, my preschooler seems to feel fine an hour later. What should I do on these days?

**A:** If you aren't sure if your child is really ill, remember to:

- **Ask if there is anything** about preschool that is scaring or worrying your child. You may be able to correct a misunderstanding and ease your child's mind. Then, you can continue the schoolday routine.
- **Follow the school's health protocols.** If your child will have to stay home from preschool, explain that this means staying in bed to rest and get well. No getting up to play around the house or watch videos.
- **Provide sympathy and care.** But try not to overdo the attention and special services. The goal is to create an environment where your child can get well, not one that is more enjoyable than going to preschool.
- **Stick with your decision.** If your child later claims to feel better and wants to get up, say that you are glad about the improvement, but your child needs to stay in bed and continue to recover. Say, "I hope tomorrow you will feel completely well and ready to return to preschool." Your child will learn that staying home sick is different from staying home to play.



## Are you teaching respect for property?

Part of learning to share with others involves learning to treat shared items—from crayons to school buildings—with care. Are you encouraging your child to show respect for property? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

1. **Do you provide** specific places for your child to keep belongings, such as a shelf for books and a bin for blocks?
2. **Do you make** cleaning up a regular part of playtime?  
"Before we get out another toy, we need to put this one away."
3. **Do you talk** about the benefits of caring for other people's property? "If you treat Dad's flashlight gently, he'll let you use it again."
4. **Do you set** an example by treating items with respect, including your child's?

5. **Do you praise** your child's careful treatment of objects?

### How well are you doing?

*More yes answers mean you are teaching the importance of treating property with respect. For each no, try that idea.*

"Live so that when your children think of fairness, caring and integrity, they think of you."

—H. Jackson Brown, Jr.

## Science is fun to think about

Curiosity often drives preschoolers to ask questions, collect information, and test ideas. This is the basis of scientific thinking. To encourage your child's interest in science:

- **Inspect things up close.** Use a magnifying glass to look at ants in the grass, veins in fallen leaves or seeds in an apple. Ask your child to describe them.
- **Make and test predictions.** How far does your child think you can throw a ball? Try it, then measure to find out.
- **Observe changes over time.** Discuss how a tree or stream looks now. Observe it again in different seasons.

## Create a balanced schedule

Preschoolers need both structured and unstructured time in their day. To strike a happy balance:

- **Choose activities** with your child's interests, age and abilities in mind.
- **Set aside time each day** for family activities: playing games, mealtime conversations, reading together, etc.
- **Listen.** If your preschooler consistently resists an activity, don't force it.
- **Provide plenty of** screen-free downtime for relaxing, imagining and playing.

## Walk and learn together

When you help your child experience new things—or familiar things in new ways—you are fostering learning. On a neighborhood walk, for example, ask your child to:

- **Point out shapes** and colors around you.
- **Notice sounds.**
- **Discuss similarities** and differences. "This door has one window; that door over there has two."



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