

Helping Children Learn[®]

EARLY CHILDHOOD

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

Onalaska Elementary School



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Your child benefits when you take an active role in screen time

Doctors and educators agree that parents should manage children's screen time. Setting appropriate limits is important (no more than one hour a day for preschoolers). But so is your participation when your child *does* use screen media. Research shows that children whose parents take part in their screen time get more out of it.



To make sure your child's screen use is positive:

- **Don't use screens as a babysitter.** Resist the urge to leave the room and do other things the moment your child is occupied with a device.
- **Choose quality programs and games.** Since you know your child will be paying close attention, pick something age appropriate that she can learn from.
- **Interact with your child.** You may not enjoy your child's favorite show or game as much as she does, but participate and talk with her about what you see. Your conversations will improve her language skills more than the content on the screen will.
- **Make the most of screen-free time.** Your child needs plenty of active play, reading and face-to-face time with you every day.

Source: "Children and Media Tips from the American Academy of Pediatrics," American Academy of Pediatrics, nswc.com/screentips.



Promote cooperation at the playground

Swinging side-by-side with another child on the playground is fun for kids. It may also be a lesson in cooperation. Research shows that when preschoolers swing in rhythm together, the kids are more likely to play cooperatively.

It may be because when children are "in sync" they feel more like they are part of a team. The joint motion can give them a sense of bonding and increase their desire to share.

To help your child feel the spirit of cooperation with his friends, encourage:

- **Tandem play.** The seesaw is another great place for kids to work together in rhythm.

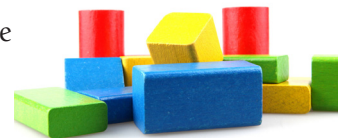
- **Musical activities.** When your child and a friend sing or move to music together, they are also playing in tandem.
- **Clapping games.** Games like patty-cake don't work if kids clap out of step, but when they move together they can finish the rhyme successfully.

Source: K. Eckart, "More than recess: How playing on the swings helps kids learn to cooperate," UW Today, nswc.com/ec_swings.

Don't make a bad deal

Making a deal with your child—"If you pick up your blocks, I'll give you a lollipop"—may get her room tidied but it won't motivate her to do as you ask in the future. Instead, change the *if* to *when* to create an expectation.

"When you have picked up your toys, we will have a snack."



Aim for a balanced day

Safety concerns and changing lifestyles mean that for many children, unstructured time has been replaced with organized activities. While these activities have many benefits, they shouldn't fill your preschooler's day. He also needs time for:

- **Family.** Hanging out with family helps your child feel loved and secure.
- **Self-directed play.** This develops your preschooler's problem-solving skills and his sense of independence.
- **Recharging.** Constantly going from place to place can be stressful for young children.

Source: J.E. Barker and others, "Less-structured time in children's daily lives predicts self-directed executive functioning," *Frontiers in Psychology*, nswc.com/ec_structure.

Treat belongings with care

Responsibility is critical for school success. One way that your child will be expected to show it is by treating property—her own and others'—with respect. Help her learn to:

- **Use items correctly.** Balls are for bouncing outdoors, not in the living room.
- **Organize.** Give your child a bin and have her put the papers she brings home from preschool into it each day.
- **Take extra care** with things that belong to others and return them promptly.





Should I be worried that my child isn't writing yet?

Q: I've noticed that some of the girls in my child's pre-K class are already writing their names. My son hasn't even mastered stick-figures, let alone letters. He's supposed to go to kindergarten in less than a year—what can I do to help him?



A: You don't need to worry about formally teaching your child to write letters yet. But you can help him develop an interest. To start:

- **Encourage your child to draw** every day and show you his pictures. Don't ask "What is it?" Instead, say "Tell me about your drawing."
- **Write captions** under his drawings using his words. Read them to him. If he seems enthusiastic and wants to do this often:
- **Post a chart of the alphabet** where he can see it. Explain that these are the letters people use to write words.
- **Show him how to print** the first letter of his name. Tell him he can put it on all his pictures.

If your son shows continued interest, suggest that he write on his pictures. He'll probably scribble, and that's OK! Have him "read" his writing to you.



Are you making patience a priority?

Preschoolers are famous for wanting everything now. But in school your child will need to know how to be patient. She can learn by watching you. Are you demonstrating the importance of patience? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

- ___ **1. Do you avoid** pushing your child to hurry? Use schedules and routines to avoid this.
- ___ **2. Do you stay** relaxed when you have to wait? Show your child how you wait your turn politely.
- ___ **3. Do you give** your child time to master new skills, such as writing her letters or buttoning her shirt?
- ___ **4. Do you react** calmly when your child is upset? Set an example of how you want her to act in difficult situations.

- ___ **5. Do you forgive** yourself and others? Show your child that learning from mistakes makes people smarter.

How well are you doing?

More *yes* answers mean you are modeling patience. For each *no*, try that idea.

"So much of all this, so much of all living was patience and thinking."
—Gary Paulsen

Praise is good discipline

One of the most effective ways to motivate kids to behave well is to praise their positive behavior. What kinds of praise work best? Parenting expert Alan Kazdin says that effective praise is:

- **Earned.** Use praise only when it's genuine and meaningful.
- **Upbeat.** Let your child hear excitement in your voice.
- **Specific.** Say exactly what he did right.
- **Instant.** Offer praise as soon as you are aware of your child's good behavior.
- **Frequent.** Praise more than you criticize.


Source: A. Kazdin, Ph.D., *The Kazdin Method for Parenting the Defiant Child*, Houghton Mifflin Company.

Encourage your child to participate in reading

To build your child's pre-reading skills, set aside at least 15 minutes every day to read together. As you read, let her "help." When you come to a familiar word, suggest that she fill it in. For example, "Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What do you ___?" This boosts your child's reading confidence.

Add some math to the day

Many parents feel more comfortable helping their children learn language skills than math skills. There's no need to worry! You are an expert at lots of activities that will teach your preschooler math concepts. Try these together:

- **Measure things.** Weigh yourselves, follow a recipe or check your heights. 
- **Ask number questions.** "How many people are here for dinner? How many plates will we need?"
- **Sing songs** about numbers. "This old man, he played one ..."

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