

# Helping Children Learn<sup>®</sup>

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School



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B. Bernice Young School

Denise King, Principal/Gary Russell, VP

## Help your child discover and enjoy the math in everyday life

You don't need to wait until your child is in elementary school to show him that not only is math fun, it's all around us. There is math in nature and in nearly everything we do. To help your child become aware of the math in his life:

- **Look for numbers.** Focus on the ones your child already knows. If he doesn't yet recognize numbers, simply point them out on occasion. "That big sign has a 2 and a 5 on it!"
- **Look for patterns.** Help your child find patterns on his bed sheets, curtains or clothing. "Your shirt has a red stripe, then a yellow stripe, then a red stripe. That's a pattern."
- **Estimate.** Say to your child, "I think you can finish your toast in 10 bites. Let's see." Then help him count his bites.
- **Have a "shape of the day."** In the morning, show your child a shape. "Look at your plate. The shape of your plate is a circle. We're going to have a circle hunt today!" Throughout the day, point out circles where you see them. Praise your child when he points out circles, too.
- **Put things in order.** Preschool children love routines and knowing what's going to happen next. Talk about the sequence of events in your child's day. "First, I'll drop you off at preschool. After preschool is over, we will have lunch. When we've finished eating, we will take a walk."



## Join a parent-teacher team

You and your child's preschool teacher both have the same goal—your child's success. That is why it is so helpful to stay in regular contact with each other.

Try to keep an open mind if the teacher mentions areas in which your child needs improvement. Ask about ways you can help at home. And tell her about changes that affect your child, such as a divorce or move.

## Get into the act of learning rules

Learning and following rules at home makes it easier for your child to learn and follow them at school. And acting them out with dolls or puppets can make learning rules fun. Ask your child to act out rules such as:



- **Use your inside voice.**
- **Walk when** you are inside.
- **Take turns** and share.
- **Say please, thank you** and *excuse me*.
- **Take care** of your belongings and other people's belongings.
- **Keep your hands** to yourself.



## Ask for details about your child's day

Preschool children are learning to talk about their thoughts, experiences and ideas. When you ask your child about her activities in preschool each day, she gets practice communicating and learns that school matters to you.

To get the conversation started:

- **Ask your child** to tell you about one of her drawings. Write a sentence or two of her description under her drawing. Read it together.
- **Encourage your child** to think about details. If she went out to the playground, ask, "What color is the slide?" "Who was playing with you on the playground?"
- **Talk about your time** together. For example, instead of saying "We're going out," try, "We are going to the grocery store. We need some fruit and cereal. You can help me pick them out."
- **Help your child** tell a story in order. Ask, "Did you practice letters *before* or *after* reading time?"

Source: C. Wright, *A Parent's Guide to Home and School Success: Kindergarten*, Brighter Vision Publications.

## Start the school year right

Preschool is a great time to teach your child the importance of attending school on time every day. Kids with regular attendance in early years are more likely to succeed in school.



- **Tell your child** you expect him to go to school every day. If it is a priority for you, it will matter to him.
- **Stay calm** if he balks at going to school one day. Don't raise your voice; just tell him he must go. It's a rule.
- **Schedule vacations** and medical appointments outside of school hours if possible.



## Can I make my child's entry into preschool easier?

**Q:** How can I help my child get settled into preschool? I know that once she gets into a routine, she'll be fine. But until then, I think she'll be anxious. How can I make things easier for her?

**A:** Starting preschool is a major transition for every child, even those who deal well with change. A child who is uncomfortable with the unknown will require more time, patience and practice with this transition. To ease your child into it:

- **Visit the school** together before the first day, if possible, so she can see the building and become familiar with the route to school.
- **Point out the practical.** Children often worry about preschool because they don't know how they will do things there that they are used to doing at home, such as using the bathroom. Show your child where the bathroom is. Show her where she'll hang her coat.
- **Stay for a few minutes only.** Start a five-minute routine when you arrive at preschool. Greet the teacher together. Look at a puzzle or book with your child. Hug her tightly and tell her you will pick her up as soon as school is over. Then hand her over to the teacher and go.
- **Be patient.** It may take your child a few weeks to feel comfortable. Even if she seems fine in class, she may work through her anxieties by having meltdowns at home with you. This should eventually ease. If it doesn't, speak to her teacher or doctor about it.



## Does your child want to find out why?

Children are naturally curious. And that curiosity will serve them well in preschool as they begin to explore the world around them. Do you stimulate your child's curiosity at home? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you model** curiosity by wondering aloud about things?
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you encourage** your child to ask questions? Do you reply with, "That's a good question!"?
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you give** your child things he can safely take apart, examine and put back together?
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you help** your child examine things—such as bugs, flowers, newsprint, dirt—through a magnifying glass?

- \_\_\_ **5. Do you take** walks with your child to see how many new things you can find?

### How well are you doing?

*More yes answers mean you are encouraging your child's desire to investigate. For each no, try that idea.*

*"Too often we give our children answers to remember rather than problems to solve."  
—Roger Lewin*

## 'Pretend reading' counts!

While your child might not be able to read yet, she *can* pretend to read. The more she pretends, the sooner she'll be reading for real. To encourage pretend reading:

- **Choose books with simple pictures** and text with rhythm and rhyme.
- **Reread familiar books often.**
- **Stop reading before you say a word** and ask your child to supply it.
- **Omit more phrases** until your child is telling the story.

## Focus on attention span

An ability to concentrate on a task is crucial for school success. Select an activity your child enjoys, then look for ways to keep him focused for longer periods of time. You can:

- **Extend reading time.** Read a chapter book over a series of nights.
- **Work on a jigsaw puzzle.** Try one with about 25 pieces. It doesn't have to be finished in one sitting. Attention span also involves coming back to a project.

Source: J. Bradford-Vernon, *How to Be Your Child's First Teacher*, School Specialty Publishing.

## Capture time for education

A time capsule can show your child the value you place on education. To make one:



- **Write down predictions.** Ask your child what she wants to be when she grows up, or what she'd like to learn.
- **Draw a portrait.** Have your child draw what she thinks she'll look like when she graduates from high school.
- **Collect some photos** of your child taken at preschool.
- **Seal the keepsakes in a box.** Plan to open it together when your child graduates from high school.

Source: J. Bissett, *Little Bits of Wisdom*, Compendium Publishing & Communications.

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