

Helping Children Learn®

EARLY CHILDHOOD

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School



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Boost academic skills with simple activities that feel like play

Sitting your preschooler down at a desk all day for lessons would probably make both of you pretty miserable. Instead, use playful experiences to introduce her to subjects she'll encounter when she gets to elementary school.

Try these reading, math, history and science activities with your child:

- **Read and tell.** With your child, choose a book and read it aloud. Afterward, have her retell the story. As she does, ask questions, such as, "What happened next?" and "What would you do if that happened to you?"
- **Play matching games.** Collect items of various shapes and colors. Have your child group them different ways: purple toys, toy horses, etc. Or write numbers from 1 to 5 on index cards, and have her match them with a pile of the same number of items.
- **Illustrate historic moments.** Do you remember what you were doing when a historic event happened? Tell your child the story and have her draw a picture to go along with it.
- **Investigate magnetism.** Give your child a refrigerator magnet and go around the house. Help her discover what it will stick to and what it won't. Explain that magnets stick to certain metals, such as iron.



Set a timer for solo play

Independent play and concentration go hand in hand. To lengthen your child's attention span when she plays on her own, sit her down with a puzzle or some blocks. Set a timer for 10 minutes and ask her to play until it goes off. Praise her when she does. Help her work up to 15 or 20 minutes of independent play.



Put your love into words

Show learning some love on February 14 with Valentine's Day activities that build your child's word power. Together:

- **Create rhymes.** Help your child think of words that rhyme with *valentine* (*fine, mine, shine, pine*) and *day* (*play, say, way*).
- **Read books** about love and Valentine's Day. Snuggle up and share books such as *Heart to Heart* by Lois Ehlert, *One Love* by Cedilla Marley and *Ollie's Valentine* by Olivier Dunrea.



Prepare for school by practicing respect

Cooperating and learning as part of a class is easier for children who have been taught at home to behave with respect and consideration for others.

To boost school-readiness, talk to your child about what respect means to your family. Give him real-life examples, and find ways to demonstrate respectful behavior. You can:

- **Draw attention to it.** Thank the person who holds a door open. Thank the sibling who waits to ask a question until your child has stopped speaking.
- **Set an example.** Be patient. Stay calm during disagreements

and when you respond to other people's mistakes.

- **Discuss the behavior** of characters in books, TV shows and videos with your child. Who is being respectful? Who isn't? How can he tell?
- **Write a poem** together about showing respect. It can be silly, as long as it's meaningful.

Source: M. Borba, Ed.D., *Building Moral Intelligence: The Seven Essential Virtues that Teach Kids to Do the Right Thing*, Jossey-Bass.

Use music to engage your preschooler's creativity

One easy way to add a creative dimension to your child's activities is by setting them to music. Encourage your child to:

- **Paint or draw** to music. Suggest that she draw a picture of the way the music makes her feel.
- **Make up songs** to sing as you do household tasks together—a song about picking up toys, or one about getting ready for bed, etc.
- **Brainstorm ways** to make music with everyday items she uses, such as by running a comb through a hairbrush.



Should I be worried that my child doesn't say much?

Q: My four-year-old talks a lot less than his brother did at this age. How can I tell if this is a problem or just his personality?

A: Children develop language skills at different rates, so differences between your children aren't necessarily reasons to worry. Some language milestones are common to most four-year-olds, however, and you can listen for them from your preschooler.

In general, four-year-olds:

- **Use language in a variety of ways.** They might like to sing and recite rhymes in addition to having conversations.
- **Can answer basic questions.** They can give their first and last names, and their siblings' names. They may be able to say the name of their street or their address. They like asking questions, too!
- **Can be understood** by people outside their families. They may not always use the right word, but they can get their meaning across.
- **Are starting to use tenses.** "I ran fast." "I will eat this later."
- **Use some prepositions.** "My shoes are *under* my bed."

If you don't hear most of these things or are still concerned, ask a pediatrician for help determining if your son's language skills are age-appropriate.



Are you prioritizing your child's sleep?

Sleep is essential for learning. Being well-rested helps your child stay alert enough to learn, and sleep also reinforces her memory of what she learns. Are you helping your child get enough sleep? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

1. **Do you make sure** your child gets at least 10 to 13 hours of sleep every 24 hours?
2. **Do you stick** to a consistent bedtime for your child—even on weekends?
3. **Do you follow** a relaxing bedtime routine for your child, such as bathing, brushing teeth and reading?
4. **Do you turn off** screen devices at least one hour before bedtime to prevent your child from having difficulty falling asleep?

5. **Do you eliminate** loud distractions in the area where your child is sleeping?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are helping your preschooler sleep well. For each no, try that idea.

"There is a time for many words, and there is also a time for sleep."

—Homer

Map your child's world

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

With preschoolers, it's best to focus on places that are meaningful to them. Teach your child to draw a simple map of his house and street. It can be as basic as a square for the house and a straight line underneath for the road.

A child who draws a map of his house at age five 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*, National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Ask for a helping hand

It may be faster to do a chore yourself than to ask your child to do it. But asking her to help out at home teaches her that she can:

- **Learn** skills and improve with practice.
- **Contribute** to the family's well-being.
- **Remember** simple instructions and plan ahead.

These lessons, and the confidence and sense of responsibility your child gains, will serve her well in school.

Encourage problem-solving

When your child has a problem to solve, ask questions to help him think it through:

- **What's going on?** Try to get him to state the problem.
- **What do you want** to do about it?
- **What might happen** if you did that? Help him consider consequences.



It's OK if your child can't solve the problem. What's important is to have him think about it instead of just asking you for answers.

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