

Helping Children Learn®

EARLY CHILDHOOD

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School



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Science learning can be good clean fun for your preschooler

Splashing and splashing in the bath is entertaining for preschoolers. But it can also be educational! Bathtime is a great time to introduce your child to some science concepts.

Gather some of these “science” tools: plastic boats, rubber animals, sponges, empty plastic bottles, some plastic cups, a small rock, a spoon, plastic pitchers and a large plastic bowl.

When your child is in the tub, encourage him to:

- **Predict which items** will sink and which will float. Then help him test his predictions.
- **Pour and measure.** As he uses the pitchers to pour water into the cups, talk about the meanings of *full*, *half full* and *empty*.
- **Fill one container** with water, and another with soap bubbles. Talk about the concepts of *heavy* and *light*. Explain that air is lighter than water.
- **Pour some water** into two plastic bottles. Ask your child, “Which has *more* water? Which has *less*?” Have him pour each bottle’s water into the bowl, one at a time, to see if he’s correct.
- **Float a boat** or the bowl on the water. Help your child experiment to see how many rubber animals he can put in it before it sinks.



Support literacy in a variety of ways

Building your child’s language and pre-reading skills in many ways gives her a strong foundation for reading. Here are some activities to fit in frequently:

- **Explore new types** of reading materials. Read biographies, poems, instructions and more together. Talk about the many different reasons people read.
- **Use new words** in ways that help your child understand what they mean. “That’s the biggest, widest tower you’ve ever built! It’s *massive*!”
- **Discuss illustrations.** Ask your child to describe what’s going on in each picture. How does she think it relates to the story?
- **Encourage participation.** When you read a favorite story your child knows well, let her chime in and “read” too.
- **Play with letters.** If you don’t have child-safe refrigerator magnet letters, just cut letters out of paper. Help your child arrange them to make familiar words, such as her name.

Make key habits routine

Adequate sleep, healthy meals and quiet play all help your child pay attention. To make sure she gets all three every day:

1. **Establish and stick to** regular nap and bedtimes.
2. **Serve meals and snacks** at predictable times.
3. **Set aside time** that’s free of scheduled activities, loud noises and screens.

What to know about apps

You may wonder if the apps labeled “educational” really are. A review of research on kids under six found that some apps can aid learning, especially in math. Effective apps:



- **Hold children’s interest** with features such as game play and rewards.
- **Let children practice** skills repeatedly in a variety of ways.
- **Provide feedback** for improvement.

If you give your child an app, use it together. Kids learn more from screen media when interaction with parents is part of the fun.

Source: S.F. Griffith and others, “Apps As Learning Tools: A Systematic Review,” *Pediatrics*, American Academy of Pediatrics, nswc.com/appreview.

Raise emotional awareness

Little people can have big emotions. Managing them is an important social skill. Help your preschooler:



- **Name his emotions.**
- **Understand what reactions** are appropriate. “You can pound a pillow if you’re upset. But you can’t throw things.”
- **Find an outlet.** “You seem antsy. Let’s go outside and see how far you can run.”
- **Recognize emotions** in others. “Dad’s frowning. Let’s ask him what’s wrong.”



What can I do to make sure my child keeps imagining?

Q: My child has a great imagination. I don't want her to lose it over time. How can I help her learn to apply it in positive ways?

A: Imagination and creativity will serve your child well in school. Here are some ways to keep her imagination humming:

- **Show interest** when your child is creative. Listen to stories she makes up. Admire her drawings and ask what she was thinking about when she made them. Play make-believe games together.
- **Read books together.** Talk about the stories. Act them out. Make up new characters and brainstorm about alternative endings.
- **Ask your child how she's feeling.** Show interest in what she says. Role-play different situations she might encounter together. Help her imagine what other people might be thinking and feeling.
- **Let your child choose** her own play activities whenever possible. Offer props that encourage creativity, such as puppets and dress-up clothes. Common household items, such as sofa pillows and dish towels, that she can use in different ways are great, too.



Are you providing new opportunities?

Your child is just beginning to learn about the world, and every new experience you provide helps him do it. Are you introducing him to new ideas, activities and places? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

1. **Do you visit** interesting new locations with your child—for example, a construction site, farm or marina?
2. **Do you read** new books with your child as well as old favorites?
3. **Do you have** your child try new foods? It may take many tries before he likes them.
4. **Do you give** your child chances to see people playing sports or performing?
5. **Do you listen** to lots of different kinds of music together?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are helping your child explore and learn. For each no, try that idea.

"In wisdom gathered over time I have found that every experience is a form of exploration."

—Rsel —dams

Investigate wind's power

Wind is a part of the weather your child can easily feel and hear. To help her understand its effects, try this experiment on a windy day:

- **Get a plastic lid.** Punch a hole in it.
- **Help your child spread** petroleum jelly on both sides of the lid.
- **Thread a string** through the hole, and hang the lid up outside.
- **Check the lid** after an hour. What has the wind blown in? Explain that the wind is strong enough to pick things up and carry them along.

Source: "What's in the wind," WeatherWizKids, nswc.com/wind.

Math links to everything

Math isn't a separate subject. The skills your child gains from learning about math—such as problem-solving, comparing and critical thinking—are important for all subjects. So don't wait to expose your child to math. Research shows that helping him develop and use math skills now can boost his achievement in school later.



Source J. Nichols, Ph.D. and others, "Reframing Early Math Learning," FrameWorks Institute and the Heising-Simons Foundation, nswc.com/mathnow.

Choose timing carefully

When should you introduce your child to new things? When you know she's interested in them. If your child isn't attentive to a new game or activity, she won't learn much from it. To ensure interest:

- **Pick a time of day** when your child is well-rested and ready for a challenge.
- **Don't force it.** If she's frustrated, try later.
- **Choose activities** that build on her previous achievements. Interest increases when kids can use skills they already have.

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