

Helping Children Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

Delta Head Start / Early Head Start



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Four steps help make your child ready for responsibility

It takes time for a preschooler to learn a new task or responsibility well enough to perform it consistently. And it usually involves a parent or teacher taking the child through a series of steps and repeating them over and over. But it's worth the effort. Children who are able to manage responsibilities are more likely to have success in school and beyond. Try this four-step method to prepare your child:



- 1. Practice.** You want your child to learn when and how to give the dog some water. The first few times, do everything together. The next few times, let her try it while you watch. Only then will she be ready to do it on her own.
- 2. Encourage.** Once your child performs a new responsibility, or makes a good effort toward doing so, she needs some feedback from you. Encourage her efforts with phrases such as "Wow, you're really getting there!" and "That is so helpful!"
- 3. Remind.** Expecting a young child to remember new responsibilities will only lead to frustration. Remind your child when she forgets. Use a gentle tone and as few words as possible. For example, say, "water dish."
- 4. Connect.** Help your child make the connection between her actions, the consequences and the future. "See how happy Spot is? It's because you gave him plenty to drink. If we want him to stay happy, you will need to fill his water dish every day."

Source: "Building Responsibility," University of Arizona Cooperative Extension, niscw.com/perc.



Develop the social skills that make preschool learning smooth

Your child's ability to get along with teachers and other students influences his learning—and his feelings about preschool. Teachers say some of the most critical social skills you and your child can practice at home are:

- **Recognizing authority.** Talk about rules and consequences.
- **Sharing.** Teach your child to be generous. Compliment his efforts.
- **Helping.** Expect your child to pitch in with age-appropriate tasks, such as setting the table.
- **Using names.** Role-play situations such as introductions. "Hi, I'm Jake. What's your name?"
- **Controlling emotions.** Help your child use polite words.
- **Working independently.** Offer your child problems he can work on solving himself. "How do you think you could make that tower stronger?"

Source: "80 Skills That Ease Kids' Transition Into Kindergarten," Thoughts from a Kindergarten Teacher—Now a First Grade Teacher, niscw.com/preschool-social.

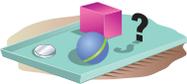
Daily reading boosts success

In a study of almost 5,000 preschool-age kids, those whose parents frequently read with them did better on school tests years later. Experts say it helps to:

- **Read every day.** Let your child chime in with questions and familiar words.
- **Surround your child** with words. Keep interesting reading materials handy.

Sharpen your child's senses

Preschoolers use all their senses to learn and thrive in class. To improve sensory skills:

- **Play a memory game.** Put some items on a tray. Let your child look at it for a minute, then see how many items he can remember. 
- **Give your child manipulatives—** materials he can touch and learn from.
- **Listen to night sounds.** Pretend you and your child are animals on the prowl. What do you hear?
- **Serve new foods.** Can your child describe their smells and tastes?

Source: L. McMurtry, "Teaching Children about the Five Senses," University of Illinois Extension, niscw.com/sense.

Inspire a love of learning

Instilling a positive attitude about school in your child now, while she's still in preschool, will help motivate her throughout her academic career. Try to:

- **Show excitement** about what your child is learning.
- **Avoid criticizing** the school or the teacher in front of your child. Contact the teacher directly.
- **Celebrate success.** Mastery of a tricky new skill may be a good cause for an unexpected treat. 

Source: M.K. Dutton, "How to motivate kids to succeed in school," Columbus Parent, niscw.com/preschool-attitude.



What language skills should my four-year-old have?

Q: My four-year-old son is not as talkative as his sister was at the same age. A friend of mine says that's normal and that it's not fair to compare boys' and girls' language at this age. Are there language skills that are "typical" by four?

A: Every child is different, and that includes their language skills. There are, however, some language milestones and skills to be aware of.

Most four-year-olds:

- **Enjoy talking and asking questions.** Some have a hard time stopping!
- **Use language in multiple ways.** For example, they like to sing and recite nursery rhymes in addition to normal speech.
- **Are usually understood** by people outside their own families. That doesn't mean their grammar and usage are perfect, however.
- **Are beginning to use tenses.** For example, "I jumped up high." Or, "I'm going to Grandma's house."
- **Provide some basic information** when asked, such as their first and last names or the name of a favorite friend.
- **Use some prepositions.** For example, "My kitty is *under* the table."



If your son is doing all of the above, his language skills are likely just fine. But it never hurts to ask an expert. Your son's preschool teacher or his doctor can tell you if his language development is appropriate for his age.



Can your child communicate effectively?

Your child's ability to communicate well is critical to her success in school. Good students need to ask questions and contribute to and learn from discussions. Are you building your child's conversation skills? Answer *yes* or *no*:

- ___ **1. Do you ask** your child questions that lead to interesting discussions? "What do you think that truck is doing?"
- ___ **2. Do you encourage** good speaking manners, such as saying "Excuse me"?
- ___ **3. Do you model** paying close attention and asking questions when you're confused?
- ___ **4. Do you ignore** distractions such as text messages and TV shows when you are talking with your child?
- ___ **5. Do you make** it a point to talk to your child about things that you see, read and do?

How well are you doing?

Each *yes* answer means you're teaching communication skills. For each *no*, try that idea from the quiz.

"Live so that when your children think of fairness, caring and integrity, they think of you."

—H. Jackson Brown, Jr.

Button up fine motor skills

A lot of preschool activities focus on using the small muscles of the fingers and hands. These fine motor skills are essential for writing, cutting, drawing and many other school tasks. To build your child's fine motor skills, encourage him to:

• Help in the kitchen.

Let him put out plates and forks. Teach him to fold a paper napkin in half and put the fork on top of it.



- **Get dressed.** If your child is nearly in kindergarten, he should dress himself. At least once a week, have him wear a shirt he has to button.

Source: "Building Fine Motor Skills," National Association for the Education of Young Children, nise.com/fine-motor.

Choices encourage thinking

You don't have to travel far away to expand your child's world. You just have to expose her to new ideas and skills. Start by offering her some choices, such as which of two shirts she prefers to wear.

There's a catch: Your child needs to tell you *why* she made that choice. ("I think red is prettier than green.") Even simple choices exercise reasoning and deciding skills.

Have fun learning at home

When you reinforce what your child learns in preschool, you make it easier for him to succeed as a student. Here are some fun learning activities to try at home:

- **Discuss different countries.** Where would your family like to go? Talk about the country's climate and culture. Find it on a map. Plan an imaginary trip, including meals and family activities.
- **Play matching games.** Have your child match or sort similar things. "Can you put all the black socks in one pile?" "Group the square blocks together."

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