

Helping Children Learn®

EARLY CHILDHOOD

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School



October 2017

Early Intervention Program

Midwestern Intermediate Unit IV

Encourage your child's curiosity to nurture STEM success

Educators talk a lot about STEM—Science, Technology, Engineering and Math. These subjects are critical for success in our rapidly-changing world. Young children's curiosity makes them natural scientists, so now is an ideal time to begin exploring these topics with your child.



You don't have to be a math or science expert to build your child's STEM knowledge. When he helps you measure ingredients for a recipe or care for houseplants, he is learning about STEM. Explore:

- **Science.** You may get tired of hearing "Why?" but it's important to encourage your child's curiosity. Ask him lots of questions, too, such as "Why do you think that happened?" and "How are these things different?"
- **Technology.** Computers and digital media are technological tools, but so are things like scissors, rulers, magnifying glasses and magnets. Help your child discover uses for a variety of basic tools.
- **Engineering.** When your child is constructing a house from boxes or using a plank to bridge a puddle, he is solving problems like an engineer. Give him some blocks, pillows and other safe materials and let him build!
- **Math.** Count everything with your child—from steps in the staircase to plates on the table. Have him sort items by shape and size, too.

Source: E.R. McClure and others, "STEM starts early: Grounding science, technology, engineering and math education in early childhood," The Joan Ganz Cooney Center at Sesame Workshop, niswc.com/earlystem.



Inspire your child's desire to write

The more you make writing appealing for your child, the more interest she'll have in learning to write. To promote writing pleasure, give your child plenty of paper and colorful crayons or markers. Then, try some of these activities:

- **Help your child write** words she likes, such as *Mom*, *dog*, *jam* and her name.
- **Add writing** to other enjoyable pastimes. If your child is hosting a stuffed animal tea party, have her "write" some invitations.
- **Ask her to help you write.** She can add words or a scribble to your weekend to-do list or a note to a friend or relative.
- **Set up a family post office.** Put a box in the kitchen and have family members "mail" one another letters. Your child can scribble hers and then "read" them aloud to the recipients.
- **Put her writing on display.** Has she written a beautiful letter E? Or spelled her name just right? Showcase her efforts on the refrigerator with pride.

Free play is thinking time

It's great to plan educational activities for your child. But he also needs an hour or two of free playtime each day (not in front of a screen). Give him access to puzzles, books and toys and let him take the lead.

Don't worry if your child complains that he is bored. Boredom can motivate kids to think, create and imagine.

Chores teach children to handle responsibility

Your child will have to take responsibility for many things when she gets to elementary school—from belongings to schoolwork to hygiene. To help her get ready:

- **Assign a few regular tasks**, such as dressing herself and putting her dirty clothes in the hamper.
- **Avoid "fixing"** things for her. Instead, offer suggestions, such as "The label in your shirt goes in the back."
- **Thank her for helping** the family.
- **Let her face consequences.** If she forgets to put her favorite skirt in the hamper, it won't get washed.



Source: "Studies Show Children Need Chores," Austin County News Online, niswc.com/chorestudies.

Introduce the difference between fact and opinion

Helping your child learn to sort and classify objects builds his thinking skills. So does helping him identify facts and opinions.



You might point to the broccoli on his plate and say "Broccoli is a green vegetable. That is a *fact*." Then say, "I think broccoli is the best tasting green vegetable. That is an *opinion*. What is your opinion? Which green vegetable do you think tastes best?"



What's the best way to raise my child's self-esteem?

Q: I've heard that I need to build my daughter's self-esteem. But I don't want her to become self-centered. What exactly am I supposed to do, and how will it help her in school?

A: There are a lot of misconceptions about self-esteem. It isn't the same as being conceited or thinking you are better than everyone else. Having self-esteem means:

- **Feeling competent.** You want your child to believe in her ability to learn new things.
- **Feeling valuable** and deserving of respect. This in turn will help her respect the value of other people.

To develop your child's self-esteem:

- **Tell her often that you love her,** just for who she is.
- **Praise her carefully.** If you praise only good results, your child will get the idea that she has worth only when she gets something right. Praise her when she shows genuine effort or persistence.
- **Listen when she talks.** Look her in the eye. Repeat what she says to show you understand. This lets her know you care what she thinks.
- **Enforce discipline fairly** and consistently. Knowing what to expect makes your child feel secure.



Are you helping your child express ideas?

When children can express themselves verbally, they can connect better with others. They can show their understanding. They can ask for what they need. Are you helping your child say what he's thinking? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

- ___ **1. Do you ask** your child questions as you do things together? "Which bowl is your favorite?"
- ___ **2. Do you ask** questions that require more than a *yes* or *no* answer?
- ___ **3. Do you ask** *what if* and *why* questions? "Why do you think ...?"
- ___ **4. Do you ask** your child how he feels about things?
- ___ **5. Do you pay** attention when your child talks? Do you ask questions to help him clarify?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean that you are building your child's ability to put his thoughts into words. For each no, try that idea from the quiz.

"Self-expression must pass into communication for its fulfillment."
—Pearl S. Buck

Enjoy indoor fitness fun

Is the weather keeping you from going outside? Here are two fun ways to help your child get exercise in your home:

- **Navigate an obstacle course.** Create a safe layout that requires crawling, jumping, climbing and more.
- **Play "hula hop."** Put a hula hoop on the floor and have your child hop in and out of it all the way around the circle.

Art is a learning experience

It's worth a little mess to unleash your child's artistic creativity a few times a week. Making art teaches children:



- **Planning.** "I want to make an elephant out of clay. I need to make the body before the legs and head."
- **Cause and effect.** "When I mixed yellow and red I made orange."
- **Experimenting.** "I am going to try gluing leaves on paper to make a picture."

Spread out newspaper for protection and let the creating begin. Display your child's artwork and encourage her to be proud of it.

Source: K. Rymanowicz, "The art of creating: Why art is important for early childhood development," Michigan State University Extension, nswc.com/preart.

Cultivate cooperation

Interacting with classmates is a big part of participation in school. Work with your child on:

- **Understanding.** Discuss other people's feelings. "You have the blocks. Katherine wants to use them, too." Practice sharing.
- **Solving problems.** "What if Andy takes the toy you are using? What could you do?" Talk about how and when to ask for help from an adult.

Source: "Better Kid Care: Teaching children to cooperate," PennState Extension, nswc.com/cooperate.

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