

Helping Children Learn®

EARLY CHILDHOOD

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School



April 2017

Early Intervention Program

Midwestern Intermediate Unit IV

Teach your child skills to boost independence and responsibility

Doing tasks for themselves makes preschoolers feel great, and also helps them learn about responsibility. Responsibility and independence go hand in hand—and both are critical for school success.

Before your child can reliably perform a task on her own, she'll need help learning and practicing it. When giving your child a new responsibility:

1. **Demonstrate the skill.** If you want your child to make her bed every day, for example, have her watch you do it a few times.
2. **Practice together.** After your child is familiar with how to make her bed, make it together. Describe each step as you do it.
3. **Supervise her solo efforts.** This step may be the longest in the process. Don't expect your child to make her bed the way you would, and don't remake it when she's done. The goal isn't perfection—it's to develop your child's desire to do the task and her confidence that she can do it.
4. **Work the skill into her routine.** Experts say that performing a task for 21 straight days will make it familiar enough to become a habit. If your child gets used to getting up, getting dressed and making her bed in the same order around the same time every day, you won't have to remind her to do it. And your child will have taken the first few steps on the road to independence.



Source: A. Friedman, "9 Tips for Teaching Kids Responsibility," Care.com, nswc.com/teachtask.



Make your home a reading place

Your child is about to become a reader. To excite him about reading and support his efforts, make your home reader friendly. Here are some ways:

- **Fill your home with books.** Make a weekly trip to the library. You can also find children's books at yard sales. Stock up on a variety of alphabet books, rhyming books and picture books.
- **Be a role model.** Let your child see you reading a book, newspaper or magazine every day. Talk with him about interesting things you read. Tell your child often how much you enjoy reading.
- **Build language skills.** Read to your child every day. Sing songs together and recite nursery rhymes. Expose him to new words, and ask questions that make him think.
- **Practice.** Say the alphabet with your child and point to the letters so he will learn to recognize them. Help him match letters and sounds. "Sun starts with the letter S. S makes the ssssss sound."

Don't give in to whining

When speaking respectfully, tone of voice matters as much as the words. To help your child reduce the whining that grates on teachers' and other adults' ears:

- **Model the difference** between a whiny and an appropriate tone.
- **Say,** "I can't understand whining." Be firm about not granting requests made in a whiny voice.
- **Respond quickly** when she uses an appropriate tone.

Source: "Whining: Why it happens and what to do about it," BabyCenter, nswc.com/whine.

Play a light-up letter game

Help your child learn to recognize letters by playing a flashlight game together. In a darkened room, use the light beam to draw letters on the ceiling or wall. Can your child figure out which letter you're making? Give him a turn drawing the letters, too.



Source: J. Silberg, *Reading Games for Young Children*, Gryphon House, Inc.

Enjoy cultural traditions with your child

Embracing family traditions can enhance your child's life. But don't stop there. Help your child learn about other cultures and traditions, too.

To expand her world:

- **Show your child photos** from your family's past.
- **Let her help you cook** a dish that represents her heritage. Try foods from other cultures, too.
- **Read a book** together about a child from another country. Talk with your child about the similarities and differences between her life and the character's.



Source: K.T. Alvy, *The Positive Parent: Raising Healthy, Happy and Successful Children, Birth-Adolescence*, Teachers College Press.



My competitive preschooler hates to lose. What can I do?

Q: When my child loses a game or isn't chosen first, he often throws a fit or refuses to continue. I know that I shouldn't always let him win just to avoid this behavior. How can I help him learn how to be a better sport?

A: Every child faces times when someone else wins a game or gets picked first. It's important to help your preschooler understand this and learn to move on.

To prepare your child to handle competition:

- **Teach him how to lose** in a loving setting. Help him process his disappointment. Ask him to use his words to express how he feels. Encourage him to switch to a different activity for a while and to say, "I'll try again another time."
- **Focus on effort.** Tell your preschooler he can always be proud of himself if he gives his best effort, whether he wins or loses.
- **Have fun together!** Games at this age should be enjoyable. Let your child know that if he has a good time playing, he has succeeded, whether he finishes first, second or last.

Of course, your child will probably win sometimes. Remind him when he does that it is just as important to be a gracious winner. He should never brag or try to make the other players feel bad.



Are you reducing your child's stress?

It's hard for preschoolers to behave well when they are fearful, anxious or tired. Stressed-out kids are also prone to illness. Are you reducing as much unnecessary stress in your child's life as possible? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

1. **Do you start** and end your child's day on a positive note, with pleasant words and calm routines?
2. **Do you make sure** your child has plenty of unscheduled time to play and dawdle?
3. **Do you make time** every day to listen to your child's concerns?
4. **Do you allow** your child to develop at her own pace, without comparing her to others?
5. **Do you talk** to your child about upcoming changes,

such as a divorce, a new sibling or a new preschool?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are minimizing your child's stress. For each no, try that idea.

"Children may not remember what you told them, but they'll always remember how you made them feel."
—author unknown

Stage a kitchen concert

Encourage your child's creativity by making music together. Your kitchen is probably filled with things you and he can turn into musical instruments. Here are some ideas:

- **A tambourine.** Get two paper plates. Put a handful of dried beans on one plate, then staple the second plate on top all around the edges. Shake!
- **A drum.** An empty oatmeal container with a lid is perfect for banging with a wooden spoon.

Gear up for math on wheels

When you are in the car, ask your child to point out numbers she recognizes on signs or buildings as you drive along. Have her:

- **Make a chart with you** of numbers from 1 to 50. She can bring the chart and a crayon in the car or on the bus. Have her cross off each number she sees.
- **Tell you the numbers** she sees on license plates around you.
- **Count.** How many red cars does she see? How many white houses?

Establish habits that help the environment

This Earth Day, April 22, help your child get into the habit of protecting the Earth. Together:



- **Turn off the lights** and TV when you leave a room. Have your child turn off any electric toys.
- **Put a cup by the bathroom sink.** Your child can fill it with water before brushing his teeth. Afterwards he can use it to rinse his mouth. Now there's no need to leave the water running.
- **Participate in a clean-up day.** If you can't find one near you, rally neighbors to clean up the area near your homes.

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