

Helping Children Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

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Spring offers outdoor learning fun in all kinds of weather

It's spring! Take advantage of the warmer weather to reintroduce your child to the great outdoors. Experts say hands-on experiences in nature help preschoolers learn. Outdoor fun also encourages children's sense of adventure.

Head outside with your child for a nature walk and try these activities together along the way:

- **If it's sunny**, notice the shadows that your child, the trees and other objects cast. Where is the sun in relation to the object? Which way is the shadow going? If your child turns around, does his shadow move?
- **If it's wet or rainy**, have your child put on rubber boots and go puddle stomping. What kind of steps will make a huge splash—or no splash at all?
- **If it's windy**, ask your child what he can see that lets him know it's windy. What does the wind sound like? Show him how to hold up a wet finger to feel which direction the wind is coming from.
- **If it's partly cloudy**, go someplace grassy where you can lie down and look at the sky. What shapes do you and your child see in the clouds?



Source: S.W. Ridge, "Get Kids Outdoors with Preschool Nature Education Tips for Teachers and Parents," University of Minnesota, niscw.com/spring_nature; "Spring Outdoor Play: Making the Most of the Season," NC State College of Design, Natural Learning Initiative, niscw.com/splash.



Make your compliments count

Compliments are a great tool for encouraging children, when used correctly. Insincere praise just confuses kids, while effective compliments teach them what they are doing right. The best compliments are:

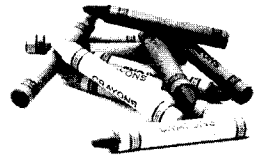
- **Genuine.** Give a compliment only when you really mean it.
- **Specific.** You want your child to understand exactly what behavior got this warm reaction from you, so she can repeat it in the future. "You stopped playing when I asked you to and started picking up the toys. Now we have time to read our favorite stories."
- **Focused more on effort** than results. Even if your child doesn't reach an ultimate goal, perseverance and improvement are accomplishments!
- **Chosen carefully.** Look for opportunities to praise special, new and important behaviors.

Source: D.F. Kris, "Preschoolers and Praise: What Kinds of Messages Help Kids Grow?" Mind/Shift, KQED News, niscw.com/pre-praise.

Support ties to teachers

The more connected your child feels to preschool, the more likely he is to have positive feelings about learning. To strengthen his bond with his teachers:

- **Tell your child** the teachers care about him and want to help him learn.
- **Have your child** draw pictures of his teachers, or make greeting cards to give them.



Encourage better listening

There are lots of ways you can help your child develop the listening skills she will need in school. Here are a few:

- **Speak clearly** to your child—not too fast or too loud.
- **Combine words and actions.** Talk about what you are doing as you do it.
- **Play listening games.** Have your child close her eyes. What does she hear?
- **Tell longer stories** once your child shows an interest.

Give your child chances to learn by doing

For preschoolers, learning takes a lot of trial and error. That's why it is necessary to allow your child to face small challenges—and to embrace his mistakes. For example, when you let your child pour cereal into a bowl, he may spill it. Just show him how to clean up the mess, and tell him that if he tips the box little by little, he will do better.



The more you support your child's efforts, the more he will accomplish. And he'll learn that practice gets results!



My child is turning into a perfectionist. What can I do?

Q: My daughter used to be so happy. But in pre-K she has become very self-critical. She says her numbers look funny and she's not good at jumping. She's more fearful about trying new things. How can I help her regain her confidence?

A: Your child may not have thought much before about how she does things. But in a classroom, she can look around and see how everyone else is doing them. She is comparing herself to others, and wondering if she can measure up.

To bolster her confidence:

- **Talk about trying.** Remind your child that before anyone can be good at something they have to try it. And in order to get better, they have to keep trying. Say things like, "I like how you are giving that number 8 another try. I know you will get the hang of writing it!"
- **Respect mistakes.** Let your child know that people learn by making mistakes. Say, "Sometimes things don't work out. Let's think about what you can do differently the next time."
- **Avoid comparisons to others.** Don't use words like *best* and *worst*. Don't judge your child—or anyone else—by others' achievements.
- **Have fun together!** Every day, do something with your child that you both enjoy. Children need time away from work, just like adults.



Parent Quiz

Do you use teachable moments at meals?

Your child is learning all the time, and family mealtimes offer lots of chances to teach him in enjoyable ways. Are you helping your child get more than food out of mealtime? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

- ___ 1. **Do you ask** your child to help with food preparation, including measuring, pouring and mixing?
- ___ 2. **Do you give** your child mealtime responsibilities, such as counting napkins and putting them on the table?
- ___ 3. **Do you include** your child in mealtime conversation and respond to what he says?
- ___ 4. **Do you model** good table manners, such as putting your napkin in your lap and saying *please* and *thank you*?

- ___ 5. **Do you reinforce** concepts your child is learning? "This plate is a circle."

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are using family meals to teach your child valuable lessons. For each no, try that idea.

"What we instill in our children will be the foundation upon which they build their future."

—Steve Maraboli

Tape art makes letters stick

Writing letters with tape is a fun way to help them stick in your child's mind. Gather removable tape, paper and paints. Then, help your child:

- **Use strips of tape** to write the letters of her name on the paper.
- **Paint a design** on the paper—right over the tape and all over the page.
- **Carefully remove** the tape and see her name in the center of a beautiful painting. Hang it where everyone can see.

Let your child help you

Is it time for spring cleaning at your home? Ask your preschooler to lend a hand. For the best results:

- **Show your child** exactly what you want him to do. "You're going to take the duster and go swish, swish, swish back and forth like this on the table."
- **Don't redo a task** in front of your child. That will make him feel you are disappointed in his effort.
- **Keep it short.** Ten minutes is probably long enough for a preschooler.

Create your own rainbows

When April brings showers, look for rainbows with your child! Explain when light shines through the raindrops, the water bends the light and reveals its colors. No rain? Make rainbows yourselves. Here's how:



- **Use a garden hose.** On a sunny day, help your child spray water to create a rainbow. What colors can she see?
- **Tape several crayons** together. Use them to draw rainbows on paper.
- **Toss a rainbow salad.** Mix chopped red peppers, carrots, yellow squash, lettuce, blueberries and purple cabbage.

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