

# Helping Children Learn®

EARLY CHILDHOOD

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School



December 2020

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## To promote learning, engage your preschooler's natural curiosity

When you think about teaching your child, do you picture using tools like worksheets and flash cards? Actually, studies show that preschoolers do a lot of important learning when they are given chances to explore and discover things on their own. This engages their curiosity, and research links curiosity to greater academic achievement.

To encourage your preschooler to be curious about the world:

- **Ask questions** instead of giving answers. When you tell your child everything, there is little for her to find out for herself. So ask, "Where could you put the car so it will go really fast?" instead of saying, "The car will go faster if you put it at the top of the track and push it down."
- **Express curiosity.** Your child is more likely to want to try new things if she thinks *you* want to try new things. For example, show her the box from a jigsaw puzzle, and say "Did you know we can make this picture? I want to give it a try! Let's put some pieces together."
- **Applaud her efforts** when she figures something out on her own. "I love the orange you made by mixing the red and yellow paint!"



Source: P.E. Shah and others, "Early childhood curiosity and kindergarten reading and math academic achievement," *Pediatric Research*, Springer Nature, [nswc.com/ec\\_curiosity](https://nswc.com/ec_curiosity).



## These values are always in season

Fill your December with generosity, gratitude, good will and togetherness by helping your preschooler practice the values of responsibility and respect.

Give your child opportunities to:

- **Help others.** Your child can help you put things away. He can go to the mailbox with you and drop in envelopes. He can call family members to the table. He can also help you collect new or gently-used items to donate to people in need.
- **Show appreciation.** If your child receives a gift, remind him to say *thank you*. Help him "write" a note (he can tell you what he wants to say) and draw a picture.
- **Use good manners.** If you and your child will be visiting someone else's home, help him practice politely saying *hello* and *goodbye*. Remind him to ask before touching something.
- **Listen to adults.** Say something like, "Mrs. James is my friend and this is her house. Please follow her instructions while we're here."

## Enrich your conversations

Research shows that talking *with* your child in a back-and-forth conversation develops her language skills better than just talking *to* her. To improve your chats:

- **Discuss** topics that interest your child. "I see you watching that dog."
- **Ask questions.** "What do you like about dogs?"
- **Follow-up** on her ideas and share your own.

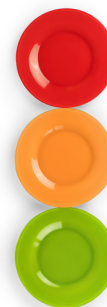


Source: A. Trafton, "Back-and-forth exchanges boost children's brain response to language," MIT News, [nswc.com/talkwith](https://nswc.com/talkwith).

## Show why math matters

Making a connection between math and its everyday uses motivates kids to learn it. To help your child see the link:

- **Speak numbers.** "We need three plates for dinner. One, two three."
- **Count down to fun.** On a calendar, show your child today's date. Each day, count down the days to an event he is looking forward to.
- **Measure growth.** How many inches tall is your child? Find out together and track his growth for a few months.



## Try a change in discipline

When an approach to discipline isn't working, it's time to try a new one. For example, instead of just repeating *no, no, no*:

- **Focus on appropriate behavior.** If your child is misbehaving to get noticed, pay more attention to what she does right and follow up with a big hug.
- **Be proactive.** *Before* she puts her hand in the fish tank yet again, remind your child: "Remember, we use our eyes to look at fish, but not our hands to touch."



## Which safety rules should I teach my four year old?

**Q:** My child knows some basic safety rules, such as holding hands when crossing the street. But I think he's ready to learn some more. Are there any that will help him next year in kindergarten?

**A:** You're correct. This is a good age to emphasize safety, and it is usually part of a kindergarten curriculum. Here are some safety measures to work on now and going forward. Teach your child to:

- **Protect against illness.** Effective handwashing is one of the best ways to do this. Teach him to lather up and scrub for 20 seconds before rinsing. Explain that he should also avoid touching people other than family.
- **Provide names.** Can he say his first and last name? Also help him learn his parents' first and last names. "You call me Mom. But what is my full name?" Talk about when it's OK to share this information, and with whom.
- **Recite his address and your phone number.** Setting this information to the tune of a familiar song may help him remember.
- **Dial 911 in an emergency.** Teach him that this number is *only* for emergencies. Give him some specific examples: He should dial 911 anytime you tell him to, in the event of a fire, and anytime he is with you and talking to you and you are physically unable to talk back to him.



## Are you instilling initiative?

It's important to find a balance between directing your child's actions and letting her learn by trying to do things for herself. Are you encouraging your child to be a self-starter? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

1. **Do you let** your child attempt to do new tasks for herself, even if she might not do them perfectly?
2. **Do you avoid** dictating every action for your child when she already knows what to do?
3. **Do you make** light of your child's mistakes, and point out when you make one?
4. **Do you celebrate** your child's effort and progress, even when she doesn't quite complete a task?

5. **Do you praise** your child when she does a task without being reminded?

### How well are you doing?

*More yes answers mean you are nurturing your child's independence. For each no, try that idea.*

"Teaching is only demonstrating that it is possible. Learning is making it possible for yourself."

—Paulo Coelho

## Active bodies, active minds

Your preschooler needs exercise every day—even when conditions are keeping you indoors. To have fun getting it, play:

- **Tag.** Chasing each other around a limited space ensures that your child will not only run, but also pivot and duck.
- **Follow the Leader.** Use energetic movements, such as pumping arms and hopping or stomping feet.
- **Over, Under, Around.** Create a safe obstacle course that requires jumping *over* pillows, crawling *under* tables, and skooting *around* barriers. Say the words as you do the actions.

## Bake in a listening lesson

Will you be doing some holiday baking this month? Use the activity to help your child develop her listening skills. Read the list of ingredients in a recipe to your preschooler, and have her bring you the items from the cupboard. Then read the directions, such as "stir for one minute." With your help, have your child carry out the instructions.



## Charge your preschooler's science knowledge

Show your child the power of electricity with this hair-raising experiment:

1. **Run** a comb through his dry hair 20 times to build up static.
  2. **Turn on** a very thin stream of water in the bathroom sink.
  3. **Hold** the comb next to the water stream.
  4. **Watch** the water move toward the comb.
- Explain that your child's hair put electricity into the comb—which attracted the water.

Source: "Water Bending Experiment," BeakerLife, [nswc.com/bend](http://nswc.com/bend).

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