

Helping Children Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School
Clay County Schools



March 2026

Combine exercise and learning on walks with your preschooler

Taking family walks helps keep your child's body healthy. And while you walk, you can keep your preschooler's mind active and learning, too! Walks offer many enjoyable ways to practice reading, math, observation and communication skills.

Here are just a few:

- **Hunt for numbers**—on license plates, buildings, curbs or signs.
- **Count things you see**, such as cats, dogs, cars, lamp posts and swings. Let your child pick something new to count each time.
- **Try to spot five things** you and your child have never noticed before.
- **Look for things that make you each happy.** A fluffy dog, a baby in a stroller, a smiling neighbor.
- **Say the first letter of things you pass**—*M* for mailbox, *T* for tree.
- **Play I Spy.** Look ahead of you and say, "I spy something red and yellow with a knob on its side." Can your child spot the fire hydrant? Take turns spying and guessing.
- **Get silly.** Every 20 steps or so, do something for your child to imitate—clap your hands, hop, skip or dance.



Be positive about math!

From early childhood on up, attitude makes a difference to success with math. When children are nervous about it, they may struggle. But when they are calm and confident, they do much better. To foster a love of math:

- **Talk with your child** about how useful and interesting you think math is—not whether you think it is easy or hard.
- **Say that anyone can learn math**, as long as they keep practicing.
- **Keep it fun.** If your child is frustrated by a number game, stop. But before you do, say "You know more than you think!"

Source: S. Sparks, "Positive Mindset May Prime Students Brains for Math," Education Week.

Avoid bribes and deals

Making a deal with your child—"If you pick up your toys, I'll give you a cookie"—may get the room tidy now, but it won't motivate your child to repeat the action routinely. To reinforce that expectation, change the *if* to *when*. "When you have picked up your toys, we can have a snack."



Encourage teamwork and cooperation

Leadership is a positive quality for children to develop. But when it turns into bossiness—not taking turns, not sharing, not listening to what others say—it's a problem. Students are expected to cooperate with their classmates.

To help your preschooler learn to contribute, rather than demand:

- **Establish house rules** for cooperation. For example, if one child divides the dessert, the other child gets to choose the first piece. If one child chooses what game to play, the other gets the first turn.
- **Have family members** take turns making decisions for the whole family—from which vegetable to have for dinner to what show to watch afterward.
- **Teach fair ways** to make decisions, such as by playing Rock, Paper, Scissors or flipping a coin to decide who goes first.
- **Notice when your child** is cooperative and offer praise. "Thank you for opening the door. You saw I needed help and you gave it without being asked."

Discuss memories you share

Shared memories are a fun topic to talk about with your preschooler. And research shows discussing them together now can even boost your child's well-being as a teen. To make the most of your talks:

- **Mention specific images**, feelings and actions. "Remember how fast we ran to make our kite fly? We got really tired!"
- **Ask questions**, so your child can take part in the memory building. "What colors was our kite?"



Source: "Sharing memories sets children on a path to better well-being," ScienceDaily.



I think my child is behind in writing. What can I do?

Q: My preschooler hasn't even mastered drawing stick figures, while other kids in the class are writing their names. My older child started writing at this age. How can I help my preschooler with this before kindergarten starts in the fall?



A: Children develop different skills at different rates, and comparing one child to another isn't really helpful. Instead, focus on introducing your preschooler to activities that build writing readiness and interest. Helping your child strengthen control of small hand muscles is a constructive place to start.

Enjoy these activities together:

- **Squeeze and roll out play dough** or clay.
- **Put jigsaw puzzles together** to foster eye-hand coordination.
- **Build with plastic bricks** that snap together.
- **Finger paint.** Draw the first letter of your child's name in the paint (shaving cream and pudding are fine substitutes). Can your child copy it?
- **Try out appealing writing tools**, such as markers, chalk and crayons.

If you are still concerned after a couple of months, consult with your child's teacher or pediatrician.



Are you turning mistakes into learning?

Making a mistake isn't fun. But since making them is normal—especially when learning something new—reacting in helpful ways is key. Are you teaching that mistakes are things to learn from? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

___ **1. Do you explain** to your child that everyone makes mistakes so often that your mistakes from time to time mistakes so often that your child gets discouraged.

___ **2. Do you say** that by correcting mistakes, people can learn how to get it right next time?

___ **3. Do you encourage** your child to make corrections after making a mistake, rather than just taking over yourself?

___ **4. Do you take care** not to tease or blame your child for honest mistakes?

___ **5. Do you set** realistic expectations and rules for your child? This lets you avoid correcting

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are helping your child learn and move forward after mistakes. For each no, try that idea.

"A mistake is only a mistake when you don't learn from it. Otherwise it's a lesson."
—Anonymous

Human book characters get behavior lessons across

The characters in picture books offer great role models for teaching positive behavior. Research shows that human characters are more effective for this purpose than animals who act like humans. Try these titles with your child:

- *What Should Danny Do?* by Adir and Ganit Levy.
- *Thank you, Omu!* by Oge Mora.
- *The Empty Pot* by Demi.

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

Spring into animal science

The return of spring means many kinds of animals will be having babies in the coming months. Celebrate their arrival by helping your child learn more about them. Together you can:

- **Learn their names.** The word for a baby animal is often different from an adult (*foal/horse, lamb/sheep, kid/goat* etc.).
- **Read books** about favorite animals and how they care for their young.
- **Watch baby animals** and birds around home or at a nearby farm or zoo.

Make a game of listening

Listening is serious business in school, but games make practicing listening fun. Play games together that involve:



- **Following directions**, like Simon Says or Red Light, Green Light.
- **Music with evolving lyrics**, like Hokey Pokey or B-I-N-G-O.
- **Guessing.** Try replacing the lyrics to songs with "la" and guessing the title.

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