

Helping Children Learn®

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

Jackson City School District

Guide pretend play with props to foster early learning skills

Imaginative play is an important learning activity for preschoolers. And research shows that guiding your child's play by introducing props can have positive effects on thinking and problem-solving abilities and early academic skills.

To use props to enhance pretend play, try these games together:

- **Going to the Library.** Set out the books you have at home. Next, pretend you and your child are going to the library to find something to read. What would your child like to read about? Discuss the books and take turns checking them out. Then, read some.
- **Construction Zone.** Set up barriers and toy vehicles. With your child, make signs that say *stop*, *go*, *slow* and more. Then, let your child direct traffic through the zone.
- **Cooking Show.** Set out a pot, a plastic bowl and a wooden spoon and have your child pretend to be on a TV cooking show. Ask your preschooler to tell the audience (you) how to make something.
- **Phone Tag.** Take turns making pretend phone calls to each other to ask questions. Discuss the need to talk loudly and clearly on the phone.

Source: K. Skene and others, "Can guidance during play enhance children's learning and development in educational contexts? A systematic review and meta-analysis," *Child Development*, Society for Research in Child Development.



Add some math into daily activities

Preschoolers who frequently encounter numbers and simple math concepts in activities they do at home become familiar and comfortable with them. As a result, they do better in math when they get to kindergarten.

Luckily, it is easy to work some math into activities you already do with your preschooler. To promote math readiness:

- **Play board games.** Using dice and moving pieces around the board offers lessons in pattern recognition and counting.
- **Pay cash for small items.** When you buy a gallon of milk, for example, say, "This milk costs

\$4.07. We need four one-dollar bills, one nickel and two pennies." Show them to your child.

- **Cook and bake together.** Being asked to scoop one half-cup of sugar or hand you two lemons exposes your child to *fractions* and *quantities*.

Source: B. Mutaf-Yildiz and others, "Frequency of Home Numeracy Activities is Differentially Related to Basic Number Processing and Calculation Skills in Kindergartners," *Frontiers in Psychology*.

Do a schoolwork review

When your child brings home "work" from preschool, look at it together. You'll get an idea of what your child is doing and your child will learn education matters. For the most benefit:

- **Discuss** the work.
- **Help** your child apply newly learned skills.
- **Notice** progress or problem areas. Raise concerns with teachers right away, and ask how you can help.



Taking schoolwork seriously fosters your child's motivation to put effort into it.

Sing out for language skills

Singing develops your child's awareness of the rhythm and sounds of language. It's also linked to stronger speaking skills. Have fun together singing:

1. **Rhyming songs**, such as *Ring Around The Rosie*.
2. **Rounds.** In a round, each person sings the same song, but starts at a different time.
3. **Favorite songs** of yours.



Source: M.C. Pino and others, "The Association between Music and Language in Children: A State-of-the-Art Review," *Children*, MDPI.

Practice careful listening

Listening is just as important as speaking for effective communication. To help your preschooler sharpen listening skills:

- **Give multi-step directions.** Ask your child to "Go to your room, get your shirt, bring it here and I will help button it."
- **Listen to audiobooks** together.
- **Play listening games.** Go outside together and close your eyes. What sounds can you each hear?



How can I help develop my child's willingness to try?

Q: I want my child to try things and tackle challenges. What can I do to encourage this?

A: Healthy self-confidence makes it easier for students to learn, persist, solve problems, get along with others and build independence—it's a real superpower! Your child develops this confidence from a sense of competence and a feeling of self-worth.



To strengthen healthy self-confidence in your preschooler:

- **Show interest in what your child thinks.** Listen patiently when your child talks. Ask for your child's opinions about daily matters: "What should we have for dinner tonight, pasta or chicken?"
- **Give your child responsibility.** Doing meaningful tasks increases children's sense of competence. A fun, age-appropriate job like watering a plant lets your child make a contribution to running your home.
- **Set boundaries** and apply consequences fairly and consistently. Limits help your child feel safe while exploring and acting independently.
- **Praise effort and progress** as well as results. And make it clear that your love is unconditional—"I love you for exactly who you are!"



Are you preparing your child to read?

Introducing your preschooler to letters and written words in informal and enjoyable ways builds excitement about reading and readiness to learn. Are you helping your child become a reader? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

1. **Do you write** your child's name on belongings, and help your child recognize the letters in it?
2. **Do you play** with letter toys together, such as blocks, and focus on the sounds those letters make while you play?
3. **Do you tell** your child that letters and letter combinations represent the sounds in a word?
4. **Do you play** letter games with your child, such as matching pictures of items with the first letter in the item's name?
5. **Do you label** household items with their names (*table, chair,*

etc.) and point to the words while saying them aloud together?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are making reading a natural part of your child's day. For each no, try that idea.

"Reading should not be presented to children as a chore or a duty. It should be offered as a gift."

—Kate DiCamillo

Explore seasonal foods to encourage healthy eating

A healthy diet full of fruits and vegetables fuels your child's body and mind for learning.



Making it fun increases children's willingness to eat it. For a fun taste of fall:

- **Let your child** choose a different kind of apple than you usually buy. Discuss the differences (*taste, smell, color, etc.*)
- **Hunt for fall vegetables** of as many colors as possible (*yellow squash, orange pumpkins, green brussels sprouts, red cabbage, etc.*) Serve a different one each day.

Set a weekly learning goal

Setting and working toward learning goals reinforces student responsibility. Preschoolers can do this, too. Help your child set a learning goal at the beginning of the week. It could be learning to write a few numbers or to zip up pants. Write the goal down, and provide chances to practice. At the end of the week, celebrate meeting the goal, or reset it and say that with more practice, your child is certain to reach it.

Team up to solve issues

When preschool teachers raise a concern about your child's behavior, they are asking for your help, not criticizing you. Here's how to help turn things around quickly:

- **Listen** with an open mind. Something is preventing your child from learning well.
- **Trade expertise.** Ask what the teacher recommends. Share information about your child. Work together on a plan.
- **Tell your child** that you and the teacher are working together to help your child learn. Explain expectations and say rules keep preschool a happy place to learn.

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