

# Helping Children Learn<sup>®</sup>

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

Alexander Co. Partnership for Children

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May 2021

## Reinforce reading readiness in fun ways all summer long

The school year may be coming to an end, but building your child's reading readiness is a year-round activity. And there's no better way to do it than to surround him with printed words and make reading activities a regular part of your family's summer plans.

To bolster your child's skills and enthusiasm for reading:

- **Read every day.** Add variety by reading at different times in different places. Read over lunch together, or in pajamas outside on a warm evening. Read on a walk, at the park or during bath time.
- **Introduce new vocabulary.** Teach your child at least one new word each day. Build a *colossal* sandcastle or blow *shimmering* bubbles.
- **Go on a neighborhood word hunt.** Can your child find a sign that says *stop*? What about the name of your town on a building?
- **Supply new reading material.** Get books from the library. Read ads that come in the mail: "Look, it says bananas are on sale!" Help your child make his own books by dictating stories to you and drawing pictures. Read them together often.
- **Keep in touch with a friend or relative.** Help your child send messages to someone he won't see over the summer. Sending and receiving mail is an exciting way for young children to practice reading.



## Plan summer days with school in mind

Following a few routines over the summer will make readjusting to a school schedule in the fall easier for your child. Teachers recommend:

- **Sticking with the basics.** Your child may not have to get up for school, but she still needs about 11 hours of sleep each night. Maintain a regular bedtime. Try to keep mealtimes consistent on most days.
- **Spending time outside** in the morning or during the coolest part of the day. Getting plenty of exercise helps keep your child healthy and alert.
- **Having a daily "work" time.** Your child could do age-appropriate chores, such as putting toys and clothes away.
- **Relaxing quietly** after lunch. Your child may no longer nap, but she can look at books or do puzzles during a brief rest time.
- **Maintain limits** on screen time. Create a schedule and stick to it. Make a list of other activities your child can choose if she is bored.

## Play the Opposite Game

Your child probably knows the words for familiar things around him. As his language skills grow, help him expand his vocabulary to include words for more abstract concepts, such as opposites. Demonstrate the meanings of words like *above/below*, *narrow/wide* and *less/more*. Then make it a game by asking your child to fill in the missing word: "This cup has *less*. This cup has \_\_\_\_ (*more*)."

## A little challenge can keep your child motivated

Children who *want* to learn do better in school than those who find it a chore. To boost your child's motivation to learn:

- **Choose** activities that are fun and a bit challenging—but not so hard that she wants to give up.
- **Provide** chances for her to solve problems independently.
- **Encourage** positive emotions. "You learned to tie your shoe! Doesn't that feel great?"



## Get set to learn on the go

Consider stashing a few items in the car for your child to use as you drive or wherever you happen to be. Here are some ideas:

- **A roll of foil.** Your child can sculpt it into shapes, animals or jewelry. Remove it from the box to avoid cutting hazards.
- **A cookie sheet.** These make great lap desks for coloring or arranging magnetic letters.
- **A plastic container** of colored cereal pieces. Your child can count them, sort them and then enjoy them for a snack.





## What can I do to give my child some self-assurance?

**Q:** I want my daughter to become a confident student. How can I encourage this?

**A:** Confident students are willing to try new things. They aren't afraid of obstacles and challenges. This is because they feel capable. They believe in their ability to learn.

To instill these feelings in your preschooler:

- **Encourage her to do** things for herself. Help her develop her strengths, and try to ignore any annoying but harmless behaviors.
- **Praise her efforts and attempts**, not just her successes. Teach her that hard work and persistence are admirable.
- **Help her learn from her mistakes.** Rather than scolding, talk about what she could do differently next time.
- **Ask her to help you** around the house. She'll see that she has valuable contributions to make.
- **Give her a sense of control.** Let her decide between two options. Which would she like to do first, read or play a counting game?
- **Talk and play with her often.** Listen to your child. Let her know that her ideas are interesting. Send the message that she is good company.



## Are you teaching your child to think?

Preschoolers learn a lot by observing and experiencing. Thinking is an important part of the process. Are you encouraging your child to think about what he sees and does? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

1. **Do you spend** time observing the world with your child? "Look at that bug. How many legs does it have?"
2. **Do you help** your child sort things such as socks, toys, and leaves in different ways (by size, shape, color, etc)?
3. **Do you ask** your child to make predictions, such as "Do you think the milk will pour out fast or slow?"
4. **Do you conduct** experiments together? "Let's see if this spoon will bounce."

5. **Do you help** your child draw conclusions? Making charts is a fun way to do this.

### How well are you doing?

*More yes answers mean you are helping your child think and learn. For each no, try that idea.*

"All the world is a laboratory to the inquiring mind."

—Martin H. Fischer

## Give your child a preview of what's coming up

The preschool years are a critical time for children to develop self-regulation skills. One important way you can help your child learn to control her emotions and behavior is by talking through new situations in advance. Whether it's a trip to the doctor or a family outing, discuss what will be expected of her. How might she respond if she feels upset? Encourage your child to use words to describe her feelings, and then listen to what she has to say.

## Use tape to make letters stick in your child's mind

Making letters out of different materials keeps practice interesting. Here's a project to try with tape:



1. **Help your child** use removable tape to form the letters of his name on paper.
2. **Have him paint** a design all over the paper—right over the tape.
3. **Carefully remove** the tape to see your child's name stand out.

## Look ahead to kindergarten

Moving up from preschool to kindergarten is an exciting milestone! To celebrate and prepare your child for the transition:

- **Talk about what went well** this year. What did your child enjoy learning? What new skills did she build?
- **Help her set goals** for next year. Some can be academic (reading a book by herself) and some can be personal (making a new friend).
- **Keep learning skills sharp** over the summer. Read, do simple science experiments, practice math and school success skills like taking turns and persisting.

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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.

Production Manager: Sara Amon.

Translations Editor: Victoria Gaviola.

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P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474

1-800-756-5525 • www.parent-institute.com • ISSN 1527-1005