

# Helping Children Learn<sup>®</sup>

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School  
Cannon County School District



March 2023

## Make a school connection that helps your child—now and later

Preschool families are busy and often have many competing priorities. It can be a challenge to stay informed and engaged with your child's life at preschool, but it's worth it—and you'll establish a pattern that boosts success as your child moves on through school.

To stay connected:

- **Talk to the teachers.** Let them know about any changes in your child's life. Ask about what your child is doing in school and how you can help at home. If your schedule is tight, find out if you can email or make an appointment for an online conference.
- **Read school communications** to stay up-to-date on classroom and school news as well as your child's progress.
- **Socialize with other families.** Reach out to the parents of your child's classmates. Connect in person, or through social media, group texts or video chats. You can find support and perspective and form bonds that will last many years.
- **Lead.** As your schedule allows, consider taking on leadership roles, such as participating in a parent-teacher group or working on a school improvement plan.



Source: H. Kreider, "Getting Parents 'Ready' for Kindergarten: The Role of Early Childhood Education," Harvard Family Research Project.



## Introduce independent work

In kindergarten, students are asked to complete some tasks independently. Use this four-step process at home now to help your preschooler learn new skills and gain confidence working alone:

1. **Demonstrate a task** you want your child to take responsibility for. Break it down into individual steps, and have your preschooler watch you do each step several times.
2. **Do the task** together a few times. If it's making the bed, for example, you could pull up the sheet while your child pulls up the comforter and puts the pillow on top.
3. **Have your child try the task** alone while you watch. Don't expect perfection, and don't redo the task. The goal is to encourage interest in doing it and help your child feel capable of doing it.
4. **Create a routine** for your child for doing the task. Doing it at the same time each day, repeatedly over time, will make it a familiar habit.

## Share some animal science

Spring is the season of baby animals, and learning about them is a great early science lesson for children. To explore the topic with your preschooler in the months to come:

- **Read a book** about your child's favorite animal and how it cares for its young.
- **Learn vocabulary.** The word for a baby animal is often different from an adult animal. Teach your child *foal* and *horse*, *lamb* and *sheep*, *kid* and *goat*, etc.
- **Look for baby animals** near home, such as newly-hatched birds, or visit a nearby farm or zoo.



## Give your child a sense of accomplishment

Here are three easy ways to help your preschooler feel like a successful learner:

1. **Talk often** about new things your child is learning.
2. **Create a brag wall** of your child's best artwork, papers, etc.
3. **Have your child** teach you a new skill.



## Practice social interactions

There's nothing wrong with being shy. Unfortunately, shy kids are often seen by peers as less likeable than more outgoing children, and they may have fewer friends.

To build your child's friend-making social skills, role-play different situations. Help your child practice things to say. Remind your child to make eye contact and speak clearly. Sometimes, change topics mid-conversation. Can your child make the switch? Being able to do so is an important part of communicating well with others.

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



## How can I help my child speak more fluently?

**Q:** My preschooler can express wants and needs, but I'd like to work on building stronger language skills. What can I do?

**A:** Strong language skills are directly linked to learning to read and write. You can help your child build these skills by having enriching conversations. Start by establishing a time every day when your child knows you are available to talk and listen. It might be at mealtime, or in the few minutes before bedtime. Then, to get the conversation started:



- **Ask your child** to pick a topic to talk about, and discuss it together.
- **Encourage your child** to ask questions. Provide age-appropriate answers.
- **Talk about your day** in the kind of detail you'd like to hear from your child. Then ask for a description of your preschooler's day.
- **Discuss family plans.** What are you going to do with your preschooler in the next few days? What things would you each like to do?

Listen while your child is speaking. Ask follow-up questions. When it's your turn to talk, use new words, and provide clues so your child can guess their meaning. For example, "It's been so long since lunch, I'm *ravenous!* You must be, too. I can hear your stomach growling." From this, your child can guess that *ravenous* means hungry.



## Are you fostering a love of reading?

When you make reading time with your child enjoyable, your child is more likely to connect reading with pleasure and want to do more of it. Are you making reading fun? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

1. **Do you choose** daily times to read together when your child will enjoy books most?
2. **Do you give** your child chances to pick what you'll read, even if they are books you have read many times?
3. **Do you look** for books about your child's interests, whatever they might be?
4. **Do you use** different voices to make characters come to life?
5. **Do you find** interesting new places to read, such as in a cozy corner or a "fort" made

by hanging a sheet over a table?

### How well are you doing?

*More yes answers mean you are feeding your child's desire to read. For each no, try that idea.*

"There are many little ways to enlarge your child's world. Love of reading is the best of all."

—Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis

## Read books with pictures of people to teach behavior

Book characters provide useful examples for teaching positive behavior. Research shows that stories featuring human characters—rather than animals who act like humans—work best. Of course, you can still read stories featuring animals with your child. But when it comes to teaching values, kids relate more to human characters. Try these titles:

- **Thank you, Omu!** by Oge Mora.
- **The Empty Pot** by Demi.
- **You Are Friendly** by Todd Snow.

Source: N.E. Larsen and others, "Do storybooks with anthropomorphized animal characters promote prosocial behaviors in young children?" *Developmental Science*, Wiley-Blackwell.

## Encourage helpfulness

Use your child's desire to "help" you with tasks to lay the groundwork for responsibility. To encourage it:

- **Use the word "help"** in requests. "Can you help the family by ... ?" This says that your child's contribution is valuable.
- **Pay close attention.** Does your child pick up something you drop? Help a sibling tidy up? Say, "Thank you! It was so helpful when you ... ."

## Play a math string game

In math, it's important to recognize that just because something changes shape, there's not necessarily more or less of it. To introduce this idea to your child, cut two pieces of string to the same length. Fold one several times. Then spread out the other. Ask which string is bigger. (Your child will likely say the flat piece.) Now, spread out the folded piece and show that the pieces are the same. Explain that things of the same size can look different depending on how you shape them.



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