EARLY CHILDHOOD

Helping Children Learn®

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

April 2022

Charles City Public Schools

Count on having fun when you play number games together

When you make math a regular part of your preschooler's games and activities, she won't think of learning it as work—it will simply be part of the fun.



Try these number games together:

- **Number Feet.** Trace your child's footprint on paper and cut out 10 footprints. Label each with a number from 1 to 10 and spread them on the floor. Have your child say the numbers as she steps on each footprint.
- **Count and Stick.** Label index cards with numbers. Give your child some small stickers. Ask her to put three stickers on the card with the number three, and so on.
- **Number Trees.** Cut out trees from brown and green construction paper. Then cut out a few dozen "apples" from red paper (use a hole punch to speed things up). Label the trunks of the trees with numbers and ask your child to put the number of apples on each tree that is written on its trunk.
- **Count with Cars.** Label toy cars with numbers. Make garages out of small boxes and label those with the same numbers. Then, ask your child to drive each car into the garage with the matching number.

If your child ever gets bored or frustrated during an activity, take a break or switch to something else. The goal is to help your child develop a positive attitude about math that will last through school and beyond.

Language skills are learning skills

Your preschooler uses his language skills to get and share information. He uses them to express needs and process what he hears. And his language skills are the foundation that supports reading.

To help your child develop strong oral language skills:

- **Encourage him to talk.** Offer your full attention and use eye contact and facial expressions to show your interest.
- **Let him finish.** Don't complete your child's sentences for him. If he's stuck on a word, allow him time to think of another way to say what he wants.
- **Ask him to listen** and look at you when you are speaking to him. Sometimes, have him repeat back what you said.
- **Add to his vocabulary.** Introduce new words into your regular conversations. For example, "Thank you for helping me organize your books and toys this afternoon. We were very *productive* and got a lot done."

Try these spring activities

Your child is growing, and new skills and talents are emerging. She's in the spring of her life! That makes springtime activities a perfect match for fostering her learning. With your child:



- **Plant some seeds.** Start an easy-to-grow plant, such as a bean, in a pot or in the ground. Show your child how to water and tend it. Talk about what will happen if she stops.
- **Investigate the wind.** Rub petroleum jelly on a plastic lid. Hang it from a tree branch by a string. In 30 minutes, check and see what the wind blew in.
- **Listen for animals** such as birds and frogs as they return to your area.

Create an obstacle course

If April brings showers, strengthen your child's large motor skills indoors by setting up an adventure obstacle course. You can:

- **Pull a couch from the wall** to create a cave, and let your child climb in and out of it.
- **Use chairs to create** rough terrain he can climb over, under and through.
- **Place a string on the carpet** and pretend it is the edge of a cliff. Your child can practice balancing without "falling off."

'Why' is a thinking question

Few activities make your child think more than having to answer questions with more than one word. Make a habit of asking your child "Why?" You can even turn his "why" questions back on him. If he asks, "Why are you washing the dog's bowl?" ask him, "Why do you think?" in a friendly tone. (Just don't do this with adults!)



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Q&A How can I help my child learn to self-entertain?

Q: My four-year-old goes to preschool during the week. On weekends, I spend most of my time playing with him. We read, do puzzles, play with blocks and go outside. I'd like to teach him to play independently sometimes, but I'm not sure how. What should I do?



A: Independent play is enriching—children often come up with some of their most creative moments when their parents are not involved. Typically, four-year-olds are ready to learn to play on their own for short periods of time.

To encourage solo play:

- **Give your child your attention** when it counts. Focus on him for a few minutes when he really needs you. Then suggest a fun activity he can do on his own. Most children play alone best after having some one-on-one time with parents.
- **Set aside some favorite toys,** games and supplies that your child can use on his own, such as a set of dominoes, a box of toy animals, or washable markers and paper. Bring them out only when you want your child to entertain himself.
- **Engage in side-by-side activities.** If your child wants to be with you, but you have work to do, give him some "work" of his own. If you are doing paperwork, give him a notebook and pencil. If you are busy in the kitchen, ask him to "read" a favorite picture book to you.

Parent Quiz Is learning on the menu at mealtime?

Family mealtime is prime time for preschoolers to learn all kinds of things in an enjoyable way. Are you taking advantage of mealtime to help your child learn and practice skills? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

___**1. Do you ask** your child to help you measure, pour and mix when you cook?

___**2. Do you give** your child regular mealtime responsibilities, such as setting the table?

___**3. Do you include** your child in conversation? Do you discuss topics that matter to her and respond to what she says?

___**4. Do you allow** only one person to talk at a time, and encourage everyone else to listen?

___**5. Do you reinforce** concepts that your child is learning? The table is *round*, the water is *cold*, the rice is *white*?

How well are you doing?

More yes *answers mean that you are nourishing your child's mind as well as her body at mealtime. For each* no, *try that idea.*

"Children do learn what they live. Then they grow up to live what they've learned."
—Dorothy Nolte

Put opposites into action

Kids learn a lot by doing. Using activities that involve movement is a great way to teach the concept of *opposites*. You can:

- **Play Opposite Charades.** Make a happy face. Ask your child to name your emotion, then make a face that shows the opposite emotion.
- **Move in opposite ways.** Squat *low*, stretch *high*. Stomp your *left* feet, wiggle your *right* feet.
- **Cook up some opposites.** Whip up something *icy* and something *steamy*. Try something *sweet* and something *sour*.

Discourage excess tattling

Preschoolers love to tattle on others. Parents and teachers, however, don't love to hear it. Here's how to respond to tattling:

- **Ask two questions:** 1. Is somebody hurt? 2. Is somebody going to get hurt? If the answers are *no*, simply say "No tattling," and turn your attention away.
- **Offer empathy.** You can validate your child's feelings without judging something you didn't see. "You are angry your brother teased you. I'd like to hear you use words to tell him that instead of me."

Source: N. Samalin and C. Whitney, *Loving Without Spoiling And 100 Other Timeless Tips for Raising Terrific Kids*, McGraw-Hill.

Make an Earth Day collage

Teaching your child to appreciate nature helps him learn to respect and protect the environment. Celebrate Earth Day (April 22) with a project that turns nature into art.



Go on a walk with your child to find pebbles, dandelions, feathers, leaves—anything he thinks is pretty or interesting. Bring them home and help him glue them into a collage, or add them to a picture he's drawn.

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