

# Helping Children Learn<sup>®</sup>

EARLY CHILDHOOD

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

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## Enjoy activities together that build your child's academic skills

You don't need to sit your preschooler down at a desk full of worksheets to encourage learning. Playful experiences are a great way to introduce academic skills and concepts and prepare your child for school.



To promote learning in fun ways:

- **Read and retell stories.** Read a book aloud to your child. Afterward, have your preschooler retell the story. Ask questions, such as "And then what happened?" and "What would you do if that happened to you?"
- **Talk about the world.** Explain that on Earth, the land is divided into continents and countries. Let your child choose a country on a map or globe. Then, learn more about it together. Plan an imaginary trip. What kind of food would you eat there? What would you see?
- **Act out historic moments.** Connecting history to people or things your child knows can make it easier to understand. Do you remember what you were doing when a historic event happened? Tell your child the story, then bring it to life by acting it out together.
- **Match and sort.** Gather items of various shapes and colors. Have your child group and regroup them in different ways: red toys, toy cars, etc. Or write numbers from 1 to 5 on index cards, and have your child match them with a pile that has the same number of items.



## Head outside for a season of learning

Each season offers its own opportunities for preschoolers to discover new things about how the world works. Here are some ways to make the most of the spring season and help your preschooler investigate and learn:

- **Observe the weather.** Each morning, look outside together and discuss whether it is sunny, cloudy, windy or rainy. Then, open the door and feel the air. Is it warm? Does it feel chilly?  
Next, discuss how to dress for the weather. Which clothes will keep your child comfortable today? A short-sleeved shirt? A raincoat and boots? Talk about why dressing for the weather is a healthy choice.
- **Grow plants.** Plant a few flowers or herbs in pots with your child. If you have more room, consider giving your child a small patch of ground to plant in. Help your child take care of the plants.
- **Play outdoor games.** Whether your child's favorite is hopscotch or T-ball, play it together. Discuss the importance of being a good sport when playing with others, win or lose.

## Write a poem about spring

It's National Poetry Month! Celebrate by helping your preschooler create a poem about the spring. Here's how:



1. **Write the word**  
SPRING vertically on a piece of paper.
2. **Talk about** the sounds the letters in the word spring make.
3. **Help your child** think of spring-related words that start with those sounds, such as *sun* for S, or *puddle* for P. For inspiration, spend some time observing outside.
4. **Write the words** by each letter and have your child add pictures.

## Play music and learn along

Music can help children learn so many things—identifying patterns, recognizing emotions, rhyming and other language skills. Take time every day to enjoy music with your child. Clap your hands to the rhythm. Discuss whether a song seems happy or sad. You can also make up your own songs about activities you do together.

## Offer lessons in respect

Respectful behavior is essential in a classroom so that all students can learn. To help your child learn what it means to show respect for people and property:



- **Draw attention** to respectful behavior when you see it, in daily life and on TV.
- **Demonstrate** how to wait. "I wish it were our turn. But let's smile and play a quiet game while we wait."
- **Plan ahead.** When you go somewhere, talk with your child about ways to show respect while you're there.

Source: M. Borba, Ed.D., *Building Moral Intelligence*, Jossey-Bass.



## My child isn't very physically active. What should I do?

**Q:** My preschooler prefers to sit and play quietly rather than run around. I'm concerned that my child isn't getting enough exercise. What can I do to get my child moving more?

**A:** Exercise helps children develop strong muscles and bones, motor skills and self-esteem. It also has positive effects on learning.

To help your child stay fit:

- **Schedule time each day for exercise.** Choose times when your child has the most energy.
- **Take turns choosing activities.** Offer creative options—you and your child could play a game of tag or build an obstacle course. You could dig in a garden or play Follow the Leader.
- **Limit screen activities.** Create a list of active alternatives.
- **Plan activities** that will make your child feel successful. Don't choose sports that require more agility than your preschooler has.
- **Use active play as a reward** rather than food. "After we finish cleaning up, we can go climbing at the playground."
- **Keep a log.** Have your child draw pictures of exercise activities. Look through it together often and talk about what fun you had doing them.



## Are you fostering communication skills?

In school, your child will need to be able to ask questions, explain needs and ideas and contribute to discussions. Are you helping your preschooler learn to communicate effectively? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you start** conversations with interesting questions? "Where do you think that plane might be going?"
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you show** interest when your child is speaking to you, and avoid distractions like your phone and TV?
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you set** an example for your child by listening attentively and asking questions when you are confused?
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you teach** your child to use polite language, such as saying "Excuse me"?

- \_\_\_ **5. Do you talk** with your child about things you are seeing, reading, thinking and doing?

### How well are you doing?

*More yes answers mean you are helping your child build communication skills. For each no, try that idea.*

*"We, as human beings, learn through sharing and communicating."*

—Hugo Reynolds

## Nurture truth-telling skills

Preschoolers are still learning the difference between fantasy and reality. So sometimes they say things they wish were true, but couldn't be. To help your child learn to tell the truth:

- **Model honesty** and admit mistakes.
- **Tell the truth for your child.** Instead of asking if your child did something, say, "I think you did this. It's OK to tell me."
- **Praise your child** for telling the truth, and explain what you expect your preschooler to do instead next time.
- **Be patient.** Children develop honesty over several years.

## Explore with five senses

Show your child that people can learn a lot by seeing, hearing, touching, tasting and smelling. Together you can:

- **Wonder aloud.** "What do you think that cooking smell could be?" "How can we tell if it's windy?"
- **Grocery shop.** Notice how foods look, feel and smell. Talk about how they taste: *sweet, sour, salty, spicy*, etc.
- **Play I Spy.** Take turns guessing things you each see, hear, smell and feel.



## Geography begins at home

Drawing simple maps helps children think about places in relation to their surroundings. This is the beginning of geography.

Teach your child to draw a simple map of your home and street. It can be as simple as a square for the building and a straight line underneath for the road. A child who draws a map of a house at age four may draw the neighborhood at eight and the city at 12.

Source: P. Brillante, Ed.D. and S. Mankiw, Ed.D., "A Sense of Place: Human Geography in the Early Childhood Classroom," Young Children, NAEYC.

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