Use family time to teach your child when to talk and when to listen

The ability to listen to others and wait for a turn to speak is a critical skill that will prepare your child for success in elementary school. After all, kids can’t learn if 25 students are talking at once!

When you model and teach polite speaking and listening skills at home, you increase the likelihood that your child will use them throughout her school career.

Your family can practice these skills during:

- **Story time.** Reading with your child motivates her to learn to read. But it also teaches her to listen and pay attention. After you read, have your child retell the story by looking at the pictures. Ask questions, such as “Can you tell me which part of the story you liked best?”

- **Mealtimes.** Sharing meals with family teaches kids valuable speaking and listening skills, so make family meals a priority in your home. When you eat together, give each person a chance to tell something about his or her day. Don’t allow others to interrupt while someone else is talking.

- **Playtime.** Games such as Red Light, Green Light have been around forever because they are fun and they require children to listen carefully. Play Name That Tune by singing a song your child likes using the syllable “la” instead of the words. See if she can guess the song. Playing board games also encourages turn-taking, talking and listening.

**Build skills with valentines**

Sending valentines helps your child express caring for others. And if she makes her cards herself, your child can strengthen her fine motor skills. Focus on:

- **Cutting.** Using scissors builds small muscles in the hand. It also helps your child with eye-hand coordination.

- **Pasting.** Pressing down to make something stick strengthens hand muscles.

- **Drawing and writing.** If your child can’t write her name, have her try just the first letter. Help her write the rest.


**Serve a sweet lesson in size**

To teach your child the concept of size, help him compare items around him. Use words like bigger, smaller, shorter and longer.

One fun way to help him practice is to make pancakes of all sizes. Arrange them in order from smallest to largest. Which one does your child want to eat first? The smallest pancake or the biggest one of all?

**Help your child choose to do the right thing**

Young children behave well to earn parents’ approval and avoid negative consequences. As they get older, they begin to behave well because it’s the right thing to do. To foster your child’s desire to do what’s right:

- **Be a role model.** If you always tell the truth, chances are your child will, too.

- **Express your expectations.** “In our family, we use kind words.”

- **Provide cues.** “Look at your sister. She’s doing homework. When we’re quiet, she can concentrate. Then when she’s finished we can ask her to play.”

*Source: I.R. Florez, “Developing Young Children’s Self-Regulation through Everyday Experiences, Young Children, niswc.com/behave.*
Chores reinforce traits that lead to school success

Doing regular chores teaches your child about responsibility. He also learns that he can contribute to the well-being of the people around him. This understanding will help him thrive in preschool and beyond.

If your child is at least three years old, consider assigning him a chore such as:

- Setting the table. Start with forks, spoons and napkins.
- Dusting. He can wipe low tables and shelves.
- Sorting and matching clean socks.
- Picking up toys on a daily basis.

Get in touch with learning

Sight and hearing are important senses preschoolers use to learn. But so is touch. To give your child some hands-on learning:

- Help her make letters and shapes out of play dough.
- Help her count pieces of dried cereal. She can move each piece from one pile to another as she counts.

Find activities that fit

Preschoolers learn a lot from visiting new places and having new experiences. When choosing new activities to try, think about:

- Ability. Can your child lift a bowling ball? If not, bowling may frustrate him.
- Temperament. A high energy child may love a gym class. A quiet child may be happier with a short museum visit.
- Cost. Preschoolers’ attention spans and behaviors vary widely. Check online or in the newspaper for free or low-cost activities to avoid having to leave before getting your “money’s worth.”

Source: C. Baicker-McKee, Ph.D., Fussbusters on the Go, Peachtree Publishers.

Are you teaching respect for rules?

Teaching your child to follow rules at home makes it easier for her to adapt to rules at preschool. Are you using effective discipline to help your child learn to follow rules? Answer yes or no to the questions below:

1. Have you established just a few important rules? Explain them in simple words your preschooler understands.
2. Do you enforce house rules consistently so your child knows what you expect?
3. Are your expectations appropriate for your child’s age? Rules shouldn’t be too lenient or too tough.
4. Do you react calmly when your child misbehaves and provide her with a good behavior role model?
5. Do you praise your child’s good behavior more often than you notice her mistakes?

Source: C. Baicker-McKee, Ph.D., Fussbusters on the Go, Peachtree Publishers.

Don’t worry that children never listen to you; worry that they are always watching you.
—Robert Fulghum