

Helping Children Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

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Questions and creative play add to your child's thinking skills

Your child is a preschooler! At this age, everything he experiences forms connections in his brain that will help him think. And the more "input" he receives, especially by interacting with you, the stronger his *cognitive*, or thinking, skills will grow.

To nurture your child's brain development, talk and play with him in ways that help him think for himself:



- **Encourage your child to ask questions.** Preschoolers want to know about everything. A constant stream of "Why ...?" may sometimes be maddening, but remember that the more questions your child asks, the more he learns and continues to think.
- **Ask your child questions.** "Why do you think we pick up toys?" "How can we tell when a story is over?" Avoid questions with one-word answers.
- **Allow your child time to think.** Young children may not be able to process their thoughts as quickly as older kids. After you ask a question, wait a moment to let your preschooler decide what he wants to say.
- **Choose toys that promote active play.** A toy that does the playing while your child watches won't build his thinking skills. Offer your child toys that encourage creative play and imagination, such as blocks, puzzles, puppets and stuffed animals.



Boost language skills with one word

What is the one word your child knows better than any other? Her name! In fact, she will probably hear it, read it and write it daily throughout her life. So it is the perfect word to use to increase her reading and writing readiness.

Here's how:

- **Add rhythm and rhyme.** Clap the syllables of your child's name. (Hol-ly Ste-vens.) Rhyme it with other words or sounds. (Jolly Holly!) Give a cheer for each letter. (Gimme an H!)
- **Show your child** how to write her name on paper. Talk about each letter and the sound it makes. Let her try writing it.
- **Write her name in fun ways.** Help your child write it on the sidewalk with chalk. See if she can form the letters out of dough.
- **Make it a puzzle.** Write each letter of her name on a separate index card. Mix up the cards. Can she use them to form her name?
- **Label your child's** possessions with her name. Capitalize only the first letter.

Ask for more details

Asking your child to tell you about his day builds his communication skills. Encourage him to provide details by asking follow-up questions. Discuss things like:

- **His artwork.** How did he make it? What did he do first?
- **His activities.** What toys did he use in the sandbox? Who else was there?

Humor helps preschoolers laugh and learn

Life can be frustrating for preschoolers—and their parents! But a good sense of humor can keep frustration from turning into anger. It can also help your child think creatively and connect with others.

Kidding around with your child teaches her that humor can make challenges fun. So if you're stuck in the rain, don't complain. Instead, say, "A shower! Too bad we don't have any shampoo!" Then scrub your head and laugh!



Source: "Encouraging Your Child's Sense of Humor," KidsHealth from Nemours, nswc.com/laugh.

Point out everyday math

To help make your child comfortable with math, teach him that it is a natural part of daily life. Together:

- **Estimate.** "I think you can finish your toast in 10 bites. Let's count and see."
- **Look for numbers** all around. "Can you see a building with a 3 on it?"
- **Talk about sequences.** "First we'll have lunch. Second, you'll have a nap. Third, we'll go outside to play."



Source: M. Caspe, "Count on Families! Engaging Families in Math," Global Family Research Project, nswc.com/mathlife.

Show your child you care

Your words of praise mean a lot to your child. But your actions matter just as much when it comes to making her feel loved and supported. To show your child she is important to you:



- **Display her work.** Designate a visible spot at home to hang her masterpieces.
- **Take pictures** of you and your child together. Give her one for her room.
- **Give gifts** that match her interests.
- **Find some time each day** when your child can sit on your lap and enjoy your undivided attention.

Prompt attendance counts

There's no better time than preschool to begin to teach your child that regular attendance will help him do better in school. But that's not the whole lesson. It's also important to get your child in the habit of arriving at preschool on time. When he arrives late, he misses a relaxed transition into the school day. Late arrivals also disrupt the rest of the class.

'Pretend reading' is learning

Reading with your child every day is one of the best things you can do to get her ready for school. But the reader shouldn't always be you! Sometimes, let your preschooler pretend to read to you. To start:

- **Choose a favorite picture book** your child knows well.
- **Let her look at the pictures** and "read" you the story.
- **Don't worry** about the book's words.

Pretending to read helps preschoolers build recall skills, print awareness and confidence, all key elements of reading readiness.

Source: "Supporting and Encouraging Emergent Literacy in Child Care," eXtension.org, niswc.com/pretendread.

Q&A How can I help my child stop dawdling and get ready?

Q: My four-year-old is starting preschool. We are both excited! But she doesn't do anything fast, and I am worried about how I am going to get us ready and out the door on time on week-day mornings. How can I make this go smoothly?

A: Dawdling is common among preschoolers. Children this age tend to focus only on what they are doing at the moment, not on what they need to do next. But with your help, your child can begin to follow routines that will make things easier.



To start your mornings off right:

- **Begin the night before.** Make lunches. Choose the next day's clothes and lay them out. And be sure to get your child into bed in time for her to get 10-13 hours of sleep. A sleep-deprived child can wreck even the best-planned morning.
- **Establish a morning routine.** Your child will need to get up, use the bathroom, get dressed, eat breakfast and brush her teeth. Encourage her to do as much as she can on her own. But stay nearby to help with the trickier parts of dressing, such as snaps and ties.
- **Give your child lots of practice.** Offer reminders—"After breakfast comes teeth brushing." Reward her efforts by allowing her to play, listen to an audiobook or look at a picture book when she's ready.

Parent Quiz

Do you encourage your child to wonder?

Preschoolers have a natural desire to learn about the world around them. Encouraging their curiosity helps turn them into motivated students. Are you inspiring your child to stay curious? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

- ___ **1. Do you wonder** out loud about things and then try to find the answers?
- ___ **2. Do you respond** positively to your child's questions? "That's a good question!"
- ___ **3. Do you offer** your child toys and other items he can safely take apart and put back together?
- ___ **4. Do you encourage** your child to examine objects closely and observe things around him?

- ___ **5. Do you take** adventure walks with your child to look for new things?

How well are you doing?

More *yes* answers mean you are keeping your child's sense of wonder active. For each *no*, try that idea.

"Curiosity is the wick in the candle of learning."

—William Arthur Ward

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