EARLY CHILDHOOD

Helping Children Learn®

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

January 2026

Moore Public Schools

Building communication skills makes it easier to make friends

Communication skills help kids establish the friendships that make school life better. But for children who are shy or just don't say much, speaking to peers can be a challenge—even when they have large vocabularies. Research shows that word knowledge doesn't always go hand in hand with effective social communication.

To help your child build the communication skills that lead to better connections with peers:

- **Role-play.** Help your child practice having school-day conversations with classmates. Talk about the importance of making eye contact and speaking clearly. Offer simple strategies for starting conversations. For example, "I really like your lunch bag. Dinosaurs are my favorite."
- **Help your child recognize cues.** Pretend that you're bored by a conversation with your preschooler. Does your child notice? If not, say, "Did you hear how I sighed when you kept talking? If someone does that, it probably means they are finished listening."
- **Change topics.** While chatting together, start talking about something else. Can your child make the switch? Being able to pivot is important for keeping conversations going.

Source: "Building social communication skills in shy children helps with peer likability," Yale-NUS College.

Practice key math concepts in fun ways

Understanding certain math concepts—counting, patterning and comparing quantities—makes it more likely that your preschooler will do well in math in elementary school. To provide practice, play some fun games together:

- **Shape Hunt.** Choose a room in your house, then see how many examples of a certain shape your child can find there. Can your preschooler spot five rectangles in the kitchen? Next time, pick a different shape and a different room.
- **Pattern Prediction.** Draw a simple pattern of colored squares (red, blue, green, red, blue, green). Ask your child what should come next. Move on to more complex patterns as skills improve.
- **More or Less?** Make two unequal piles of small objects (cereal pieces, coins, etc.). Ask your child to tell you which has more in it without counting. Then ask, "How do you know?" Finally, count together and find out!

Source: B. Rittle-Johnson and others, "Early Math Trajectories," *Child Development*, The Society for Research in Child Development.

Promote learning at home

Children who grow up in "learning-rich" homes learn a lot before they ever get to school, and the benefits are long-lasting. To create a pro-learning environment:

- **Read together daily.** Ask your child questions about what you read.
- **Play with toys** that foster skill-building, like blocks, dominoes and puzzles.
- **Have meaningful** conversations. Introduce new words. Ask what your child thinks.

Source: C.S. Tamis-Lemonda and others, "Child's Home Learning Environment Predicts 5th Grade Academic Skills," *Applied Developmental Science*, Routledge.

Add value to time together

What your preschooler needs most from you is your time. To make the most of it:

- **Combine learning and doing.** Take your child on your errands and discuss what you are doing the whole time.
- **Exercise with your child.** Walk, bike, skate—even climbing stairs counts.
- **Join in your child's** favorite activities. Ask what your child likes about them.

Explore winter in a poem

Preschoolers like listening to poems. Now, help your child write one! Here's how:

1. **Write five sentences** that begin with "In winter, I ... ." Add one of the five senses to each (*see*, *smell*, *taste*, *hear*, *touch*). Then, leave a space for your child to add a word.
2. **Discuss what** each sense means. Give examples.
3. **Go outside** and observe winter using your senses. Take the poem and help your child fill in the blanks.

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Q&A I want my child to be a good thinker. What can I do?

Q: I've heard that many kids grow up lacking the kinds of thinking skills they need to do well in school. Are they something I can help my four-year-old learn?

A: Yes! Thinking skills have to do with imagining, predicting, figuring and questioning. Most preschoolers can do all of these things—they just need regular encouragement and practice to strengthen their skills.

To nurture thinking-skill development:

- **Discuss your child's work.** Ask questions like "Why did you decide to make the dog purple?" or "What else have you learned about this?"
- **Encourage problem-solving.** For example, if your child's shirt is on backward, stand in front of a mirror together. Say, "Uh-oh, where is the design on your shirt?" Let your child figure out what went wrong and fix it.
- **Ask your child thinking questions.** These often start with phrases like, "How do you know that ..." or "What would happen if ... ?"
- **Make time each day for independent play.** Have your child play with simple toys that can be used many ways, such as a few cardboard tubes. This provides an opportunity for creative thinking.

Parent Quiz Are you balancing safety and freedom?

Safety is a high priority for families of preschoolers. But letting children learn by exploring and experiencing fosters the independence they need in school. Are you providing room to learn and grow safely? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

___**1. Do you watch** nearby when your child plays with friends, but avoid directing the action?

___**2. Do you let** your child make simple choices, such as which of two pairs of pants to wear?

___**3. Do you spend** time playing with your child and also encourage independent play?

___**4. Do you show** respect for your child's opinions by listening without interrupting, even if you disagree?

___**5. Do you give** your child time to try to solve minor problems before you step in to help?

How well are you doing?

More yes *answers mean you are helping your child develop skills and confidence within safe limits. For each* no, *try that idea.*

"The expert at anything was once a beginner."
—Helen Hayes

Have fun with healthy foods

The things children eat affect how they feel—and how they learn. A nutritious diet can improve your child's:

- **Concentration.**
- **Memory.**
- **Self-control.**

Young children are more likely to eat healthy foods like vegetables if families offer options and make them seem fun. Try arranging cut up vegetables and fruits into a funny face or a flower. And stick with it. Repeated exposure is an effective way to increase your child's appetite for nutritious foods.

Source: "Helping Your Children Love Vegetables," Utah State University.

Ask your child to pitch in

Doing a regular chore or two at home helps your preschooler learn that everyone in a family has a responsibility to keep things running smoothly. Preschoolers aged three and up can do tasks such as:

- **Set out spoons** and forks on the table.
- **Put dirty clothes** in a laundry basket.
- **Dust chair legs** and bannisters.
- **Pick up toys,** books and shoes and put them away in designated spots.

Reading has many benefits

Reading aloud together can help your child build school skills—including the ability to cope with challenges. One study found that reading aloud at home can triple children's resilience at school. Introduce your child to a wide variety of reading material, such as:

- **Fiction** that encourages imagination.
- **Poetry** that rhymes.
- **Nonfiction** that teaches your child that reading is a fun way to learn new things.

Source: University of South Australia, "Reading builds resilience among at-risk kids," ScienceDaily.

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