

Helping Children Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

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Enjoy winter activities that boost learning in any weather

Winter sets in this month and brings with it lots of fun seasonal learning activities to do with your preschooler. To help your child learn about nature, weather, shapes and colors, and more:

- **Take a listening walk.** Talk about winter sounds you hear, such as boots crunching on icy ground, rain splashing or wind whistling.
- **Be winter detectives.** As you go about your day, help your child use his other senses to identify signs of winter, such as colder weather, less daylight, bare trees, warm winter clothes and the smell of smoke rising from chimneys.
- **Pack a winter picnic.** Bundle up and head outdoors with some hot chocolate and a tasty snack. As you eat, look for animals. Talk with your child about what animals such as birds and squirrels do in the winter. Or spread a blanket inside and read about animals instead.
- **Play a cookie cutter game.** Making holiday cookies? Help your child trace around plastic cookie cutters with a pencil. Look at the shapes they make. Then place the cutters in a paper bag and see if your child can feel for the one that matches each shape.
- **Play Mitten Match Up.** Gather several pairs of mittens (or cut some out of paper). Mix them up and have your child sort them back into pairs.



Take a musical approach to learning

Music is a wonderful way to explore lots of different learning concepts. Playing a variety of music styles for your child can help her learn to identify emotions, for example. Some songs sound happy, others sad, calm or relaxed.

Listening to songs with lyrics introduces her to new vocabulary and helps her learn to recognize the patterns, such as a repeating chorus. To enrich learning with music:

- **Schedule at least one** time a day when your child will hear music: on the car ride to preschool, during playtime, after lunch, etc.
- **Get moving to music.** This is even more fun for preschoolers if they have something to wave as

they move, such as a scarf or strip of fabric.

- **Blend music** with other activities. When you act out stories together, make up songs for the characters to sing. Sing songs about cleaning up as you do it.
- **Enjoy rhythm.** Show your child how to clap her hands to the beat of favorite songs.

Source: J.R. Bradford-Vernon, *How to Be Your Child's First Teacher*, Instructional Fair, TS Denison.

Choose words mindfully when discussing your child

It is as important to choose your words carefully when speaking *about* your child as it is when speaking *to* him. He may be listening—and he may misinterpret what he hears. When talking about your child:



- **Avoid complaining** when there's even a chance he might be nearby.
- **Give challenges** a positive spin. "Logan finds recognizing letters difficult, but he never gives up. How can we help him?"
- **Offer praise** he can overhear. "Logan helped Noah pick up his room. He is such a caring brother."

Tips for making rules work

Rules and limits give kids structure. Within them, your child can safely learn to think and act independently. Remember to:

- **Keep expectations** realistic.
- **Give reasons.** Explain *why* you want your child to do (or not do) something.
- **Offer choices.** She must get dressed, but let your child decide whether to wear the pink sweater or the green hoodie.

Encourage acts of kindness

Children who are considerate and kind are more likely to get along with their teachers and classmates. To promote this behavior:



- **Discuss kindness.** What does it look like? Sound like? Feel like?
- **Role-play.** Use dolls or puppets to act out situations. What does your child think is the kind or helpful thing to do?
- **Read books** about kindness, such as *Be Kind*, by Rana DiOrio.

Source: M. Coulombe and E. Zuccaro, "A Culture of Kindness in Early Childhood Classrooms," *Edutopia*.



How can I encourage my child's interest in math?

Q: My daughter counts the stairs as she walks up; she counts stop signs as we ride in the car. I would be so excited if this love of counting turned into a love of math later! What can I do to encourage it?

A: You can use almost any daily activity to foster your daughter's math skills.

Here are some suggestions:

- **Measure things.** Preschoolers love to help measure ingredients for baking. Your child will also enjoy having you measure her height. Compare lengths of items, too. "Your scooter is *taller* than your doll."
- **Have her make a pattern** with utensils when setting the table: spoon, fork, spoon, fork. Gradually make the patterns more complicated.
- **Use math words in your chats** with her. For example, "Julia, you have three hats: one, two, three. I have one hat. Who has *more* hats?"
- **Help your child become aware of time.** For example, say, "It's seven o'clock in the morning now. This is when we have breakfast. This afternoon we'll play outside. That will happen right after we have lunch."
- **Visit the grocery store** when it is not crowded. Ask your child to point to two gallons of milk. Have her guess which weighs more, one grapefruit or two lemons. Help her weigh them to find out.



Are you mixing learning with play?

Learning isn't just for the classroom! Playtime provides an opportunity for preschoolers to explore, think creatively and learn new skills. Are you helping your child learn through play? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

- ___ **1. Do you have** conversations with your child about what he is doing when he is playing?
- ___ **2. Do you strengthen** his large and small muscles with activities like running, jumping, drawing and shaping clay?
- ___ **3. Do you encourage** creative play, such as making art and pretending?
- ___ **4. Do you build** your child's social skills by having him share, take turns and use words like *please* and *thanks*?
- ___ **5. Do you make** reading a fun part of playtime every day?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are filling playtime with learning. For each no, try that idea.

"Play is often talked about as if it were a relief from serious learning. But for children, play is serious learning."

—Fred Rogers

Promote habits for learning

Research shows that healthy lifestyle habits improve children's ability to pay attention and learn. Adopt these for the whole family:

- **Getting enough sleep.**
- **Engaging in physical activity.**
- **Eating a nutritious diet.**
- **Limiting screen time.**

Source: J.J. Walsh and others, "Associations between 24-hour movement behaviors and global cognition in U.S. children," *The Lancet Child & Adolescent Health*.

Journaling is writing fun

Preschoolers aren't too young to enjoy keeping a journal—and it may spark your child's desire to learn to write! To get started:

- **Have** your child draw a picture of something he did today.
- **Ask** him to tell you about his picture. Write a caption under the drawing.
- **Explain** that the words tell about the picture. Then have your child "write" something, too.
- **Repeat** often. Staple the pages into a book with his name on it.



Stay on track for January

Holiday breaks can cause havoc with family routines. To avoid a readjustment struggle:

- **Help your child stick** to a consistent eating and sleeping schedule as much as possible.
- **Don't relax rules** about good behavior. Treating others with respect is important at any time of year.
- **Keep talking about preschool.** Say things like, "Won't it be fun to tell your teacher about the cake you baked?"

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