

Helping Children Learn®

EARLY CHILDHOOD

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

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Responsibility takes practice and time to learn—but it's worth it

As your child goes through school, her sense of responsibility will be increasingly vital to her success as a student. With your help, she can begin to strengthen it now.

Teaching young children how to be responsible takes great patience. After all, learning takes a lot of trial and error. But over time, your child will understand that responsible effort gets results—and that feels great.

To start building responsibility:

- **Establish expectations.** Explain the rules you want your child to follow. Tell her what will happen if she doesn't. When she slips up, hold her accountable.
- **Assign age-appropriate jobs,** such as putting napkins on the table for a meal.
- **Allow your child to try** safe new challenges, such as pouring milk on her cereal. If she spills, don't scold. Just show her how to clean up the mess and talk about what she can learn from her mistake.
- **Give your child opportunities** to make decisions and live with the results of her choices.
- **Adjust your rules and expectations** as your child becomes more responsible. And be sure to praise her progress often!



Source: M. Purcell, "Building Responsible Kids," PsychCentral, nswc.com/ec_responsibility.



Add to math skills with pattern play

In math, the patterns that the numbers appear in give them meaning. Recognizing and predicting patterns is a key step in solving math problems.

To help your child sharpen this skill, have him:

- **Read a book** about patterns, such as *I See a Pattern Here*, by Bruce Goldstone.
- **Hunt for patterns** at home. Can he recognize a pattern in the stripes on his sheets? How about in the tiles in the bathroom?
- **Learn simple sequences** of hand motions, such as *clap, clap, flap, flap*. Add other motions as this gets easy. Just repeat them in the same order.
- **Look at a calendar.** Point out how the pattern of days repeats each week. Show him how each month begins with the number 1.
- **Make his own patterns.** He can arrange blocks by color or objects by size. He can string differently shaped beads on yarn.

Genuine praise gets results

Not all compliments are equal. Genuine praise reinforces positive behavior and motivates your child. To use it:

- **Offer a compliment** only when you really mean it.
- **Be specific:** "You practiced tying a bow until you got it! I'm proud of you."
- **Focus on effort and progress.** Hard work and improvement deserve praise.

Make some time to rhyme

April is National Poetry Month. Reading rhyming poetry with your child is a great way to build her language skills. Rhymes teach her to listen for the sounds that make up words.

Read a short poem to your child. Then read it again and pause when it's time to say a rhyming word. "Twinkle, twinkle little star, how I wonder what you" Can your child supply the missing word, or any rhyming word?



Source: K. Johnson, "9 Ways to Build Phonological Awareness in Pre-K and Kindergarten," Understood.org, nswc.com/rhymetime.

Take learning outdoors

Research shows that spending time in nature boosts learning. So head outside and enjoy the spring weather with your child. If it's:

- **Sunny,** look at shadows. If your child turns around, does his shadow move?
- **Rainy,** put on boots and go puddle stomping. What kind of steps will make a big splash? No splash at all?
- **Partly cloudy,** stretch out on a blanket together and look at the sky. What shapes does your child see?



Source: M. Kuo and others, "Do Experiences With Nature Promote Learning? Converging Evidence of a Cause-and-Effect Relationship," *Frontiers in Psychology*, nswc.com/spring.



What can I do to improve my child's listening skills?

Q: I often have to ask my preschooler several times to do things. I don't think he's being deliberately naughty, but how can I get him to listen the first time?

A: Preschoolers aren't the best listeners. In most cases, they aren't trying to tune parents out. But their attention spans are short and they are easily distracted—even when they are trying to behave.

To help your child become a better listener:

- **Get his attention.** Walk over to your child and say his name. You can also try using a special phrase that tells your child it's listening time. "One, two, three, eyes on me" is a common one.
- **Use a different tone of voice.** Singing and whispering can both get children's attention in a positive way. Avoid speaking too fast or yelling.
- **Discourage interruptions.** If your child starts to talk or do something else before you are through speaking, hold up your hand and say "Please wait." Finish what you are saying, then add, "Thank you for listening. It's your turn to speak now."
- **Ask your child to repeat** what you said in his own words. If he can't, make eye contact with him and repeat what you said.



Are you introducing letters and words?

Engaging activities that help your child understand that letters combine to form words will set her on the path to reading. Are you developing your preschooler's reading-readiness skills? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

- ___ **1. Do you give** your child toys with letters on them, such as alphabet blocks?
- ___ **2. Do you write** your child's name on her belongings and encourage her to write it, too?
- ___ **3. Do you label** items your child uses often with their names: *bed, chair, table, cup*?
- ___ **4. Do you point out** words your child sees during the day, like *milk, sale* and *open*?
- ___ **5. Do you play** word games, such as naming words that start with the same letter?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are teaching your child to recognize letters and words. For each no, try that idea.

"Reading is important, because if you can read, you can learn anything about everything and everything about anything."

—Tomie dePaola

Restore a positive outlook

When a setback has your child discouraged and saying "I can't," here are two ways to help him recover his can-do spirit:

- 1. Acknowledge his feelings.** "I see you are sad that you couldn't throw the ball into the basket. That's frustrating."
- 2. Let your child assist** you with an important task. "Look what you did! That helped me so much!"

Have fun exploring space

Your preschooler probably knows about the sun and moon. But what about the rest of the solar system? Try these planet-themed activities together:

- **Look at pictures** of the planets. You can find amazing photos at www.nasa.gov.
- **Make a book.** Print out or draw a picture of each planet. Write the planet's name underneath. Let your child color the pictures. Staple the pages together.
- **Bake cookies.** Let your child shape the dough into "planets." Decorate with details that show what you've learned.



Promote reading with props

Does your child enjoy pretend play? Use it to inspire enthusiasm for reading! Just pull out some props, such as:

- **Menus.** Use an old take-out menu or create your own. Then play "restaurant" with your child and take turns being the customer and server.
- **Books.** Pretend you are going to the library. Set out books you have at home and take turns checking them out.
- **Signs.** Create a construction zone. With your child, make signs that say *stop, slow, go*, etc. Let your child direct traffic.

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