EARLY CHILDHOOD

Helping Children Learn®

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

November 2025

Waunakee Public Schools

Help your child use fingers to strengthen math understanding

Learning about numbers and counting is hands-on fun when your child puts fingers to use. It's effective, too. Research shows that when preschoolers use their fingers to sort out numbers, it helps them understand math concepts. Fingers serve as a "bridge" for your child to move from thinking about numbers to seeing them.

To help your child get a grip on math, try these finger-learning activities together:

- **Say a number from 1-10** and encourage your preschooler to hold up the same number of fingers. Then, have your child repeat the number.
- **Have your child trace numbers on paper.** Write down a numeral, such as 5, and show your preschooler how to trace over it with a finger. Then, ask your child to show you five fingers. This reinforces the connection between the numeral and the quantity it represents.
- **Play with dominos.** Demonstrate how to match a two-dot tile to another two-dot tile, and have your child try to make other matches. Then, ask your child to hold up the same number of fingers on each hand and touch them together.

Source: M. Krenger and C. Thevenot, "The use of fingers in addition: A longitudinal study in children from preschool to kindergarten," *Cognitive Development*, Elsevier.

Ask your child to make predictions

In elementary school, your child will be asked to make predictions in most subject areas. This thinking skill helps students consider evidence, recognize patterns and make educated guesses. And it's a skill preschoolers can learn!

Encourage your preschooler to make predictions when you:

- **Read.** Ask your child to predict what will happen next in the story. "When they get to the farm, what do you think they will see?" This helps with reading comprehension.
- **Change location.** "Do you think it will be hot or cold when we go outside?" "What will we pass on the way to the grocery store?"
- **Engage in daily routines.** "I'm wearing my uniform and getting ready to leave. Where do you think I am going?" "It's bedtime, what will you do to get ready?"

Be sure to discuss the results of your child's predictions, too. "You said we would pass the playground on the way to the grocery store. You were right! Look, I see some children on the swings."

Add value to read-alouds

When a book has multiple pictures on each page, it can be harder for young children to follow the story. One study showed that children also learn more new words when there is only one picture per page. To boost read aloud value:

- **Look for books** with one engaging image per page.
- **Limit lift-the-flap books,** which distract attention from listening to the words.
- **Clarify multi-image stories.** Point to the picture that goes with the text as you read it.

Source: Z.M. Flack and J.S. Horst, "Two sides to every story: Children learn words better from one storybook page at a time," *Infant and Child Development*, John Wiley & Sons.

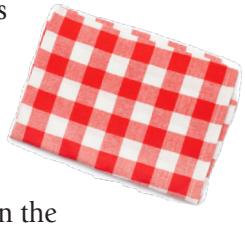
Make size comparisons

To teach the concept of relative size, help your preschooler measure two items of different lengths. Next:

1. **State the lengths.** "The pencil is six inches long. The crayon is four inches."
2. **Compare the items' sizes.** "The crayon is *shorter* than the pencil. The pencil is *longer* than the crayon." Let your child choose some new items and repeat.

Sit down to a story picnic

Sharing at least one healthy meal each day as a family nurtures your child's body and mind. But nothing says you always have to eat it at a table!



Try having a story picnic. Put the food in a box or bag, and spread out a blanket on the floor. Sit down and say the words, "Once upon a time ... ." Then, take turns adding a new sentence until the story is complete.

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Q&A What can I do to prepare my child for classroom learning?

Q: My four-year-old doesn't like to sit and focus on one thing for very long. How much of that is expected in kindergarten? How can I help my child get ready?

A: Kindergarten teachers are well aware that five- and six-year-olds need to be active. While there will be more seat work than in preschool, it typically happens in small, 15 to 20 minute chunks.

To develop your child's ability to sit and concentrate:

- **Create and follow routines.** Knowing what to expect provides young children with a sense of order and helps them settle down to tasks.
- **Have your child play** with one toy at a time. Choose toys such as blocks, puppets and art supplies that offer lots of ways to play.
- **Limit digital media use.** Passively watching TV and videos feeds a desire to be entertained by constantly changing scenery.
- **Read together.** Engage your child's interest by giving the characters funny voices. Extend focus time by encouraging your child to ask questions about the story and talking about it together.
- **Return to activities.** "After you have had your snack, you can finish coloring your picture."

Parent Quiz Are you fostering a sense of caring?

Children who treat people and things with kindness and care are better friends and classmates. They also tend to care more about doing well in school. Are you showing your child how to be caring? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

___**1. Do you teach** appreciation for others by having your child say *thank you* to them for the things they do?

___**2. Do you help** your child learn to care for living things, such as pets or plants?

___**3. Do you ask** your child to think about how someone else might be feeling?

___**4. Do you encourage** your child to share and do other acts of kindness?

___**5. Do you set** an example of caring by showing kindness and respect to your child and to others?

How well are you doing?

More yes *answers mean you are reinforcing the importance of caring. For each* no, *try that idea.*

"A single act of kindness throws out roots in all directions, and the roots spring up and make new trees."
—Amelia Earhart

Boost interest in writing

Your child may not be writing yet, but now is the time to begin making it seem exciting! To encourage a desire to write:

- **Fill a "writing box"** with a variety of writing tools and plain and lined paper. When your child seems receptive, pull out the box.
- **Create word art.** Help your child use glue to write words on bright pieces of paper. Shake sprinkles on top.
- **Make a letter scrapbook.** Help your child write a letter on each page. Next, your preschooler can draw or paste in pictures of things that start with that letter.

Strengthen recall ability

In school, your child will need to be able to recall material as well as understand it. To help your preschooler build memory power:

- **Read rhyming poems and stories.** Recognizing the patterns helps reinforce memory.
- **Hide a few items** while your child watches. Then, do another activity. Later, ask your child to find the items.
- **Reverse roles.** After teaching your child a new skill, ask your child to teach you how to do it.

Share the benefits of music

Music—making it and listening to it—can help your child learn self-regulation, language and social skills, and a lot more. To enhance learning with music:

- **Play lively music** during clean-up time.
- **Make up silly songs** together about familiar words, concepts and activities.
- **Attend music performances** for families in the community. Talk with your child about how to behave there.

Source: D. Wolf, "Why Making Music Matters," Carnegie Hall.

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