

Helping Children Learn®

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

EARLY CHILDHOOD



September 2023

Reading with your child every day is the recipe for a bright future

When you read aloud with your preschooler every day, you're doing much more than building reading readiness. You are also developing your child's brain power, and increasing your preschooler's likelihood of success in a wide variety of school subjects. And you are strengthening the important connection between you.



For the best results:

- **Read together daily.** Make this a cozy part of your routine. Read with enthusiasm, and pause and talk with your preschooler about what you are reading. Have your child turn the pages.
- **Don't rely on screens.** Research shows that children get more out of reading with a parent than looking at an e-book alone.
- **Explore the library** with your child. Attend storytime and other events for children. Regularly refresh your child's supply of reading material by checking out age-appropriate books that appeal to your preschooler.
- **Read more than books.** Show your child that the world is full of words to read. Read labels on items in your home together. Read signs aloud everywhere you go. Read directions when you travel or cook together.

Source: S. James, M.D., "Benefits of Starting Reading at a Young Age," Nationwide Children's; A. Delgado and others, "Reading with a caregiver trumps reading an e-book alone," Brookings.



Build key cooperation skills at home

Children's ability to cooperate with teachers, staff and classmates influences their learning and their overall school experience. Plenty of practice at home can help your child strengthen these school success skills:

- **Recognizing authority.** Help your preschooler learn to respect boundaries. Listen if your child disagrees, but make final decisions yourself.
- **Contributing.** Expect your child to pitch in with age-appropriate tasks, such as putting dirty clothes in a hamper.
- **Communicating.** Spend lots of time having back-and-forth conversations together. Follow up on what your child says by asking for more details. Encourage your child to ask questions, too.
- **Expressing strong emotions** appropriately. Teach your child to use words rather than actions.
- **Using names.** Role-play some situations with your child, such as meeting a new classmate. "Hi, I'm Cameron. What's your name?"

Science is fun in the tub

Introducing your child to science is as easy as turning on the tap! Here are some bath time activities to try with your preschooler:

- **Float a boat.** Give your child a big plastic bowl to use as a boat and some rubber animals. How many animals can ride in the boat before it sinks?
- **Bubble up.** Pour a small amount of bubble solution into the bowl and add water. Help your child use a straw to blow into the solution. Explain that the bubbles are soap filled with breath (air).
- **Compare weights.** Fill a plastic cup with bubbles, and another with water. Ask your child which is *heavy* and which is *light*. Explain that air is lighter than water.



Foster a love of learning

Show your child that you value learning, and your child will think it's important, too.

- **Explain that education** is a priority for your family.
- **Talk about how school** and learning have been important in your life.
- **Ask your child** to teach you things.
- **Show pride** in your child's new skills.

Play with patterns together

In math, the patterns that numbers appear in give them meaning. To help your child practice recognizing patterns:



- **Make a simple pattern** (green apple, red apple, green apple). Can your child say what comes next?
- **Look at a calendar.** Show your child how every month begins with day 1.
- **Search for patterns** at home. Check clothing, tiles, sheets and more.



What is the right way to nurture self-esteem?

Q: I've heard that families should foster healthy self-esteem in children. I don't want my child to be self-centered. How is this different, and how do we do it?

A: It is a myth that self-esteem is a form of conceitedness, or that people with high self-esteem think they are better or above everyone else. Healthy self-esteem is associated with better academic performance, and it has two main parts:

1. **Competence.** This means your child feels capable of learning and accomplishing things.
2. **Self-worth.** This means your child feels valued and worthy of respect.

To develop your preschooler's self-esteem:

- **Show that you love** the person your child is. Say "I love you" often, regardless of your child's actions.
- **Give your child responsibilities** at home. Have fun together, but also share work. Doing real tasks increases children's sense of competence.
- **Praise your child** for effort and progress as well as results.
- **Apply rules and consequences** fairly and consistently.
- **Listen patiently** when your child talks. Allow your preschooler time to think of the words. Give your undivided attention.



Are you encouraging your child to see mistakes as ways to learn?

Everyone makes mistakes—especially when learning new things. Mistakes are also great teachers. Are you helping your child learn and move forward after making mistakes? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

- | | |
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| <p>___ 1. Do you tell your child that everyone messes up from time to time?</p> | <p>___ 5. Do you avoid teasing or blaming your child for honest mistakes?</p> |
| <p>___ 2. Do you establish realistic rules and expectations for your child? This prevents correcting mistakes so often that your child gets discouraged.</p> | <p>How well are you doing?</p> <p><i>More yes answers mean you are teaching your child to learn from mistakes. For each no, try that idea.</i></p> |
| <p>___ 3. Do you explain that mistakes let us correct ourselves and get it right next time?</p> | <p><i>"Mistakes are a fact of life. It is the response to error that counts."</i></p> <p>—Nikki Giovanni</p> |
| <p>___ 4. Do you help your child make corrections after making a mistake or struggling with a task, rather than taking over?</p> | |

Include props at playtime

Imaginative play boosts creativity, communication and concentration—and props make it more fun! Offer your child:

- **A pot and a spoon.** Have your preschooler pretend to be on a cooking show. Ask your child to show and tell the audience what to do.
- **Dress-up clothes.** Ask your child to dress up as someone and give you hints so you can guess who it is.
- **Play phones.** "Call" your child and have a conversation about the day.



Set up helpful routines

Daily routines at home support school readiness. Adequate sleep, healthy meals, and quiet play all help your child pay attention. Set a regular nap time, and a bedtime that lets your child get 10-13 hours of sleep. Serve meals at predictable times. Set aside time for screen-free quiet play.

Transitioning smoothly from one activity to the next is also important in school. Build transition time into your routines. Alert your child: "We'll go outside in five minutes. Finish your drawing and let's put the crayons away."

All screen time is not alike

If you allow your preschooler a little screen time, choose educational activities. Research says that children under six can learn from apps and games that:

- **Require** them to think before reacting.
- **Focus** on the learning activity without lots of distracting motion, noise, flashing, etc.
- **Teach** skills kids can apply in real life.
- **Let** children interact with parents or caregivers while using the program.

Source: C. Goodwin, Ph.D., "A Research-Backed Guide to Educational Apps for Children," Psychology Today.

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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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