

Helping Children Learn[®]

EARLY CHILDHOOD

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School



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Ask questions that help your child learn how to solve problems

Problem-solving is a skill your child will use all her life, and the preschool years are the right time to begin developing it. Solving problems involves imagination, persistence and flexibility—all of which will help your child in elementary school.

Asking your child questions—rather than offering answers—gives her a chance to think up her own solutions. To guide her through the solving process, ask her to:



- 1. Identify the problem.** If your child is frustrated because her block tower keeps falling down, you might say, "It looks like something isn't working. What is going on?"
- 2. Look for solutions.** Start your child brainstorming by asking, "What do you want to do about that?" and "Do you have any other ideas?" If she needs help, offer a suggestion by asking: "Have you thought about ...?"
- 3. Predict the outcomes.** Ask, "What do you think might happen if you did that?" Ask how her options might affect others. "If you throw the blocks away, how will your sister feel when she can't play with them any more?"
- 4. Try out an appropriate solution.** Then ask, "How did that work?" If it didn't, ask, "What will you try next?"

Source: G. Innis, "Problem-solving skills begin in preschool," Michigan State University Extension, nismw.com/ask-solve.



Simple habits support attention span

In order to learn in a classroom setting, your child will have to pay attention. Establishing an "attention-friendly" lifestyle at home can help him give his best effort in school. Supportive habits include:

- **Sleep.** Lack of adequate sleep makes it challenging for kids to focus. Sleep deprivation also causes symptoms that can be mistaken for Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder. Preschoolers need 10-13 hours of sleep a day.
- **Exercise.** Daily vigorous exercise has been shown to improve memory and attention.
- **Nutrition.** Healthy foods, including lean protein and fresh vegetables and fruits, should make up most of your child's diet.
- **Reading and creative play.** These engage your child's mind in more positive ways than TV or computer games, which can cause him to tune out or be distracted.

Source: "Attention Problems: Intervention and Resources," Center for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA, nismw.com/attspan.

Wrap up some kindness

This holiday season, teach your child that kindness is the best gift she can give to others. To encourage her, you can:

- **Help her make coupons**—good for a hug or a helping hand—to give as gifts.
- **Have her go through her closet** and select gently-used items to donate.
- **Teach her to express her thanks** for gifts and kindnesses she receives.

Add math talk to each day

Teaching your child about numbers and math concepts at home not only builds his math skills, it may even improve his vocabulary, say researchers. And it's easy to do:

- **Count together.** Count spoons as you set the table, or socks as you put them in the drawer.
- **Compare quantities.** "This bowl has *more* rice in it. That one has *less*."
- **Be specific about numbers.** Say, "Let's read these *three* books," rather than "Let's read some books."



Source: A.R. Napoli and D.J. Purpura, "The home literacy and numeracy environment in preschool," *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*, nismw.com/numbertalk.

Play a sweet shape game

Cookie cutters aren't just for baking! They also make fun tools for teaching your child about shapes. Here's how:

- 1. Place** some plastic cookie cutters on a sheet of paper.
- 2. Help** your child trace around each one with a pencil.
- 3. Talk** about the shapes.
- 4. Place** the cutters in a paper bag, then point to a shape on the paper. See if your child can reach carefully into the bag and identify the matching cutter by touch.





Will a vacation sabotage my preschooler's routine?

Q: Our family has a good school day routine in place. Over the holidays, we will be away for a couple of weeks, and we'll have to be more flexible. How can I avoid having to start all over again when my son returns to preschool in January?



A: Completely abandoning all his routines for weeks could make readjusting a struggle for your preschooler. But you probably won't have to. To keep things more or less on track and make reentry easier:

- **Keep your child's schedule** as normal as possible. There will be days when he must eat or sleep at odd times, but these will likely be part of an event you can plan for. The rest of the time, feed him at the same time he usually eats. Stick to his regular bedtime.
- **Enforce everyday rules.** The holidays are not an excuse for relaxing your expectations for good behavior. In fact, the many changes your child will likely face are even more reason to enforce discipline and respectful behavior.
- **Talk about preschool.** Some kids think the school year has come to an end when they hear adults talking about the end of the calendar year. Say things like, "Won't it be fun to tell your teacher about our trip when you go back to preschool?"

Parent Quiz

Do you expect your child to follow rules?

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

1. **Do you keep** your list of rules short, so your child won't get confused or overwhelmed?
2. **Do you explain** rules clearly and specifically? "We say *please* and *thank you*" is better than "Be polite."
3. **Do you create** routines that help your child cooperate? Doing the same things the same way each day makes them easier to remember.
4. **Do you enforce** the rules consistently?

5. **Do you adapt** rules as your child matures, and praise her new abilities?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are helping your preschooler learn about rules. For each no, try that idea.

"Discipline is the refining fire by which talent becomes ability."

—Roy L. Smith

Listening takes practice

Just telling a child to listen doesn't build this school success skill. Give your child opportunities to practice in fun ways:

- **Play listening games**, such as Simon Says. Your child will have to listen closely to know whether "Simon" is giving the instruction so he can obey.
- **Tell stories.** Read or tell your child a detailed story several times. Then pretend you can't remember part of it. Can your child complete the story for you?
- **Let your child help** around the house. Choose a task that interests him, then give him specific directions to follow. "Fill the watering can. Touch the plant's soil. If it feels dry, water the plant."

Discuss what's OK to tell

Tattling on others can make preschoolers feel important, but no teacher wants a class full of tattlers. Let your child know that she:

- **Should** tell an adult information about someone else that can keep them from harm (Kate is playing with matches).
- **Should not** tattle information just to get someone else into trouble (Jeremy ate three cookies).



Wellness improves learning

Winter is the season for colds and other illnesses that can make it hard for kids to learn. To help your child—and everyone around him—stay healthy:

- **Keep up to date** on his medical visits.
- **Make sure he wears** clothes that protect him from cold or wet weather—a warm jacket, hat, mittens, etc.
- **Have him wash his hands** when he comes home after being around others.

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