

# Helping Children Learn®

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

EARLY CHILDHOOD



April 2023

## Enrich family reading time by interacting with your child

Reading with parents every day does so many things to prepare children for success in school—from developing thinking, language and listening skills to building a broad base of knowledge. For the best results, make reading an interactive experience for your preschooler. Children get more out of read aloud time when they are active participants.



When you read together:

- **Look at the book** with your child. Does the title give your preschooler any ideas about what the book might be about? Read the author's name. Explain that authors are regular people who like to share stories.
- **Read a few pages and then pause.** Ask your child a question or two: "What do you think will happen next in this story?" "What do you see in this picture?" "Have you ever felt like the main character?" Encourage your child to talk about the story and ask questions, too.
- **Give your child a chance to "read."** Encourage your preschooler to point out familiar words, such as *dog* or *the* or *and*. If the story is a favorite, let your child take a turn telling part of it to you.
- **Create reading excitement.** With a longer book, stop reading at a dramatic part so your child will look forward to reading again tomorrow.

Source: "Make the most of Reading Aloud," ReadWriteThink, International Literacy Association.



## Show that math is a fun part of life

Helping your child be comfortable with math from an early age will make it seem natural, rather than scary. You can do this by making math a part of all sorts of daily activities you do together. Here are just a few ways:

- **Make a game** of looking for numbers everywhere you go. Search for numbers your preschooler knows. If your child doesn't recognize numbers yet, point them out.
- **Estimate and count.** You might say, "I think you can walk to the wall over there in 10 steps. Let's see." Then help your preschooler count each step while taking it.
- **Use math words** to describe actions. "Here is the cereal and here is the milk. Now I'm *adding* the milk to the cereal." "Let's *divide* this cookie so we can share it."
- **Highlight sequences.** Discuss your daily routines. "First, you go to preschool. Second, I pick you up. Third, we have lunch." "We eat meals in the same order every day: breakfast, lunch, dinner."

## Build communication skills

To help your child practice expressing ideas and information clearly:

- **Ask about artwork.** Why did your child choose those colors? What was your child thinking about while making it?
- **Talk about plans.** Say more than "We are going out." Try, "We are going to take Aunt Sue some soup because she is sick. What else can we bring to make her feel better?"
- **Ask for details.** "Why do you think Aunt Sue would like a puppy? What kind? How do puppies make you feel?"



## Start Earth-friendly habits

April 22 is Earth Day. Teach your child that everyone—even preschoolers—can help protect the Earth. You and your child can:

- **Turn off lights** when you leave a room. Explain that this saves resources.
- **Reduce plastic use.** Choose reusable containers instead of single-use plastic.
- **Save water.** Teach your child to fill a glass of water for rinsing, then turn off the tap while brushing teeth.

## Play around with time

It takes time for children to master the concept of time. To help your child learn some basics now:

- **Set a timer** for one minute so your child can get a sense of how long that feels.
- **Ask your child** to guess how long it will take to jump up and down 50 times. Time it and see.



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## I'm worried about my child's writing skills. What can I do?

**Q:** My child has no interest in writing. I see other preschoolers writing their names, but my child hasn't even mastered stick figures. What should I do to help?

**A:** Children develop skills at different rates. So it is more helpful to introduce your child to activities that will strengthen skills and boost interest in writing than to make comparisons to others.

Helping your child build fine motor skills (the small hand muscle movements used for writing) is a good place to start. You and your child can:

- **Squeeze and roll dough or clay.**
- **Put puzzles together** to help develop eye-hand coordination.
- **Build with interlocking blocks** that snap together.

To add writing to the fun:

- **Finger-paint.** If you don't have finger-paint, things like pudding and shaving cream work, too. Draw the first letter of your child's name in the paint and see if your child can copy it.
- **Experiment with writing tools.** Start with markers, then try chalk, crayons and finally pencils.

If your child isn't making progress, discuss your concerns with the preschool teacher or a pediatrician.



## Are you showing how to be kind?

Students who are kind are better friends and classmates. And they are more likely to care about doing well in school. Are you encouraging your preschooler to be kind and caring? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you demonstrate** kind behavior by helping and showing respect to your child and others?
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you encourage** sharing, and other acts of kindness?
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you help** your child think about others' feelings?
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you teach** your child the importance of thanking and appreciating others?
- \_\_\_ **5. Do you ask** your child to help take care of living things, such as plants or pets?

### How well are you doing?

*More yes answers mean you are teaching kindness and consideration for others. For each no, try that idea.*

"No act of kindness,  
no matter how small,  
is ever wasted."

—Aesop

## Help your child learn how to work with others

Leadership is a positive quality in school. But bossiness—not listening to others, not taking turns, not sharing—is a problem. To encourage your child to cooperate rather than dictate:

- **Set basic family rules** for fairness. If one child cuts the cake, the other gets the first piece.
- **Share family decision making.** Take turns choosing what movie to watch, or what vegetable to have for dinner.
- **Teach fair ways** to decide, such as flipping a coin or playing rock-paper-scissors to see who goes first.

## Instill respect for property

One way that students are expected to show responsibility in school is by treating property with respect. Help your child learn to:

- **Use items** properly. Crayons are for drawing on paper, not on the walls.
- **Organize papers.** Give your child a bin to put papers in that come home from preschool.
- **Care for books and toys** borrowed from others and return them promptly.



## Make time for downtime

Every preschooler's day should include some unprogrammed time. Getting to choose and control hands-on activities develops your child's problem-solving skills, self-confidence and sense of independence.

Spending downtime with family lets your child strengthen bonds and feel loved. It also relieves the stress of going from activity to activity—which can cause meltdowns.

Source: J.E. Barker and others, "Less-structured time in children's daily lives predicts self-directed executive functioning," *Frontiers in Psychology*, Frontiers Media.

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