

Early Childhood Parents[®] make the difference!

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Turn daily tasks into fun interactive math activities

Engaging children in certain activities can have a positive impact on their number-knowledge in preschool and beyond. Luckily, these math-rich activities aren't complicated. And they are easy to work into everyday activities you do with your child.

Here are some activities shown to sharpen kids' math skills:

- **Sorting.** Putting objects into categories helps your child grasp basic math concepts. To make it exciting, turn it into a challenge. "OK, let's see who can find five square shapes in the family room first." Or, "How fast can you find six pairs of socks in this pile of clean laundry?"
- **Cooking and baking.** When you ask your child to scoop a half-cup of flour or hand you two eggs, you are

introducing mathematical concepts like *quantity* and *fractions*. It's educational, although your child will just think it's yummy!

- **Handling money.** When you're buying something with cash, point it out to your child. "This gallon of milk costs \$4.03. That means we need four one-dollar bills, and three pennies."
- **Board games.** Rolling dice and moving pieces around a board offer hands-on lessons in counting. As a bonus, you can also use board games to teach your child how to be a gracious winner or loser.

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*, Frontiers Media.

Music can boost your child's language skills



Most young children love to sing. That's good news because singing is an effective way to strengthen communication skills.

Here are some fun music activities to enjoy with your child:

- **Learn** as many nursery rhymes as you can. Have your child help you find some at the library or online. Sing them together at least once a day. Combining nursery rhymes with an activity, such as *Ring Around the Rosie*, encourages active play and builds muscles, too.
- **Experiment** with different types of singing, such as singing in a round. (This is when each person sings the same melody, but starts at a different time.) Songs that work well for this include *Row, Row, Row Your Boat* and *Are You Sleeping?*
- **Introduce** your child to your favorite music. (Make sure the lyrics are age-appropriate.) Your child will enjoy sharing music with you and learn how to sing along.

Source: N. Politimou and others, "Born to Speak and Sing: Musical Predictors of Language Development in Preschoolers," *Frontiers in Psychology*, Frontiers Media.

Art projects ignite creativity and teach children useful skills



Young children should have opportunities to create art several times a week. It doesn't matter what they make or even

if they finish a project. What matters is that they use their creativity—and enjoy making something.

While preschoolers create art, they are learning how to:

- **Take risks.** “I’m going to try to make a brand new piece of art today!”
- **Make a plan.** “I know what I want to make. First, I will gather my supplies. Next, I will... .”
- **Problem-solve.** “I want to color the sun, but I don’t have a yellow crayon. I think I’ll use orange instead.”
- **Work with dimensions.** “I want to make the shape I cut out fit on

this page, but it’s too big. I’ll have to make it smaller.”

- **Experiment.** “Look at what happened when I mixed white and red! I made pink!”
- **Be independent.** “I can make my picture all by myself without getting help from anyone.”
- **Feel satisfied with themselves.** “Look at what I created! I am very proud of myself.”

Source: “Better Kid Care: Children’s Art,” Penn State Extension, Penn State University College of Agricultural Sciences.

“Every child is an artist; the problem is staying an artist when you grow up.”

—Pablo Picasso

Good nutrition is vital for your child’s future academic success



What children eat affects how they think and feel. And according to research, children who eat a well-balanced diet are likely

to reap academic benefits. Healthy nutrition promotes:

- **Concentration.** When kids are well-nourished, they’re more alert and better able to focus.
- **Memory.** If kids skip a meal they may have trouble remembering what they’ve learned.
- **Achievement.** Children with poor diets are more likely than their peers to repeat a grade. They also tend to score lower in math and on standardized tests.
- **Better behavior.** Undernourished kids have higher rates of suspension

from school than their better-fed peers. They’re also more prone to arguing or fighting with classmates.

Helping your child establish healthy eating habits now will pay off in school later. Studies show that kids are more likely to eat healthy foods if families:

- **Offer options.** Let your child pick between two snacks (like apples and peaches, or carrots and celery).
- **Make it fun.** Arrange cut-up fruits into a smiley face or rainbow.
- **Prepare foods together.** Invite your child into the kitchen to help you cook. When children are involved in the process of making healthy meals, they are more excited about eating them!

Source: Kansas State University, “Winning the war: How to persuade children to eat more veggies,” ScienceDaily.

Are you helping your child learn from mistakes?



Mistakes are a part of learning, and learning to handle them will help your child overcome challenges in school.

Are you raising your child to have a positive attitude about mistakes? Answer *yes* or *no* to find out:

- ___ **1. Do you set** realistic expectations for your preschooler? That way, you avoid correcting behavior so much that your child gets discouraged.
- ___ **2. Do you talk** to your child about your expectations?
- ___ **3. Do you ask** if your preschooler needs help when you see signs of frustration after repeated tries?
- ___ **4. Do you let** your child know that everyone makes mistakes?
- ___ **5. Do you tell** your child that mistakes give people a chance to correct themselves and get it right the next time? For example, if your child spills milk, say, “Don’t worry. Next time, try pouring it slowly and then it won’t spill.”

How well are you doing?

Each *yes* answer means you are teaching your preschooler to think positively about mistakes. For each *no* answer, try that idea.

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Props can enhance your child's imagination and pretend play



When children engage in pretend play, they develop skills that they will use throughout their school years.

Imaginative play boosts creativity, communication and concentration.

Encourage and guide your child's pretend play by adding props. Try:

- **Menus.** Pretend you're visiting a restaurant. Create menus or use an old take-out menu from a restaurant. Take turns pretending to be the customer and the server.
- **Books.** Imagine you're going to the library to find books. What would your child like to read? Set out books you have at home. Then, take turns "checking them out."
- **Signs.** Create a "construction zone." What signs would you see? With your child, make signs that say *stop*, *go*, *slow* and more. Then let your child direct traffic.
- **Phones.** Make a pretend phone call to your child and ask questions. Discuss the importance of speaking loudly and clearly when talking on the phone.
- **Stuffed animals.** Line up a few stuffed animals and pretend you are in a classroom. Take turns being the teacher and a student.
- **Pots, pans and a wooden spoon.** Your child can pretend to host a cooking show and explain the steps to take to make something.
- **Dress-up clothes.** Gather some hats, sunglasses, shoes and coats. Ask your child to dress up as someone and then give hints about the character being portrayed.

Demonstrate the importance of careful and respectful listening



Families often focus on helping children learn to speak. But children must also learn how to listen. To be successful

in school, they must pay attention to what the teacher says, then act on what they hear. You can help your child develop listening skills in several ways.

First, be a good role model. Set an example by giving your full attention when your child is speaking. Make eye contact. Smile and nod. Restate what your child says to show that you've heard and understand.

Next, discuss the importance of listening respectfully. Your child shouldn't make sounds or jump around while listening. Also, explain why it's not acceptable to talk while others are talking.

Here are a few more ways to boost listening skills:

- **Speak in a voice** that helps your child listen. Don't speak too fast or too loud.
- **Give your child multi-step instructions.** "Please go to your room, get your shoes, bring them here and let me help you tie them."
- **Combine words and actions.** Talk about what you're doing as you do it.
- **Listen to audiobooks.**
- **Attend storytime online.** Check out storylineonline.net/library.
- **Begin to tell longer** and longer stories once your child shows an interest.
- **Play listening games.** Together, go outside and close your eyes. What sounds does your child hear?

Q: My four-year-old has suddenly become anxious about going to preschool and doesn't want to go back. I'm confused because my child was so excited about it after starting in the fall. What could be going on and how can I help my preschooler adjust?

Questions & Answers

A: Many children have a difficult time adjusting to the routines and expectations of preschool. However, with your support, this should just be temporary.

Here are some strategies that will help your preschooler adapt:

- **Remove the drama.** Beginning preschool is a milestone. But making it seem like a big deal can make an anxious child even more so. Instead, talk about the fun activities, new friends and interesting things your child will learn there.
- **Encourage your child to talk.** Sometimes there is just one aspect of preschool that a child fixates on and becomes anxious about. Ask specifically what is bothering your child. You may be able to ease anxiety with an explanation.
- **Control your own emotions.** Many parents are teary-eyed when their "baby" goes off to preschool. If this describes you, do your best to hide the tears. Put on a brave smile and your child just might, too!
- **Work with the teachers.** Preschool teachers are experienced in helping children adjust to preschool. Share your concerns with the teacher and ask for additional advice if needed.
- **Read books** together about starting school and share your own positive experiences to build your child's enthusiasm.

The Kindergarten Experience

Instill a sense of responsibility in your child



Now that your child is in kindergarten, it's time to demonstrate how to be a responsible student.

Perhaps you already give your child responsibilities around the house. Experts agree that children develop responsibility when they see that their work contributes to the good of the household. This concept also applies to school.

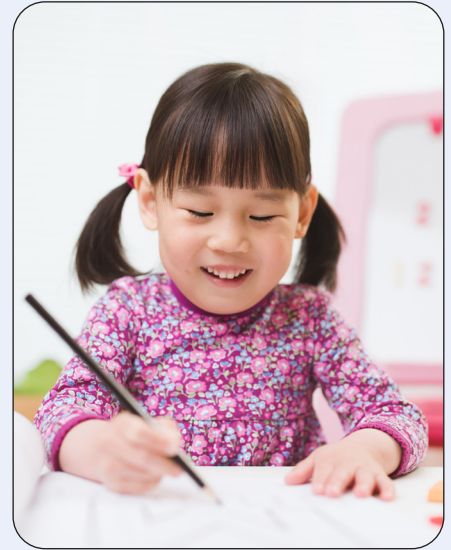
Assign meaningful tasks to help your child feel a sense of responsibility for school matters. You could:

- **Make a large wall calendar.** Help your child mark certain days to track responsibilities. *Return library books on Wednesday. Wear sneakers on Friday for gym class.*
- **Place a box in your child's room** for school items. Your child can put finished schoolwork there—and anything else needed for school. Have your child check the box when packing school bags.
- **Give your child an alarm clock.** Together, set it for a time that will allow your child enough time to get ready and have breakfast. Choose outfits the night before.
- **Help your child set a goal** for school at the beginning of each week. Write it down. Review it together at the end of the week. If your child doesn't reach the goal, create a plan for improvement.
- **Create a contract** that outlines both of your responsibilities. For example, your child agrees to practice reading *before* playing. You agree to read books aloud every day.

Reviewing assignments gives families a window into learning

When kindergartners bring home schoolwork, it's a wonderful opportunity for families to learn more about what their children are learning and how they are doing in school. Reviewing your child's work is also a chance to:

- **Stay involved** with your child's learning. Discuss what kind of work your child is doing. Look for ways to apply new skills to real life. For example, "If I give you one of my cookies, how many will you have?"
- **Monitor progress.** Families are often the first to raise concerns about their child's learning. This is extremely helpful to the teacher. "It appears that Max is having trouble identifying shapes. How can I help my child develop this skill?"
- **Build a learning routine.** Establishing habits for discussing



schoolwork now can foster a positive attitude towards learning that will benefit your child in the years to come. Knowing that you take learning seriously, will motivate your child to give best effort.

Follow these steps if your child gets into trouble in school



Receiving a phone call from a teacher to say your child is misbehaving is never pleasant. But if you take quick action, you can

almost always nip the problem in the bud. Take these steps:

1. **Listen to the teacher.** Teachers don't like calling families to report a problem with a student. So if the teacher is calling you, something is going on that is stopping your kindergartner from learning. Listen patiently.
2. **Work with the teacher.** It's likely the teacher has seen a similar problem before. Ask questions, like, "What do you recommend? What can I do at home to help?" Form a plan as partners.
3. **Talk with your child.** Say that you and the teacher are a team and you both want to help your child. Review school rules together. Explain that following rules is not always easy, but it is something that everyone must do so school can be a happy place to learn.