

# Helping Children Learn®

EARLY CHILDHOOD

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School



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Early Intervention Program  
Midwestern Intermediate Unit IV

## Sharpen school skills as you enjoy the summer with your child

Are you planning to fill the long days of summer with fun activities to do with your child? Spending time together, talking and enjoying each other's company, builds a bond that will support her efforts in school.

To add some learning to the fun, include activities that emphasize school skills, such as:

- **Reading.** Read with your child every day. And don't just read! Discuss the stories, the characters and the pictures. Talk about the difference between real (nonfiction) and pretend (fiction). Attend story times and special programs for children at the library.
- **Writing.** Keep a journal of your family's experiences, such as swimming, traveling and playing in the sand. Have your child add drawings and "write" captions under them.
- **Counting.** Have your child count bubbles you blow, swings at the playground, children in the pool. If she has mastered counting by ones, move on to twos or tens.
- **Following routines.** Stick to a regular schedule for meals and bedtime.
- **Interacting.** Give your child lots of opportunities to meet and play with other children. Talk about the importance of taking turns. Help your child practice sharing.



## Reduce screen time to a healthy limit

A recent study found that children ages three to five spend over two hours a day on screen time—more than double the one hour limit recommended by doctors. The biggest culprit was time in front of the television.

The variety of devices in use today make limiting children's screen time a trickier task than simply turning off the TV, however. To keep your child's screen use under control:

- **Don't use screens** to pass time while waiting. When you are running errands or waiting for the doctor, offer your child traditional ways (books, cards, etc.) to amuse himself. Leave your phone in your pocket and the tablet at home.

- **Establish blackout times** when *all* screens (yours too!) go off. If he knows that 2–5 p.m. is tech-free, he'll get out of the habit of reaching for a device then.
- **Unplug before bed.** Screens and sleep don't mix. Have your child stop using screens an hour before lights-out.

Source: W. Chen, Ph.D. and J.L. Adler, Ph.D., "Has Screen Time Increased for Young Children and on What Screen?" JAMA Network, [nswc.com/blackout](http://nswc.com/blackout).

## Rehearse public speaking

In school, children need to be able to speak comfortably in front of others. To give your child some practice, think up a situation, such as visiting a friend

or going on a trip. Then help her act it out using puppets or dolls. Have her practice the show and put it on for family or friends.



## Help your preschooler get a feeling for respect

Understanding that it feels good to be treated nicely helps children learn to treat others with respect. To get this lesson across:

- **Be a positive role model.** Show your child respect and help him recognize his reaction to it.
- **Talk with your child** about other people's emotions. "You didn't say hi to Grandpa. Now he's frowning. How do you think he's feeling?" Discuss how characters in books might be feeling, too.
- **Use a warm tone** when speaking of others' feelings to encourage empathy.

Source: S. Madigan and others, "Three strategies to promote empathy in children," *The Conversation*, [nswc.com/empathy](http://nswc.com/empathy).

## Set rules for a safe summer

Summer adventures demand discipline with an emphasis on safety. When you are away from your home or yard:

1. **Explain** that in some places your child *must* hold your hand—such as crossing a street or entering a crowd.
2. **Teach your child** to stay where she can see you and you can see her at all times.
3. **Establish a safe person** or spot your child can go to if you get separated. Safe spots should be in sight, out of traffic and away from water.





## Should I be teaching my child to sit still and learn?

**Q:** My son will start kindergarten in the fall. I know it will involve more seat work than he is doing now, but I'm not sure how long an attention span a kindergartner is expected to have. What should I do to prepare my child?

**A:** Kindergarten does involve more seat work than preschool, but the work will take place in small chunks. Teachers know that five-year-olds need to be active. Your child will be expected to pay attention for 15 to 20 minutes at a time.

To lengthen your child's attention span:

- **Encourage him to play** with one toy at a time. Choose playthings such as blocks and art supplies that build concentration and let him be endlessly creative. Ask him to return to an activity, too. "After you have had your snack, you can finish coloring your picture."
- **Play board games.** Look for age-appropriate games with simple rules.
- **Practice following directions.** Start with one step: "Wash your hands." Move on to two steps: "Wash your hands and then bring me your backpack." When your child masters this, try three or more steps.
- **Read together.** This is the best activity of all. Your child learns to engage with the story. Give characters funny voices to sustain his interest.



## Do you provide new learning experiences?

Organizing your preschooler's day with routines helps her know what to expect. But she also needs new experiences to learn and grow. Are you exposing your child to new things and ideas? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you involve** your child in new activities at home, such as baking or finger painting?
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you try** new things as a family, such as foods or games from other cultures?
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you explore** new places with your child, such as museums and parks?
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you visit** the library often with your child to check out new books?
- \_\_\_ **5. Do you play** different kinds of music for your child? Talk about how they make you feel.

### How well are you doing?

*More yes answers mean you are expanding your child's knowledge of the world. For each no, try that idea.*

"That is the beginning of knowledge—the discovery of something we do not understand."

—Frank Herbert

## Invite reading participation

Your child gets more out of reading aloud when you make it an interactive experience for the two of you. Here's how:

- **Start by looking.** Examine the book's cover before you start reading. Ask your child what he thinks the book is about.
- **Read a few pages,** then pause. Ask a question or two about the text. Can your child predict what will happen next?
- **Encourage him to ask** questions about the story.
- **Have your child point** to any words he knows by sight. Ask him to read them aloud to you.

Source: "Make the Most of Reading Aloud," ReadWriteThink, International Literacy Association, [nswc.com/read\\_aloud](http://nswc.com/read_aloud).

## Keep your child moving

Preschoolers love to move, and making sure your child gets regular exercise is a vital part of helping him learn. Exercise builds motor skills that increase coordination and control in the classroom. It helps kids reduce stress so they are better able to face challenges. Active children also sleep better—and a well-rested child is one who is ready to learn.



## Students need self-esteem

Seeing herself as a person who is accepted and valued will give your preschooler the confidence to try new things, in school and in life. To support her positive self-image:

- **Ask her opinion.** "Should we have chicken or fish for dinner?"
- **Encourage her interests.**
- **Appreciate her help.** This makes her feel competent.
- **Tell her you enjoy** her company.

Source: "Your Child's Self-Esteem," KidsHealth, [nswc.com/self](http://nswc.com/self).

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