

# Helping Children Learn<sup>®</sup>

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

Cotulla Independent School District



February 2019

## Enjoy the world of books together during Library Lovers' Month

February is the month for lovers—library lovers, that is! Celebrate by helping your preschooler explore your local library.

If your child is new to the library, explain that it holds an exciting collection of books that will help her learn about anything she wants to know. If she's been there many times, revisit favorite spots and check out a section your child hasn't yet seen.

To turn your child into a library lover:

- **Learn about free programs** at the library that are geared to kids her age. Attend together whenever you can.
- **Encourage her to think of herself** as a reader (being a reader-in-training counts). Say things like, "Let's read the sign on the door: P-U-S-H, push. Let's push it open and go right in!" Explain that the librarian can help find books that are just right for her.
- **Help her see you as a reader and library lover.** Explain the ways you read for work and fun. Point out library features you like, such as the magazine section or the new releases. Check out books for yourself as well as for your preschooler, and let her see you read them.
- **Create a cozy reading area at home,** with a special basket or shelf for library books. Encourage your child to feel that spending time looking at books in this spot—with you or on her own—is an enjoyable activity.



## Provide opportunities to learn by doing

To you, sorting socks may be a boring chore. But when your child does it, he is learning to compare and classify. Helping you cook teaches him about measuring. Feeding a pet fish helps him learn responsibility. The opportunities you give your child to learn things for himself enrich his developing intelligence.



## Talk about sportsmanship

Whether your child plays a sport or not, learning how to *be* a good sport will make her a better team player. Teach your child:

- **Sports and games** are for learning, having fun and getting exercise. If your child does this, she's a winner.
- **Manners count.** Encourage your child to say "good game" or "good job" to teammates and opponents—win or lose.
- **Frustration is no reason to quit.** "Sometimes you catch the ball, and sometimes you don't. It's hard to feel good when you don't, but don't give up!"

Source: T. Trautner, "Good Sportsmanship is important in youth development—Part 2," Michigan State University Extension, [nswc.com/beasport](http://nswc.com/beasport).



## Help your preschooler start a journal

Your child may not be able to write his name yet, but he can still get useful pre-writing practice by keeping a journal. He'll also learn that writing is a great way to capture his ideas on paper. To help him get started:

1. **Give your child** a blank sheet of paper and some crayons.
2. **Ask him to tell you** about something he did today. Prompt him if necessary: "You went to the park today. What did you do there? What did you see?"
3. **Have him draw** a picture of the activity he describes. Encourage him to include as many different details as he can remember.
4. **Ask him to tell you** about his finished drawing. Underneath the drawing, write down your child's description.
5. **Explain that the words** tell about the picture. Encourage your child to write something as well—even if he just makes marks.
6. **Repeat this process** every few days. Save the pages and staple them together to make a book.

## This art is full of heart

Making homemade valentines is a fun way to help your child be creative and develop motor skills. You can:

- **Cut hearts** out of paper. Show your child how to overlap them to create heart "people" or "animals." Glue them to a sheet of paper or card stock.
- **Weave a valentine.** Use a hole punch to make holes along the outer edge of a paper heart. Let your child weave ribbons or yarn in and out of the holes.





## Are fancy educational toys really necessary?

**Q: We are on a tight budget. I can't afford to buy electronics or expensive educational toys for my child. Will his learning suffer without them?**

**A:** Good news! Education experts agree that thinking about how to use a toy is one of the most critical parts of play for kids. Simple toys are best for engaging your preschooler's thinking skills in this way.

Look for toys that:

- **Encourage creativity.** When your child plays with toy animals or cars, for example, he makes up his own stories about what they are doing. And of course, there are no limits to what his imagination can do with a cardboard box.
- **Are fun to use with other kids.** Sharing toys builds your child's social skills. A ball is perfect for this.
- **Hold your child's interest.** An ideal toy is something your son will come back to again and again, each time thinking of a new way to play with it.

A few basic enjoyable toys—along with books and puzzles—are all your child needs. They will help him develop many of the skills he will need to be successful in school.



## Your words have an impact

Your child is listening—even when you think he isn't. When you talk about your child, choose your words carefully:

- **Respect your child's feelings.** Don't complain about him to others when he's within earshot.
- **Speak of your child** in positive terms. "Numbers are challenging for Nathaniel, but he never gives up. How can we make it easier for him to understand them?"
- **Let your child overhear you** saying nice things about him. "Nathaniel is so kind to other children. He's a real friend."

## Make the most of your chats with the teacher

A conversation with your child's preschool teacher is a key way to learn about what goes on in the class. Be sure to ask if you have questions about educational terms. Talk about setting goals, too. Ask how you can help your child reach them, and plan to stay in touch about her progress.

## Foster your child's desire to find out more

Encourage your child to ask questions—they lead to learning! Here are three ways to stimulate his curiosity:



1. **Play 20 questions.** Have your child think of an object in the room. Say you'll ask questions to help you guess what it is. "Is it green? Is it soft? Does it smell?" When he understands the game, reverse roles.
2. **Consider categories,** such as animals. Say, "Fish swim. Can you tell me something else that swims?"
3. **Read books** that ask questions, such as *Are You My Mother?* by P.D. Eastman. Point out that each time the character asks a question, he learns something new.



## Are you instilling respect for property?

Preschoolers are learning to share lots of things. They must also learn respect for the items being shared, such as books, costumes, toys and crayons. Are you teaching your child to respect belongings? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

- \_\_\_ 1. **Do you provide** places for your child to store her own belongings, such as a box or bag for crayons?
- \_\_\_ 2. **Do you make** cleaning up a routine part of play? "Before we get out a new game, let's put this one away."
- \_\_\_ 3. **Do you point out** the benefits of treating others' belongings with respect? "If you treat Grandpa's piano gently, he'll let you play it again."
- \_\_\_ 4. **Do you offer** praise when she treats objects with care?
- \_\_\_ 5. **Do you set** an example by treating others' property with respect, including your child's?

### How well are you doing?

*More yes answers mean you are teaching your child to handle property with respect. For each no, try that idea.*

*"Of all possessions a friend is the most precious."  
—Herodotus*

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