

Early Childhood Parents®

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make the difference!



Five strategies build school skills and promote learning

Studies show the more parents and families engage with and nurture children at home, the better those children do when they start school. Here are five simple ways to boost your child's school smarts:

- 1. Play together.** Children learn through play, so spend time playing games and solving jigsaw puzzles. Dress up in old clothes and put on a silly show together. Stack a tower of blocks. Crank up the tunes and sing.
- 2. Be creative.** Activities like squishing clay, coloring and finger-painting aren't just fun—they're educational. So let your child get messy.
- 3. Cuddle.** Hugs and snuggles are more than a cozy way to bond. They're also a way to make your

child feel loved and safe. The more secure children feel at home, the more confident they are likely to be when they head to school.

- 4. Get active.** Healthy bodies nourish healthy minds. Go on walks with your child. Play catch outside. Go down the slide at the park. Skip rope. And when you're finished, chat about how much fun you had and what you want to do tomorrow.
- 5. Connect.** Introduce yourself to your child's preschool teacher or day care provider. Ask questions about what your child is learning and doing every day.

Source: K.L. Bierman and others, "Parent Engagement Practices Improve Outcomes for Preschool Children," Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

Sleep is crucial for your child's brain growth



You probably know that sleep is necessary for your child's growing body. But did you know that sleep helps children's brains work better, too?

When children get enough sleep, they are better able to control emotions, pay attention and remember material with accuracy.

To support healthy sleep habits:

- **Develop a sleep schedule.** Have your child go to bed and wake up about the same time each day. Try to keep the same schedule on the weekends, too. Aim for 10 to 13 hours of sleep every 24 hours.
- **Enjoy physical activity outside.** Studies show that exercise and fresh air help kids sleep better.
- **Follow a bedtime routine.** Help your child take a bath, put on pajamas and brush teeth. Read a bedtime story aloud. Talk about something positive. Then, lights out.
- **Ease bedtime fears.** Put a night light in the bedroom if your child wants one, and offer a stuffed animal for company.

Source: D. Thompson, "Poor Sleep in Preschool Years Could Mean Behavior Troubles Later," HealthDay.

Introduce your preschooler to the power of the five senses



Children learn about their world by seeing, touching, tasting, hearing and smelling. To help your preschooler appreciate

what humans can do with their senses:

- **Play 1-2-3 Look and See.** Put five items on the table. Ask your child to look at them for a few seconds. Then, take the tray away and remove one item. When you show the tray again, can your child guess what's missing?
- **Make a "feely" bag.** Place a variety of small items in a paper bag. Say, "Close your eyes, reach your hand in and pick up an item." Can your child guess what it is without looking?
- **Have a taste test.** Have your child place salt on the tip, side and back of the tongue. Then, repeat with

sugar and lemon juice. Discuss which part of your child's tongue is more sensitive to which taste.

- **Take a smell walk.** Lead your blindfolded child around your house or outside. Ask what smells your child can sniff and name.
- **Have a listening minute.** Stand outside in the dark with your child. Ask, "Can you guess what is making the sounds you hear?"

"If I, deaf, blind, find life rich and interesting, how much more can you gain by the use of your five senses!"

—Helen Keller

Promoting respect in early years has lasting benefits for children



Over time, kids learn to be respectful not just because it's right, but because they understand how being respected feels. They

realize that it feels good to be asked politely, thanked and treated fairly. Experiencing this at home is a key way children learn.

A study of mothers and preschoolers published by the Economic and Social Research Council shows that:

- **Talking to preschoolers** often about people's thoughts and feelings encourages empathy. For example, "That little boy is crying. Why do you think he's upset?" Or, "Grandma is frowning. How do you think she's feeling?" These conversations give your preschooler opportunities to be understanding.

- **Discussions about feelings** have long-term benefits. Talking with your preschooler now can offer benefits well into elementary school—when positive social skills will make it easier to get along with classmates and teachers.
- **Being a positive role model** is important. Let your child see you treat others with consideration. When talking about other people's emotions, use a warm tone. Research suggests this increases kids' cooperation. In addition to discussing real-life emotions, it also helps to address how characters in books, movies and TV shows might be feeling.

Source: N. Yuill and others, "The Relation Between Parenting, Children's Social Understanding and Language," Economic and Social Research Council.

Are you making patience a priority in your home?



Kids can try parents' patience. However, patience is a vital school success trait for children to develop—and they

learn by example.

Are you promoting patience in your home? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

- ___ **1. Do you give your child time to master new skills**, such as pouring a drink or zipping a jacket?
- ___ **2. Do you stay calm** when your child is upset? Demonstrate the behavior you'd like to see in difficult situations.
- ___ **3. Do you try to relax** when you have to wait? Show your child how to wait and take turns politely.
- ___ **4. Do you avoid rushing?** Following routines can reduce delays and the need to push kids to "hurry up."
- ___ **5. Do you forgive yourself and others?** Show your child how to learn from mistakes and be positive about the future.

How well are you doing?

Each *yes* answer means you are promoting patience. For *no* answers, try those ideas from the quiz.

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to Help Their Children.

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Encourage participation during your family read-aloud time



Experts agree that reading with children is the best way to prepare them for school success. And it's something that

you and your child can do every day.

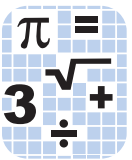
To make reading aloud a great experience:

- **Take a moment** before you start reading to look at the book. Ask what your child thinks the book might be about. Does the picture on the cover offer any clues?
- **Read a few pages** and then pause to ask your child a question or two. One question to ask is: "What do you think will happen next in this story?" This encourages your child to stop, think about the story and make a prediction. Predicting is an important skill for reading comprehension.

- **Hold your child's interest.** Try using a different voice for each character. Ask your child, "What do you think this character sounds like? Can you make your voice do the character's voice?" Encourage your child to act out some of the characters' movements, too.
- **Let your child "read" to you.** Most preschoolers don't know how to read just yet. However, they can still hold the book, turn the pages and talk about what's happening in the illustrations. Or, they can simply retell the story from memory.
- **Create anticipation.** With a longer book, stop at an exciting place so your child will look forward to reading again the next day.

Source: "Make the Most of Reading Aloud," ReadWriteThink, International Literacy Association.

Show your preschooler that math is a natural part of life



Early childhood is a great time to show children that math is not only fun, it's a natural part of daily life,

too. Nearly everything kids do involves math. Each time they get dressed, for example, they follow a sequence. That's a basic math skill.

Here are some other ways to help your child become aware of the math that is all around:

- **Look for numbers everywhere.** Notice numbers around you. If your child doesn't recognize numbers yet, point them out.
- **Estimate.** Say to your child, "I think you can finish your sandwich in 10 bites. Let's see." Then help your child count the bites.
- **Look for patterns.** Help your child find patterns on sheets, curtains and clothing. "Your shirt has a red stripe, then a yellow stripe, then a red stripe, then a yellow stripe."
- **Have a "shape of the day."** In the morning, show your child a shape. "Look at your plate. The shape of your plate is a circle. We're going to have a circle hunt today!" Throughout the day, point out circles where you see them.
- **Discuss sequences.** Preschoolers love daily routines and knowing what's going to happen next. Talk about the course of the day. "First, I'll drop you off at preschool. After preschool is over, Dad will pick you up. Then, you will come back to our house to play."

Q: This fall, my child started attending a new preschool. Every morning drop-off starts with a burst of tears. It's been a week, and things haven't gotten better. Is there anything I can do to make drop-off less stressful for both of us?

Questions & Answers

A: It's always difficult for parents to watch their children fall apart when it's time to say goodbye. But what's going on is common for children of preschool age. Your child is still very dependent on you and being apart can create feelings of insecurity.

With the teacher's help, you can convey that your child will be safe and cared for at day care and you will *always* come back. Here's how:

- **Show your child** you trust the teacher. Say, "If you need help, I want you to ask Ms. Casey. She will take wonderful care of you."
- **Reassure your child** about your return. Draw a picture of a clock that shows the time you'll return. Say, "When the clock on the wall looks like this, I'll be here." Or offer something of yours that your child can keep, such as a scarf or a photo.
- **Follow a short goodbye routine** with your child. Perhaps you can walk to the front door and do a special handshake. Then you can give a hug and kiss, say you'll be back soon, and go. Tears may still fall for a few weeks, but eventually the routine will be comforting to your child.
- **Stay in touch with the teacher** about how your child does after you leave. Ask about the activities your child seems to like best at preschool and be sure to talk about them at home.

The Kindergarten Experience

Teachers share back-to-school tips for success



What's the secret to making sure your kindergartner has a successful school year?

Seasoned teachers

from around the country weighed in to share their best back-to-school advice. Here's what they had to say:

- **Follow routines at home.** Children thrive when they have a regular time to eat, sleep, play, read, do chores, etc.
- **Create daily rituals.** Start school mornings eating breakfast together. Ask about school every evening. And end the day with a bedtime story.
- **Encourage playing by the rules.** Know and talk about school rules. Never tell your child you think a rule is silly.
- **Stay up-to-date on school news.** Read everything that the school and your child's teacher send you.
- **Inform the teacher** about any changes at home, such as a new living arrangement or new baby.
- **Avoid saying negative things** about school in front of your child. Make it clear that you and the teacher are on the same "team."
- **Support success with schoolwork.** Establish a regular study time and place. Stay nearby to answer questions.
- **Choose screen activities carefully.** Limit the amount of time your child spends passively watching.
- **Provide balance.** Organized activities are great, but all children need downtime to daydream, create and relax, too.

Partner with the school to support kindergarten learning

When your child starts elementary school, you join a community of people who are supporting your child's learning. And the more involved you are, the better!

Studies consistently show that when families are engaged in children's education, students perform better academically.

To be an effective partner with the school:

- **Tell teachers** about your child's likes, dislikes, strengths and challenges. Find out what your child will be learning this year and how you can reinforce those skills.
- **Get involved.** Join the parent-teacher organization. Ask about any volunteer tasks you can do from home. Communicate with teachers regularly.



- **Review the school calendar.** Write down important dates, such as back-to-school night and parent-teacher conferences. Plan to attend as many as you can.

Show your kindergartner how to focus on finishing tasks



In kindergarten, students are expected to settle down and complete jobs they're given. They can't jump from one activity

to another when they're frustrated or bored. They must learn how to stick with and finish what they start.

To help your kindergartner develop this ability:

- **Encourage quiet activities.** Give your child time to look at books or work alone.
- **Let your child struggle** a little when working on a task. If you are always jumping in to help,

it will be difficult for your child to develop a "can do" attitude.

- **Instill perseverance.** Encourage your child to keep trying after making a mistake.
- **Offer only a few pieces of paper** at a time to draw on. Don't let your child throw away 10 half-completed drawings before really getting started.
- **Play games** together that require concentration.
- **Let your child run around** and be noisy after completing a task. Your child will learn there is time to let off steam after finishing work.