

Early Childhood Parents®

September 2010
Vol. 15, No. 1

Katy Independent School District

make the difference!



Make the most of 'on-the-go' time with your preschooler

Home may be where the heart is, but in reality it may not be where you and your child spend time during the day. You're often on the go, trying to get to work, school or daycare. You are running errands and going to appointments. This means spending time with your child in the car, bus, subway or on foot.

Days like these can be hectic, but you can also make them meaningful and fun if you:

- **Make up a story together.** Tell your child part of a story. "Once upon a time, a little boy and his mom went for a walk." Then ask your child, "Where were they going?" or "What did they see?"
- **Tell your child a real-life story** about his first year of life. Young children often love to hear about when they were babies.

- **Look for colors and shapes.** Ask your child to point out a blue car or a sign shaped like a square. If you approach a traffic light, have him tell you what color it is. If it's red, ask him to tell you when it turns green.
- **Sing!** Sing along with the radio. Or just sing a song you know your child likes.
- **Play "Which will come first?"** Ask your child which you'll see first: a black car or a white car; someone pushing a baby in a stroller or a someone walking a dog.
- **Remind your child** that you enjoy his company and let him know you're glad he's with you.

Source: Carol Baicker-McKee, *Fussbusters on the Go: Strategies and Games for Stress-Free Outings, Errands and Vacations With Your Preschooler*, ISBN: 1-56145-263-7, Peachtree Publishers.

Playtime builds kids' creativity, thinking skills



One of the best things about childhood is that play and learning are the same thing. Research shows

simple activities, such as pretending a box is a ship, also teach lessons. Play nurtures many skills, including:

- **Problem solving.** Your child might answer questions like, "How can I move the ship from here to there?" "What if I see a whale?" "Where can I get food and water?"
- **Reading.** Have "X" mark the spot on a treasure map. Or list silly rules for sailors to follow. Let your child scribble a "message in a bottle."
- **Math.** What shape is the ship? What shape would make sails? How long might it take to reach shore? Should your child sail north, south, east or west?
- **Cooperation.** Whether your child plays independently or with others, she can practice ways to get along.

Source: "Time for Play, Every Day: It's Fun—and Fundamental," Alliance for Childhood, www.childrennatureandyou.org/play_fact_sheet.pdf.

Are there benefits to reading aloud to your child every day?



“Reading aloud to young children is the single most effective thing parents can do to help prepare their children to succeed in school.” So says the Reach Out and Read National Center. This is a nonprofit group that focuses on reading research. Sadly, the center also says that less than half of children under five are read to daily.

Are you already reading to your child? Great job! Encourage family and friends to do the same. Not in the reading habit? The good news is you can start today. Here are five reasons why you should:

1. **Children who often see books and magazines and who listen to reading aloud have a better chance of learning to read in the primary grades than children who do not.**
2. **Reading aloud builds language and thinking skills.** It encourages children to use their imaginations.

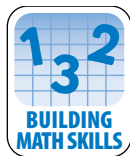
3. **Reading aloud is another way to talk to your child.** When parents talk, children learn language. Then children tend to do better in school.
4. **Reading aloud lets parents and children share affection.** Preschoolers feel positive attention from parents when parents read aloud.
5. **Children almost always hear words in books that they don't hear in everyday language.** So reading aloud to a child is one of the best ways to build vocabulary.

Source: “Importance of Reading Aloud,” Reach Out and Read, www.reachoutandread.org/parents/readingaloud/.

“In every conceivable manner, the family is link to our past, bridge to our future.”

—Alex Haley

Use fun games to teach your preschooler how to estimate



Math is usually precise. But guesswork is important in math, too. In math, guessing is called *estimation*. Here are some ways to practice estimating:

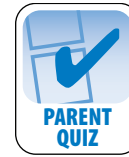
- **Put 10 small toys** (or large marshmallows) into a clear plastic bag. Have your child look at it. Then ask him how many he thinks the bag contains. After his guess, empty the bag and count together. How close did he get?
- **Cut a long piece of string** or yarn. Curl it up and place it in the bag. Ask your child if he thinks it's

longer or shorter than his height measurement. After he answers, take the string out and stretch it out against your child.

- **Put about 20 kernels of unpopped popcorn** in one bag. Then put 20 kernels of popped corn into another bag. Ask your child which bag contains more. Many children will say the popped corn. Count with your child and show that each contains 20, even though one looks bigger.

Source: Grace Davila Coates and Jean Kerr Stenmark, *Family Math for Young Children*, ISBN: 0-912511-27-3, Lawrence Hall of Science, University of California at Berkeley.

Are you teaching your child how to build friendships?



Socializing prepares preschoolers for school, where they'll need to cooperate with others. Answer *yes* or *no* to the

following questions to see if you're encouraging it:

- ___ 1. **Do you take your child to playgrounds and introduce your child and yourself to other families?**
- ___ 2. **Do you visit the library and ask about story hours and other times when kids gather?**
- ___ 3. **Do you invite children over to play?** Plan activities that are likely to be successful (and put away toys that are likely to cause arguments).
- ___ 4. **Do you attend community events for kids**, such as concerts and museum exhibits? These are opportunities for kids to have fun together.
- ___ 5. **Do you help your child practice important skills**, such as sharing, taking turns and saying *please*?

How well are you doing?

Each *yes* answer means you're building your child's confidence in social situations. 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 © 2010 NIS, Inc.

Publisher: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.

Editor: Rebecca Miyares.

Writers: Maria Koklanaris & Susan O'Brien.

Illustrator: Joe Mignella.

Use positive discipline to teach your preschooler how to behave



Research shows that positive discipline—teaching children how to act—works much better than negative discipline—

trying to teach them how *not* to act. Here's why:

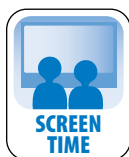
- **Your preschooler** wants to accomplish things, rather than be told to stop. So try saying, “Put your clothes in the hamper,” instead of “Stop throwing clothes on the floor.”
- **Your child may not hear** you say “don’t.” Again, she will focus on being active. So “Don’t touch that!” becomes “Touch that!”
- **Using positive discipline** lets you help your child start a good habit. For example, you can help

her learn how to speak in a pleasant tone of voice when indoors: “Remember to use your inside voice.” This may be easier to do than breaking a bad habit: “Stop screaming!”

- **Positive discipline** lets you praise and encourage behavior. You instruct your child to give her friend a turn and she does. Now you can say something positive: “I loved the way you shared your game with Sydney.” Negative discipline invites criticism. “Stop being so selfish!” Your child will respond better to encouragement every time.

Source: Kerby T. Alvy, *The Positive Parent: Raising Healthy, Happy and Successful Children, Birth-Adolescence*, ISBN: 978-0-8077-4808-4, Teachers College Press.

Develop screen time habits to last your preschooler's lifetime



Experts recommend no TV for kids under two, and limiting screen time (TV, computer and video game use) to no more

than an hour or two a day for older kids.

Following these guidelines is challenging but worthwhile. That's because what kids see on the screen may affect their behavior, health, self-image, reading skills and more.

To protect your child and promote good habits:

- **Consider alternatives.** When your child needs downtime, try reading, drawing, playing games, singing and telling stories.
- **Pick shows ahead of time.** Check TV listings for high-quality shows your child will enjoy. Plan TV time around them.

- **Notice ratings.** Learn the ratings systems for shows, movies and video games. Use them—along with your good judgment—to make the best decisions.
- **Spend screen time** with your child. Stay nearby and help him think critically about what he sees. “Should the girl have done that? Why or why not?”
- **Make mealtime family time.** Turn the TV off during meals (as well as the radio, cell phone, etc.). Enjoy the food—and each other's company!
- **Be a role model.** Limit your TV and computer use. Put family activities first. Save adult shows and websites for when your child isn't there.

Source: “Media Education in the Practice Setting,” American Academy of Pediatrics, www.aap.org/advocacy/mmguide.pdf.

Q: My oldest child is starting kindergarten. I'm very excited for her, but a little worried too because I've never had a child in elementary school before. How can I be sure I'm supporting her in a way that helps her do her best?

Questions & Answers

A: Here are some specific things you can do that years of research have shown to be particularly helpful:

- **Strive for optimum rest,** nutrition and exercise. A kindergarten child usually needs at least 10 hours of sleep each night. So if your child must be up by 7 a.m. to make it to school on time, she should be in bed no later than 8:45 p.m. Three balanced meals, plus two healthy snacks a day, will give your child the fuel she needs to grow and learn. An hour of active play daily helps keep her mind and body sharp, and burns off the excess energy many children this age seem to have!
- **Read to your child every day.** It's hard to overstate how important reading is to your child's education.
- **Have conversations** with your child. Talk with your child about school, her friends, activities she likes, or anything at all. Just talk with her.
- **Tell your child you are proud** of her work in school. Your child should know that her education is important to the whole family.
- **Keep in touch** with your child's teacher. Send the teacher a note to say hello during the first week of school. Include information about the best way to contact you (phone, email or other).

—*Maria Koklanaris,*
The Parent Institute

The Kindergarten Experience

Does attendance really matter in kindergarten?



No one wants to miss the first day of kindergarten! But what about the days after it?

How important is it for kindergartners to arrive consistently—and on time?

According to experts, it's essential! Missing too much school may affect first-grade success, and that's no way to start elementary school.

To prevent unnecessary absences:

- **Prepare at night.** Organize backpacks, choose outfits, make lunches, plan a nutritious breakfast, and put school supplies by the front door. Also stick to a regular bedtime. Preparation will help you and your child get out the door and to school on time.
- **Develop a morning routine.** Wake up at the same time, do the same tasks in the same order (a kid-friendly chart helps), and keep necessities in the same spots. Mornings will run more smoothly, and your child will gain skills and confidence.
- **Plan carefully.** Start by adding the school schedule to your family's calendar. Then plan appointments and vacations for non-school hours and days. If a conflict is unavoidable, let the school know ahead of time.
- **Ask about makeup work.** If your child has to miss school due to illness or another reason, the teacher may want her to complete assignments at home. Sick days are also a good time to squeeze in extra reading!

Your parent involvement promotes kindergarten success

Kindergarten is a new adventure for your child—and you! While she's busy with a new teacher and class, you have countless new ways to help her succeed.

One important way to help your kindergartner get off to a great start is to get involved. Research shows that parent involvement truly helps kids succeed in school. With this in mind, find ways to pitch in:

- **At school.** Volunteering is the best way to get comfortable with students, staff and parents. It also shows your child, "School is a family priority." You might be able to read to the class, be a "room parent," schedule volunteers, shelve library books, decorate, type a class list, raise funds or organize events. The possibilities are endless!
- **At home.** Simple activities also make a big difference, such as helping with homework,



reading and talking positively about school. Meanwhile, keep up with school paperwork and check the school's website regularly. Joining the parent-teacher organization is another way to contribute and stay informed.

Remember: Every minute you spend on parent involvement is an investment in your kindergartner's success!

Teach your kindergartner how to be responsible, organized



At school, your child's teacher is creating an environment for classmates to be responsible for their own things.

Here's how you can do the same at home:

- **Have a set place** for your child's school things. This includes the shoes he wears to school and a jacket when he needs one.
- **Keep everything** at your child's height.

- **Start a routine** for what goes where. For example: jacket on hook, shoes in one box, backpack in the other box.
- **Look through the backpack** together every day. Your child may soon learn to show it to you without being asked.

Source: Carol Baicker-McKee, *Fussbusters at Home: Around-the-Clock Strategies and Games for Smoothing the Rough Spots in Your Preschooler's Day*, ISBN: 1-56145-262-9, Peachtree Publishers.