

# Helping Children Learn<sup>®</sup>

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

Onalaska ISD



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## Building respect in the preschool years has long-term benefits

Over time, children learn to show respect for others not just because they are told to, but because they understand how being respected feels. They realize that it feels good to be asked politely, thanked and treated fairly. Experiencing this at home is a key way children learn. Here are some other ways to foster respectful behavior:

- **Talk about feelings.** Help your preschooler learn to identify and name emotions. Discuss positive ways to respond to them. These positive social skills will make it easier for your child to get along with classmates and teachers.
- **Encourage empathy.** You might say, "That little boy is crying. Why do you think he's upset?" Or "Grandma is frowning. What makes you frown? How do you think Grandma is feeling?" You can also talk with your child about how characters in books and TV shows might be feeling. These conversations give your preschooler opportunities to be understanding.
- **Set a positive example.** Let your child see that you treat people with respect and consider their feelings. Use a warm tone when talking about emotions, both your child's and other people's. Studies suggest this increases children's willingness to cooperate.



Source: N. Yuill and others, "The Relation Between Parenting, Children's Social Understanding and Language," Economic and Social Research Council.



## Naps support learning and literacy

Many children stop taking daytime naps when they reach preschool age. However, to be alert for learning, kids this age need 11-13 hours of sleep each day—and they may not get it all at night.

What's more, napping supports literacy development. According to a recent study, young children who took naps after learning about the sounds letters make were better able to retain and apply the information later. To keep your child napping:

- **Stick to a regular schedule.** Have your child wake up around the same time each morning and go to bed at the same time each night. Assign a regular time for

naps, as well. Consistent sleeping habits aid better rest.

- **Create soothing surroundings.** Turn off lights, and noisy devices and minimize other distractions.
- **Limit caffeine.** Coffee isn't the only source of this stimulant. Soda, iced tea and chocolate may all contain this sleep-stealer.

Source: "Study: Naptime May Bolster Early Literacy Skills Among Preschoolers," Society for Research in Child Development.

## Play listening games

Listening is serious business in school, but you can help your child strengthen listening skills by playing games. Try:

- **Classic games** such as Simon Says or Red Light, Green Light, that involve listening carefully for directions.
- **Musical games** that involve adding actions to songs, such as Hokey Pokey or B-I-N-G-O.
- **Guessing games.** For example, replace the words to favorite songs with "la" and take turns guessing what the song is.



## Use smart ways to praise

Your child has learned something new, and you are proud. But saying something like "You're so smart," can backfire. Research shows that when children are frequently praised for being smart, they feel pressured to prove it—and may turn to cheating. Instead, focus on effort. Praise your child's actions: "You paid attention and did a careful job. I'm proud of you!"



Source: L. Zhao and others, "Praising Young Children for Being Smart Promotes Cheating," *Psychological Science*.

## Fend off peer pressure

Even preschoolers face peer pressure. In one study, a majority of four-year-olds were influenced by one another's actions—even when they didn't agree with them. To help your child resist negative peer pressure:

- **Discuss social situations.** Role-play solutions using dolls or stuffed animals.
- **Encourage asking** for help. "If you're not sure what to do, ask the teacher."
- **Be a role model.** If others are doing wrong, do the right thing, and mention it.

Source: D. Haun and M. Tomasello, "Conformity to peer pressure in preschool children," *Child Development*.



## How can I help increase my child's attention span?

**Q:** I know that kindergarten involves more sitting still and focusing on learning than my child does now. What should I be doing to make sure my child is ready?

**A:** Kindergarten does involve more seat work than preschool. But teachers know that five-year-olds need to be active. Your child will be expected to pay attention for 15 to 20 minutes at a time.

To help lengthen concentration time:

- **Read together.** Give characters funny voices to keep your preschooler's interest. Ask questions about the story, and encourage your child to ask questions, too. Engaging with the story extends focus time.
- **Encourage your child to play** with one toy at a time. Choose playthings such as blocks, puppets and art supplies that let your child be endlessly creative.
- **Ask your child to return to activities.** "After you have had your snack, you can finish coloring your picture."
- **Play board games.** Look for age-appropriate games with simple rules.
- **Follow routines.** Knowing what to expect provides young children with a sense of order and helps them settle down to the task at hand.



## Are you creating a learning environment?

Young children want to understand the world around them. By providing conditions that encourage learning, you can help your child along the way. Are you stimulating learning? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

1. **Do you answer** questions patiently and encourage your child to ask more?
2. **Do you ask** your child to help you solve problems? "How could we find out where the store is?"
3. **Do you encourage** your child to use different senses (sight, hearing, taste, touch and smell) to learn?
4. **Do you help** your child concentrate by removing distractions?
5. **Do you give** your child opportunities to learn from new experiences, such as visits to museums or nature trails?

### How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are helping your child acquire knowledge. For each no, try that idea.

"Our children are only as brilliant as we allow them to be."

—Eric Micha'el Leventhal

## Make valentine puppets that are full of love

Creativity, caring and fine motor skills are all part of the mix when you make valentine crafts with your child. Here's a puppet project to try together:



1. **Cut two heart shapes** from an old cardboard cereal box.
2. **Let your child use** crayons, glitter and glue, or paint to put faces on the hearts, then decorate them by gluing on beads, sequins, or scraps of fabric or ribbon.
3. **Help your child** glue each heart to the end of a craft stick to make a puppet, then put on a Valentine's Day show together!

## Build math skills with blocks

Blocks are great toys for helping your preschooler lay a strong math foundation. Use them to help your child practice:

- **Pattern making.** Stack a square block, a rectangular block and then another square block. Ask your child to guess what comes next, then copy the pattern.
- **Shape recognition.** Ask questions like, "Is this block a square or a triangle?" "What shape do we make if we put these two triangles together like this?"

## Ask your child's opinion

Giving young children frequent chances to express opinions encourages them to think—and makes them feel valued. Ask your preschooler questions like:

- *Should we have salad or green beans with our dinner tonight?*
- *What do you think was the most interesting place we have ever gone together?*
- *What do you think is the best video for kids? What makes it so great?*

Source: K. DeBord, Ph.D., "Self-Esteem in Children," North Carolina Cooperative Extension.

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