

Early Childhood Parents[®]

January 2011
Vol. 15, No. 5

Katy Independent School District

make the difference!



Five ways to spend more time with your child in 2011

What your child wants most from you is for you to spend time with him. No matter how much time you spend with your child now, consider making a new year's resolution to spend even more. Here are five great ways to get started:

1. **Focus on *quantity*** as well as quality. Thirty minutes of playing on the floor with your child is wonderful. But taking him on your Saturday afternoon errands and talking with him the whole time is even better. (Make sure he is well-rested and fed!)
2. **Eat meals together as a family.** Research shows that more family bonding happens around the table than anywhere else.
3. **Involve your child in family life.** Let your child help you prepare

meals. Ask him to do simple chores, such as dusting. He can also work outdoors and pick up sticks from your yard or sidewalk.

4. **Exercise together.** Move with your child daily. Walk, bike, skate—even climbing stairs counts.
5. **Engage in your child's interests.** If, like many young children, he is on a sports team, think about coaching. Try to attend all of his games. If he likes dinosaurs, check out a book about dinosaurs from the library and read it together. Watch his favorite television show with him and then ask him to tell you why he likes it.

Source: T. Lee, "How to Spend Quality Time with Your Child," College of Education and Human Services, Utah State University, www.coe.usu.edu/news/archives/child_qualitytime.php.

Learn about birds with a bagel project



Preschoolers wonder so many things about birds. How do they fly? What do they eat? How do they sound?

In honor of National Bird Day on January 5, make a simple bird feeder at home with your child. Observe birds that visit. Talk about what you see. You'll need:

- String.
- Half of a stale bagel.
- Peanut butter.
- Shortening.
- Bird seed.

Tie one end of the string through the bagel hole. Then mix one teaspoon each of peanut butter and shortening. Spread the mixture onto the bagel. Press the coated side of the bagel into bird seed. Hang the feeder outside and watch who enjoys it!

Note that some bird seeds are designed to attract certain birds. Keep a bird guide handy to help you and your child identify the birds you see. You can use binoculars or a camera to get a better look.

Source: S. Osborn, "Bagel Bird Feeder," About.com, <http://familycrafts.about.com/od/birdfeeders/a/bagelbirdfeeder.htm>.

Preschool is the perfect time for your child to practice manners



If your preschooler lacks manners, take heart. Kids this age are naturally self-centered. Thankfully, they also want to please parents. So it's a great time to teach your child to:

- **Be nice.** Kids need to share, take turns and include others in play. To build these skills, be understanding and encouraging. "It's hard to take turns on the swing. But I'm so proud of you for doing it!" Also point out examples to follow. "Peyton and Madelyn are sharing dolls. They're having fun!"
- **Use polite words.** Saying *please* and *thank you* are more than polite—they're effective! People respond well to them. Show this to your child by using the words yourself and complimenting your child for using them. And react quickly. (Child: "May I please have another glass of milk?" Mom:

"Absolutely! Coming right up!" Child: "Thanks!" Mom: "You're welcome!")

- **Greet others.** Many kids hesitate to introduce themselves and answer adults' questions. You can help by practicing at home. Role-play saying *hello* and using a firm handshake. Take turns introducing yourselves so you can be a role model for your child. Use other key phrases, including, "My name is _____" and "Nice to meet you!"

Source: W. Toth, "Manners Matter," Parents.com, www.parents.com/toddlers-preschoolers/development/behavioral/5-ways-to-teach-manners-to-preschoolers.

"Love begins at home, and it is not how much we do, but how much love we put in that action."

—Mother Teresa

Find opportunities to use new, descriptive words with your child



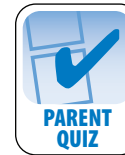
One of the big jobs of early childhood is learning language. In a few years, your child will go from about 2,000 words to 5,000 or more. Here's how to increase your child's vocabulary:

- **Think about what is unfamiliar** to your child as you go about your day. If it's unfamiliar, it's an opportunity for your child to learn a new word. Point out *escarole* in the grocery store, a *convertible* on the highway and a *politician* in the newspaper. Hearing a word several times is the first step to using it.

- **Play "opposite" games** with your child. Start with easy ones, such as "This is not hot. Brr!" Your child will likely say, "It's cold." Continue onto more challenging ones as your child is able. "What is the opposite of *happy*?" Your child will have to think—she could say, *angry*, *sad* or another word.
- **Use different action words.** Tell your child she is *prancing* instead of running. If she asks you what it means, set another example by looking up the word together.

Source: Lillian Alice Noda and others, *Off to a Great Start: Activities for Becoming Your Child's Best Teacher*, ISBN: 0-7802-4207-6, The Wright Group.

Are you building your preschooler's math skills?



It's amazing how quickly preschoolers build math skills with practice. After all, math concepts are everywhere! Answer *yes* or *no* to the following questions to see if you're focusing on math:

- ___ **1. Do you look for shapes** with your child? "The tambourine is a *circle*." "Your crackers are *square*."
- ___ **2. Do you count things together?** Point to blocks and count aloud or count stairs as you climb them.
- ___ **3. Do you talk about numbers?** Find them on signs, clocks, book pages, cereal boxes and elsewhere.
- ___ **4. Do you practice addition and subtraction?** "You have one cookie, and I have one cookie. That makes two cookies!"
- ___ **5. Do you read books about math?** There are plenty to choose from, including *10 Minutes Till Bedtime* by Peggy Rathmann.

How well are you doing?

Each *yes* answer means you're increasing your child's awareness of math. For each *no* answer, try that idea from the quiz.

Early Childhood
Parents
make the difference!

Practical Ideas for Parents to Help Their Children. ISSN: 1523-1267

For subscription information call or write:
The Parent Institute®, 1-800-756-5525,
P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474.
Fax: 1-800-216-3667.

Or visit our website: www.parent-institute.com.
Published monthly September through May by
The Parent Institute®, a division of NIS, Inc., an
independent, private agency. Equal opportunity
employer. Copyright © 2011 NIS, Inc.

Publisher: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.

Editor: Rebecca Miyares.

Writers: Maria Koklanaris & Susan O'Brien.

Illustrator: Joe Mignella.

Teach your child to appreciate music for the joy it can bring



This month, classical music lovers everywhere note the 255th birthday of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. Mozart, born

on January 27, was one of the most gifted composers in history. Some people even think young children gain better reasoning skills after listening to his music, although this idea is not proven by research.

Your child should listen to Mozart and all other kinds of music. Not because of this unproven theory, but because music is one of the greatest joys you can share with your child.

Here are ways to do it:

- **Sing to your child every day.** At night, sing lullabies.
- **Encourage your child to learn through music.** You can use the power of a tune for memory. Often it is easier to remember words sung to music, than just the words alone.
- **Give your child lots of musical experiences.** Sending him to preschool is one way! Music is a big part of preschool curriculum. Look for free music performances in your community, too.

Source: L. Ellis, "5 Ways Music Benefits Kids," Quality Health, www.qualityhealth.com/childrens-health-and-parenting-articles/5-ways-music-benefits-kids.

Celebrate National Puzzle Day by doing puzzles with your child



Many toys claim to be "educational" but puzzles are toys that truly fit the bill. Puzzles help your child sharpen many skills that will help her

in school. Here are some of the skills your child can improve by working puzzles:

- **Recognition of basics** such as colors, shapes, letters and numbers.
- **Working the eyes and hands** together.
- **Perception** of where objects are in space, and where they could fit.
- **Recognition** that a whole is made up of parts.
- **How to solve the pattern** of turning parts into a whole.
- **How to use visual clues**, such as parts of a picture, to form another part of a picture.
- **How to sort** similar objects.
- **How to classify objects**, like finding the straight-edge pieces first.

- **How to come back to work in progress.** And this is just a start! If you and your child are new to working puzzles, consider these guidelines:
- **Your child needs basic** fine motor skills to do puzzles. She must be able to pick up the piece and fit it into the space.
- **A child's early puzzles** should be made of just a few pieces (eight or fewer) and the pieces should be large. It's better to start a child with a puzzle that is too easy, rather than too difficult.
- **As your child develops**, find more challenging puzzles. They should be challenging enough that she needs to think about how best to assemble them. They should not be so challenging that she gets frustrated and upset.

Source: L. Ackert, "Educational benefits of puzzles," The Examiner, www.kindergarten-lessons.com/educational_benefits_of_puzzles.html.

Q: Next week, my son's preschool will be holding "Kindergarten Readiness Night." Then, in February, the school would like pre-K parents to tell them whether their children will return for another year of preschool or move on to kindergarten. How do I know if my son is ready?

Questions & Answers

A: It's always a little confusing and nerve-wracking when you send your first child to kindergarten. For example, many parents think that if their child can't read yet, they should keep him back.

That's not the case. The teachers at your child's new school will teach him to read and write. What they want is for your child to walk in the door ready to learn. A child who will be successful in kindergarten can:

- **Listen and follow directions.** Kindergarten teachers understand they are dealing with five-year-olds and will not give complicated directions. But when the teacher tells your son it's time to sit down and listen to the story, he needs to do it.
- **Share and take turns.** Your child may be in a classroom of 20 or more children next year. He will need to get along with them. That means sharing materials, toys, books and the attention of adults.
- **Take care of basic needs.** When he arrives, he will be expected to hang up his jacket and put away his backpack. Your child will be expected to use the restroom independently and wash his hands.

We hope these points help you make your decision. Good luck!

—Maria Koklanaris,
The Parent Institute

The Kindergarten Experience

Study links early attention trouble to later struggles



The teacher says your child has trouble paying attention in kindergarten. You've noticed the same thing at home. Should you do anything about it or should you wait to see how first grade goes?

A new study suggests getting help quickly is important. The research tracked kids as they grew from ages six to 17. It compared children with attention problems (such as lack of focus and restlessness) to kids with other challenges (such as anxiety, depression and acting out.)

The study found that:

- **Kids with attention problems** struggled more in school.
- **Attention difficulties** may hurt kids' learning.
- **Trouble in school** may lower motivation and put kids at higher risk for substance abuse and dropping out of school.

Keep in mind that young kids are naturally active. It takes time for their attention spans to grow!

But if your kindergartner has an unusually hard time following directions, sticking with simple activities and staying in control, talk more with the teacher. Discuss how you, the school and others, if needed, can work together toward your child's current—and future—success.

Source: P. West, "Attention Problems in Kindergarten Could Spell Long-Term Trouble," U.S. News and World Report, <http://health.usnews.com/health-news/family-health/brain-and-behavior/articles/2009/05/26/attention-problems-in-kindergarten-could-spell.html>.

Connecting letters & sounds is the foundation of reading

In kindergarten, your child works hard to learn the letters and the sounds each letter makes. By the end of the year, she will be using beginning consonant sounds and sound patterns to read words. For example: M (*mmm* sound) plus the sound pattern *an* turns into the word *man*.

To reinforce this skill at home:

- **Make sound patterns fun** through rhyming. Read books of silly poems with your child.
- **Help her find the sounds** in her own name. "We're having rice, Rachel. Did you know that the word *rice* and your name both make the *rrrr* sound? They both start with the letter R, too."
- **Use learning styles.** Many young children learn best by doing.



So add in some action by forming clay letters and saying their sounds as you do so. Or put some pudding on a plate, and let your child trace letters in it with her clean fingers.

Source: "Reading Tips for Parents of Kindergartners," Reading Rockets, www.readingrockets.org/article/7834.

Help your kindergartner return to school with helpful routines



Returning to kindergarten after winter vacation is an adjustment, no matter how you tried to maintain a normal schedule. Maybe your child stayed up late, slept in, watched extra TV, or ate meals at different times. Or maybe all of the above!

To shift back into school mode:

- **Get back to a regular bedtime.** "Lights out" should happen at the same time every night. Follow a routine before bedtime. Have your child put school supplies by the front door, brush his teeth, put on pajamas and read.

You might also let him choose from two outfits to wear the next day.

- **Tame morning "rush hour."** Wake your child at a regular time with a few minutes to spare. If he's easily distracted, post a checklist for him to follow. Provide a nutritious breakfast that energizes him for the day.
- **Make homework a priority.** Kindergarten homework should be short and fun. Choose the best time and place for your child to work, and stick to it every day. Stay nearby to supervise and answer questions.