

Helping Children Learn®

EARLY CHILDHOOD

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School



January 2018

Early Intervention Program
Midwestern Intermediate Unit IV

Routines and explanations help preschoolers learn self-control

Research has shown that children's ability to *self-regulate*—to control their emotions and behavior—improves their chances of success not only in kindergarten, but throughout their lives. While kids gain these skills at different rates, the preschool years are a critical time for developing them.



To help your child self-regulate:

- **Slow things down.** Give your child a five-minute warning before she needs to transition to a new activity. Encourage her to wait her turn while playing with friends or siblings, and praise her when she does. Teach her how to take deep breaths to calm herself.
- **Talk situations through.** Whether it's a trip to the store or a family visit, you can help your child plan for new situations by talking about them beforehand. What will be expected of her, and how could she respond if she feels upset? Encourage her to use words to describe her feelings, and then listen to what she has to say.
- **Play games to practice skills.** Try Simon Says, which requires players to listen carefully and control their impulses to move, or Musical Statues, in which children move madly for as long as music is playing but freeze in mid-motion when it is paused.

Source: J.J. Montroy and others, "The Development of Self-Regulation Across Early Childhood," *Developmental Psychology*, American Psychological Association, nswc.com/regulate.



Resolve to support learning this year

A new calendar year is a great time for a fresh start. For 2018, resolve to boost your child's learning. Renew your efforts to:

- **Read together every day.** Set a regular time for reading aloud. Gather as a family often to read quietly, too. Your child can look at picture books he likes.
- **Take part in activities** that help your preschooler learn in fun ways, such as putting jigsaw puzzles together, building with blocks and playing board games.
- **Take local trips together** that offer your child chances to learn.
- Visit the library to attend story time. Go to the park to identify animals and plants.
- **Limit screen time.** If your child has been overdoing it lately, now is the time to cut back. Preschoolers should have no more than one hour of screen time per day.
- **Serve nutritious meals** that each include at least one vegetable and one fruit.

Ask interesting questions

To build your child's thinking skills, ask her questions that require more than a simple *yes* or *no* answer. You could ask:

- **What are** some things that make our home special?
- **What would** your perfect day include?
- **What are** some hard things about being a kid?

Source: A. Brill, "40 Questions That Get Kids Talking," Positive Parenting Connection, nswc.com/questions.

Point out lots of patterns

When you think about math, do you picture numbers? Math is also about *patterns*—sequences that give numbers meaning. To teach your child about patterns, have him:

- **Look at a calendar.** Show him how each month begins with the number 1.
- **Repeat simple sequences**, such as *clap, clap, stomp, stomp*. Add other motions as he learns the pattern, but repeat them in the same order.
- **Sing songs with repeating phrases**, such as "B-I-N-G-O."



Develop artistic awareness

Pull out the paints and encourage your child's creativity. To reinforce what she is learning about colors and textures, help your child:



- **Mix new colors.** Show her how mixing blue and yellow makes green. What does she think mixing red and blue will make? Try it and see!
- **Explore textures.** Have your child add salt or sand to paint. What happens? Brainstorm about other things she could add to make different textures, such as crushed cereal.

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What can I do to help my child learn to listen?

Q: I know it's important for my son to learn to listen, but his attention span is still really short. Is there anything I can do to improve his listening skills?

A: Listening is an important skill for school success. Your son will need to listen to the teachers and respond appropriately. And listening to his classmates will help him make friends. It's normal for preschoolers to have short attention spans, but you can still make time each day to focus on talking and listening with your child.

To build his listening skills:

- **Be patient.** Start with short conversations. Over time they will become longer and livelier.
- **Choose moments** when you can give your child one-on-one attention, such as before he takes a nap.
- **Make eye contact.** Gently ask your child to look at you and offer praise when he does.
- **Talk about subjects your child likes.** He's more likely to focus on something that interests him.
- **Encourage discussion.** Say something like, "I asked you a question. Why don't you ask me a question, too?"



Are you adding math to your child's day?

When your child gets to elementary school, math will be part of her daily schedule. Are you preparing her by introducing math concepts during your activities together? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

- ___ **1. Do you ask** your child math questions? "I have two pieces of cheese. If I give you one, how many will I have left?"
- ___ **2. Do you play** sorting games? Sort books or blocks by size, then sort them again by color.
- ___ **3. Do you count** things or actions out loud? "We need to add five teaspoons of milk to these eggs. One ... two ..."
- ___ **4. Do you point out** numbers on objects, signs or buildings? "I spy a 3. Can you find it?"

- ___ **5. Do you use** math words in conversation? "This shelf holds fewer toys than that one."

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you're making math a part of your child's daily life. For each no, try that idea.

"Curiosity is the wick in the candle of learning."

—William Arthur Ward

Choose apps with care

Apps for preschoolers are everywhere. But how do you know which will help your child learn? Researchers advise parents to look for apps that:

- **Require your child to think** and use information—and not just tap or swipe.
- **Present material** without unrelated noises, pop-ups or other distractions.
- **Help your child connect** new information to his daily life.
- **Allow social interaction**, with in-app characters or with parents.

Source: K. Snow, Ph.D., "How to Find Educational Apps," The National Association for the Education of Young Children, nise.com/apps.

Careers get kids moving

One fun way to help your child develop muscle coordination is to have her role-



play different careers. Would she like to be a chef, a soccer player or an ace reporter? Gather related props that encourage muscle use, like pots and spoons, sports balls, and writing tools. Then let her imagination—and motor skills—grow.

Foster healthy curiosity

Curiosity leads to learning, so it's important to nurture it in your child. Here's how:

- **Encourage questions.** Say, "I don't know but let's find out!" Show your child how you find answers online or in books.
- **Celebrate discoveries.** You may not be interested in the rock he found, but saying, "Wow, look at that" encourages your child to keep observing the world.
- **Redirect gently.** If he puts his fingers in his pudding, say, "That looks so soft. But we feel food with our tongues in our mouths, not with our fingers."

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