

# Helping Children Learn<sup>®</sup>

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School



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Ladd Community Consolidated School  
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## Your participation improves your preschooler's education

Your child has a long school career ahead. He will have many teachers, but the things *you* do to support his learning at home will be critical to his success. And research shows that the preschool years are an ideal time to start!



Here are some important ways to help:

- **Show your child** that learning is a top priority in your family. Ask questions and try and find out the answers.
- **Establish routines.** Routines help make daily activities go smoothly, and they help children stay calm.
- **Talk with your child** about what he's thinking and doing. What is he learning? What activities does he like? Discuss ways education has been important in your life.
- **Show pride** in your child's projects and the skills he's building. Hang up his artwork. Take a picture of his tall block tower to send to Grandma.
- **Make time for reading** every day. Get comfortable together and help your child discover how enjoyable reading can be.
- **Foster independence.** Help your child learn to do things for himself, like pouring cereal or zipping up his jacket.

Source: X. Ma and others, "A Meta-Analysis of the Relationship Between Learning Outcomes and Parental Involvement During Early Childhood Education and Early Elementary Education," *Educational Psychology Review*, Springer.



## Put your child on the top of the list

In a year of unprecedented quarantines, you may be spending more time than usual with your child. That's a good thing, because time together is essential for building your connection—and your child's school readiness.

As you juggle the priorities on your to-do list in this new school year, save the place at the top of the list for spending time with your child. You can use the time to:

- **Care for something.** If you have a family pet, feed it or walk it together. Or have your child help you water your plants.
- **Start a family project,** such as a jigsaw puzzle, a card-making

session or anything else you enjoy doing together.

- **Collect something** from nature, such as fallen leaves.
- **Help the community.** Bake cookies together to deliver to the fire station. Have your child draw a picture for an elderly neighbor who might be lonely. Collect clothes that no longer fit your child and pass them on.

## Make learning a pleasure

No matter how eager you are for your child to learn to count or say the ABCs, be patient. Keep activities light-hearted, and if your child gets bored, stop. Remember that while you want your child to develop school skills, you also want him to learn something else: that learning is fun!

## Books boost vocabulary

Researchers say that reading aloud to your preschooler may be the best way to build her vocabulary. Listening to stories gives your child:

- **Exposure** to unfamiliar words.
- **Clues** about how grammar works.
- **Examples** of other meanings and new ways to use familiar words.



Of course, having conversations with your child is also important. They develop her social skills as well as her vocabulary. But to really sharpen her word knowledge, break out the books!

Source: D.W. Massaro, "Two Different Communication Genes and Implications for Vocabulary Development and Learning to Read," *Journal of Literacy Research*, Sage Journals.

## Serve exercise for dessert

Kids need lots of exercise to have healthy bodies and minds. The key to encouraging your child to be active is to get active yourself. Preschoolers' activity levels are linked to their parents' activity levels.

One way to add exercise to your lives is to change your after-dinner routine. Rather than reaching for dessert, reach for a ball. The good feeling you'll get from kicking it around lasts longer than a cookie.



Source: S.L. Barkin and others, "Parent's Physical Activity Associated With Preschooler Activity in Underserved Populations," *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, Elsevier.



## How can parents help young children learn to think?

**Q:** I've read a lot of advice for parents on teaching children at home. Some suggest helping my preschooler think logically and creatively. How can I do that?

**A:** Chances are good you are already doing it. One wonderful way to help your child develop her thinking skills is to encourage her to reflect on the world around her.

You can do this by asking your child questions that can't be answered by a *yes* or a *no*. Use questions to help your child think about:

- **Categories.** You might ask, "Can you name two things with wheels that a child can drive?" Answers could be a tricycle, kiddie car or scooter.
- **Descriptions.** Describe something and see if your child can name it. For example, "I'm thinking of something cold and white and flaky that falls from the sky. What is it?"
- **Situations.** Describe a situation and encourage your child to be creative about what she would do in those circumstances. For example, "What if we had an elephant for a pet? How would we take care of it?"
- **Sense and nonsense.** You could ask, "When it's bathtime, we fill the tub with ice cream, right?" She'll probably laugh and say *no*. Encourage her to say what should go in the tub.



## Are you making home a learning place?

Your home is your child's first school, and you are his most influential teacher. Are you encouraging your child to learn new things by providing learning opportunities at home? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you have** conversations with your child about things that interest you and things that you've learned?
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you praise** your child when he tries something new, and build on the things that interest him?
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you let** your child see you reading for pleasure, and read a variety of materials together?
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you supply** learning tools, such as blocks, puzzles, paper and crayons?

- \_\_\_ **5. Do you engage** your child in lots of screen-free learning activities each day, such as examining and exploring?

### How well are you doing?

More *yes* answers mean you are promoting learning at home. For each *no*, try that idea.

"Each day of our lives we make deposits in the memory banks of our children."

—Charles R. Swindoll

## Manage digital media use

Parents hear a lot about limiting screen time. But the types of digital media your child uses, and how she uses them, also matter. Doctors recommend that families:

- **Choose** educational, non-violent shows and games and simple e-books.
- **Interact** with children when they use screen media. Talk about what you see.
- **Unplug after dark.** Nighttime use of screen media can disrupt sleep.

Source: "Healthy Digital Media Use Habits for Babies, Toddlers & Preschoolers," [Healthychildren.org](http://Healthychildren.org), [niswc.com/digitalmedia](http://niswc.com/digitalmedia).

## Practice respectful behavior

The skills children need to do well in school aren't all academic. Showing respect for others, for example, is also important. Help your child practice:

- **Waiting.** Teach him to wait for someone else to finish speaking before he talks.
- **Sharing.** Encourage him to share his belongings with others, and to ask nicely if he wants to use something of theirs.
- **Being kind.** Role-play nice things he can say, like "I really like your hat!"



## Talk about letter sounds

One of the first steps in learning to read is understanding that letters represent specific sounds. To help your preschooler link letters to the sounds they make:

- **Give examples.** "The word *sky* starts with the letter *s*. It sounds like *ssss*."
- **Read tongue twisters.** Ask your child to listen for the repeated sound. Show her that many of the words start with the letter that makes that sound.
- **Point to rhyming words.** "*Cat* and *mat* rhyme. They use the same letters to make the same ending sound."

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