EARLY CHILDHOOD

Helping Children Learn®

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

May 2022

Charles City Public Schools

Encouraging science learning is easier than you might think



Research shows that parents are less confident about how to help their children learn science than they are about helping with reading or math. In a national survey, seven in 10 parents said they would do more science activities with their child if they knew specific things to do.

Science activities don't have to be complex, expensive or dangerous. The goal of science is to discover how the world works, something children love to do all day.

Try these activities with your child:

- **Test predictions.** Have your child guess how far you can each throw a ball. Then measure and see how close his answers come to the real distances.
- **Begin a collection** of items from nature, such as shells, rocks or leaves. Each time your child adds something new, discuss how it is the same and how it is different from other items he's gathered.
- **Ask questions** that require thought: *Why do you think lions are tan? Where does all the water go when it rains? How could you figure out how much sand will fit in this bucket?* Then look for answers together.
- **Discuss how things change.** Observe a nearby tree and talk about how it looks. Write down your child's observations. Then do it again in different seasons. How does the tree change?

Source: M. Silander and others, "What Parents Talk About When They Talk About Learning," Education Development Center, Inc. and SRI International.

Strengthen school readiness skills

Children do better in kindergarten if they arrive with some basic skills, such as the ability to express themselves clearly, to listen and pay attention for short periods of time, to cooperate with others and to work with their hands.

To build these skills this summer:

- **Have frequent discussions.** Encourage your child to talk and to use new words and specific names for items.
- **Listen attentively.** Does your child state her thoughts clearly? Can she retell an event in sequence? Ask follow-up questions to keep the conversation going.
- **Model sharing, respect** and cooperation. Take turns with your child using items. Speak respectfully to her and to others. Ask her to help you do tasks at home.
- **Develop her small motor** skills. Encourage your child to paint and write. Show her how to zip and button her clothes. Help her sort small items into piles.

Warm up to summer reading

When families don't keep up with reading activities over the summer, their children can lose months of skills. So include reading in your summer fun every day. Here's how:

- **Look for books** that match your child's activities. If he is learning to swim, for example, read a book about children or animals going swimming.
- **Refresh your supply** of reading material often at the library. Or see if the area library system has a bookmobile that stops in your neighborhood.
- **Play a few online reading games.** PBSKids offers games based on popular TV series at *https://pbskids.org/games/reading*.
- **See how many new places** you and your child can find to read.

Create a hero wall of fame

To fill your child's life with positive role models, encourage her to draw pictures of people she admires and tell you why she likes them. Her heroes could be fictional or people she knows. Write the character traits her heroes demonstrate on the bottom of the pictures, then hang them on the fridge or wall.



Play outdoors with friends

Playing outside develops children's minds as well as their bodies. Let your child invite a friend to play in your yard or at a local park. Supervise to ensure safety, but let the children figure out what to play. They'll learn:

- **Creativity.** An upside-down pail can be a mountain for a village of ant people.
- **Problem-solving.** What can they use to make a road?
- **Social skills.** Your child will learn to include others in his play.



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Q&A How can I prepare my child for school responsibilities?

Q: My five-year-old will be going to kindergarten in the fall. What can I do in the meantime to help her become a responsible student?



A: Responsible behavior makes learning in a classroom easier for everyone, and a responsible attitude toward learning will help your child do her best academically. It's a great thing to work on together this summer.

To instill responsibility:

- **Practice personal care.** Kindergarten students should be able to dress themselves and know how to wash their hands thoroughly.
- **Teach your child to express her wants** and needs politely, such as by raising her hand and saying *please*.
- **Develop her problem-solving skills.** Ask, "What do you think you should do about this?" Make sure the problem is age-appropriate.
- **Assign your child simple chores,** such as pulling up the cover on her bed and putting her dirty clothes in the hamper. Expect her to put her toys away after using them.
- **Express confidence in your child's ability to learn.** If she struggles with a new or challenging task, let her know it's OK. She'll get the hang of it with time and practice.

Parent Quiz Are you applying rules effectively?

Upholding basic rules at home gives your child a sense of security that comes from knowing what to expect. He is also more likely to follow rules at school. Are you teaching respect for rules? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

___**1. Have you established** a short list of rules that help life run smoothly?

___**2. Do you explain** rules clearly and specifically? "No name-calling" is better than "Be nice."

___**3. Do you enforce** your rules consistently and praise your child when he follows them?

___**4. Do you create** routines that help your child cooperate?

___**5. Do you review** your rules as your child matures, and adjust them as necessary?

How well are you doing?

More yes *answers mean you are making it easy for your child to follow rules. For each* no, *try that idea from the quiz.*

"Effective discipline is built into the daily parenting of a child, not used as an after-the-fact reaction to an unwanted behavior."

—D'Arcy Lyness

Stick to screen time limits

Research links too much screen time with reduced development of white matter in preschoolers' brains. White matter supports language and literacy. Experts say that preschoolers should have no more than one hour of screen time each day—not including video chats with family. To occupy your child in more productive ways:

- **Give her a job** when you are busy. Have her sort socks, pick up toys or dust table legs with a feather duster.
- **Make a list** of fun activities: building block towers, twirling with scarves, blowing bubbles, etc. When your child is bored, have her pick one from the list.

Source: J.S. Hutton and others, "Associations Between Screen-Based Media Use and Brain White Matter Integrity in Preschool-Aged Children," JAMA Pediatrics.

Make a place for learning

To encourage your child's interest in learning, create a special spot to do it in. Make a nest of pillows in a cozy space in your home. Add a favorite stuffed animal that can be your child's learning buddy. Then spend some time doing learning activities with your child in this spot. Also encourage him to spend some time there on his own. Suggest that he teach his stuffed buddy something that he has learned.



Enliven summer learning

You want your child to keep learning over the summer. But you also want summer to be relaxing. To combine learning and fun:

- **Make math** a regular part of the day. Have your child count and measure items. Hunt for numbers wherever you are.
- **Make connections** to history. Tell family stories about the past. Visit a museum. Talk about ways the world has changed.

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