

Helping Children Learn®

EARLY CHILDHOOD

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

Moore Public Schools



October 2025

Encourage your preschooler to think and communicate in detail

Talking about ideas and experiences develops preschoolers' ability to express themselves clearly. Strong communication skills will make it easier for your child to learn and exchange information with others in the classroom, and also form friendships. And as your child gets older, these skills will be important for writing as well as speaking.

To help your child develop strong communication skills:

- **Set an example.** When you talk with your child, expand on basic information by giving details. Instead of saying, "We're going out," say, "We are going to the store this afternoon. I need to get some vegetables for soup and a box of pasta. You can help me pick them out."
- **Ask about your child's work.** If your child makes some art, ask, "Which part did you do first? Why did you choose the colors you did?"
- **Help your child learn** to describe events in order. You might ask, "What are some of the things you do after dinner and before bed?" If your child isn't sure, offer a prompt. "You brush your teeth. What do you do next?"
- **Ask follow-up questions** to draw out more details. If your child tells you about playing with friends on the playground, ask, "What were you playing?" "Do you and your friends like the sandbox or the swings more?"



Practice letters in creative ways

Letter recognition is an essential early step in learning to read. Luckily, there are countless ways to help your child practice that will keep the learning experience fresh and fun. Enjoy these activities with your preschooler:

- **Yummy letters.** Form letters with tasty, kid-friendly supplies, such as circle-shaped crackers and small, straight pretzel sticks. Allow your child to break up the foods to create letter shapes.
- **Start with parts.** Draw a shape or line, such as a circle or a diagonal line. Then, ask your child to add to it, eventually making a letter, such as B or N. Offer hints as needed, then switch roles.
- **Light-up letters.** In a dark room, use the light beam from a flashlight to draw letters on the ceiling or wall. Can your child follow the beam and figure out the letters you are writing?
- **Letter match.** Write letters in uppercase and lowercase (A, a) on a sheet of paper. Then, ask your preschooler to draw a line from each lowercase letter to its uppercase match.

Playtime is learning time

When playing, preschoolers are also thinking, self-directing and learning by doing. To promote learning through play, encourage your child to:



- **Imagine.** Pretending helps your child consider what could happen in a situation.
- **Play board games.** These teach patience and cooperation. You can also use them to teach letters, numbers and words.
- **Play outside.** Playing in nature promotes curiosity, creativity and thinking and builds children's gross motor skills.

Source: M. Yogman and others, "The Power of Play: A Pediatric Role in Enhancing Development in Young Children," *Pediatrics*, American Academy of Pediatrics.

Praise positive behavior

Frequent approval and praise from you motivates your child to behave in desired ways. For the best results, your praise should be genuine and specific, and given as soon as you are aware of your child's positive behavior. Reinforce your words with body language: a gentle hug, smile or thumbs-up, for example.



Source: A. Kazdin, Ph.D., *The Everyday Parenting Toolkit*, Mariner Books.

Boost screen time quality

Doctors recommend limiting children's screen use. But it is also important to make the time your child does spend using digital media productive. Here's how:

- **Choose age-appropriate**, educational content.
- **Watch or play** with your child and talk about what you see.
- **Avoid using screens** to occupy your child while you do something else.



How can I strengthen my child's ability to listen?

Q: My preschooler rarely listens to me the first time. I often have to ask several times before my child does what I say. I don't think this behavior is intentional, so I'm not sure how to change it. What should I do?

A: Even when preschoolers want to behave, they aren't the best listeners. Their attention spans are short, and they are easily distracted.



To help your child become a better listener:

- **Close the distance between you.** Walk over to your preschooler. Capture attention by saying your child's name. Or, use a special phrase that signals that it's listening time, such as "One, two, three—eyes on me."
- **Change your tone of voice.** Singing and whispering can both get children to listen because they are different than regular speaking. Avoid speaking too fast or too loud.
- **Curb interruptions.** If your child starts to talk or do something else before you are through speaking, hold up your hand and say, "Please wait." When you are finished, say, "Thank you for listening. It is your turn to speak now."
- **Ask, "Can you tell me** what I just said?" If your child can't, make eye contact and repeat your original message.



Are you enriching your child's vocabulary?

The preschool years are a boom time for language development. And when you help your child learn new words, you are also boosting reading readiness. Are you helping grow your child's vocabulary? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

- ___ **1. Do you introduce** new words which mean the same thing as familiar ones? When your child says a building is *big*, say, "Yes, it's *gigantic*."
- ___ **2. Do you call** items by specific names, rather than general ones, when talking to your child (*pineapple*, not fruit)?
- ___ **3. Do you explain** unfamiliar words to your child when you read aloud?
- ___ **4. Do you play** word games together, such as pointing to an object and having your child name it?

- ___ **5. Do you teach** your child words that describe emotions and sensations (*joyful*, *chilly*)?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are expanding your child's word power. For each no, try that idea.

"All I know is what I have words for."
—Ludwig Wittgenstein

Puzzles are skill-builders

Putting together jigsaw puzzles helps your child develop fine motor skills and think logically and visually. While working on a puzzle—especially over two or three sessions—your child also learns important school behaviors such as how to:

- **Concentrate quietly.**
- **Recognize progress.**
- **Return to an unfinished project.**

Start with a puzzle of about eight pieces and move up at your child's pace.



Try some hands-on math

When something changes shape, there is not necessarily more or less of it. To help your child understand this key math concept:

- **Cut two pieces of string** the same length. Ball one up, and spread out the other. Next, ask your child which string is longer. Then, spread out the balled piece and show that they are the same.
- **Fill a tall, narrow glass** halfway with water. Let your child pour the water into a short, wide glass. Does it look the same?

Explain that things that are the same size or amount can look different depending on how you shape them.

Instill a love of learning

Your child's school career is just beginning. To nurture an enthusiasm for learning that will support success now and later on:

- **Ask your child to teach you** something the preschool class is learning.
- **Display your child's work** proudly in a visible place in your home.
- **Read together every day.** Kids who love books are less likely to be overwhelmed by reading tasks in kindergarten.

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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.

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