

# Helping Children Learn®

EARLY CHILDHOOD

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

Hamilton Wentworth Catholic District  
School Board



September 2012

## Commit to making the most of time together this school year

Like many parents, you're likely often on the go, trying to get to work, school, day care or to errands or appointments. This can be hectic, but it can also be precious time with your child in the car, bus, subway or on foot. Here's how you can make your time together meaningful and fun:



- **Make up stories.** You can start with: "Once upon a time, a boy and his mom went for a walk." Then ask your child, "Where were they going?" or "What did they see?"
- **Tell real-life stories.** Children love hearing about when they were babies.
- **Look for colors and shapes.** Ask your child to find a sign shaped like a square or a triangle. As you approach a traffic signal, talk about the colors of the different lights.
- **Sing along with the radio** if you're riding in the car. Or just sing a song you know your child likes so he can chime in.
- **Make predictions.** Ask your child which you'll see first: a black car or a white car, a mom pushing a baby in a stroller or someone walking a dog.
- **Let your child know** how much you enjoy his company.



## Developing responsibility starts early

Preschool and kindergarten teachers work hard to create an environment where all children can be responsible for their own belongings. You can help by doing the same at home. Here are some ways that you can get your child's school year off to a great start:

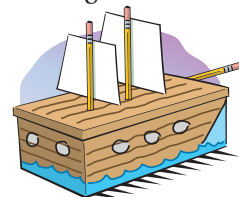
- **Establish a place** for your child's school things. This can include a place for her shoes, her jacket and her backpack.
- **Keep those needed items** at your child's height so she can grab them easily.
- **Create a routine** for what goes where—jacket on the hook, shoes in one box, backpack in another.
- **Provide containers** for her books, pencils and other supplies.
- **Look through** your child's backpack together every day.
- **Repeat the same routine** every school day. After enough practice, your child will learn some responsible habits.

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

## Playtime is learning time

The best thing about childhood is that play and learning are the same thing. Simple activities teach:

- **Problem solving.** How can your child turn a box into a pirate ship?
- **Math.** How many edges do the sails have?
- **Language skills.** Write a "message in a bottle."



Source: "Time for Play, Every Day: It's Fun—and Fundamental," Alliance for Childhood, [www.childrennatureandyou.org/play\\_fact\\_sheet.pdf](http://www.childrennatureandyou.org/play_fact_sheet.pdf).

## Build healthy screen habits

Experts recommend limiting TV, computer and video game use to no more than an hour or two a day. This can be challenging, but worthwhile. What kids see on the screen may affect their behavior, health, reading skills and more. To promote good habits:

- **Pick** shows ahead of time.
- **Notice** ratings.
- **Spend** screen time with your child.
- **Turn** off the TV during meals.

Source: "Media Education in the Practice Setting," American Academy of Pediatrics, [www.aap.org/advocacy/mmguideline.pdf](http://www.aap.org/advocacy/mmguideline.pdf).

## Make guesswork count

Estimation is an important math skill. Here are some ways to practice:

- **Place about 10 small toys** into a clear jar. Ask your child to guess how many there are. How close did he get?
- **Put 20 kernels of unpopped popcorn** into one bag and 20 kernels of popped corn into another bag. Ask which bag contains more. Then count together.



Source: G.D. Coates and J.K. Stenmark, *Family Math for Young Children*, Lawrence Hall of Science.

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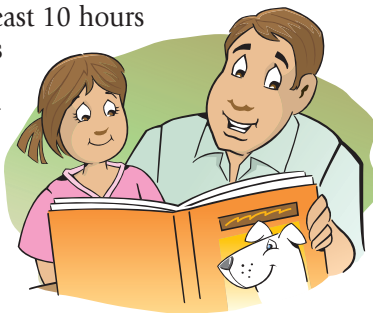


## How can parents support children in kindergarten?

**Q:** My daughter has just started kindergarten. I'm excited for her, but I want to be sure that I'm doing the right things to support her learning. Can you offer some guidance?

**A:** Congratulations! The fact that you're asking the question means that the two most important basics are already in place: You care about your child and you care about her education. Here are some things you may already be doing that decades of research indicate are particularly helpful:

- **Make sure your child** gets plenty of rest, nutrition and exercise every day. A kindergartner needs at least 10 hours of sleep each night. Three balanced meals and two healthy snacks a day give your child the fuel she needs. Daily active play will keep her mind and body sharp—and burn off excess energy!
- **Read to your child** every day. It's hard to overstate how important reading is to your child's education.
- **Have conversations about school,** friends and activities she likes. Show pride in her work. Be sure she knows that her education is important to the whole family.
- **Keep in touch** with your child's teacher throughout the year. You will be working with her throughout the year to ensure your child's success!



## Are you building first friendships?

Socializing prepares children for school, where they'll need to cooperate with others. Answer *yes* or *no* to the following questions to see if you are encouraging positive socialization skills.

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you take** your child to playgrounds? Be a role model by introducing your child and yourself to other families.
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you visit** the children's section at the library? 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 or museum exhibits? These are opportunities for kids to have fun together.

- \_\_\_ **5. Do you help** your child practice important social 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.*

*"A family needs to work as a team, supporting each other's individual aims and aspirations."*

—Buzz Aldrin

## Reading aloud can be a habit for the whole family

Research shows that children who are read to have a better chance of learning to read in the primary grades than children who are not. Here are some skills that children gain from being read to:

- **Imagination.** Reading aloud builds creativity and thinking skills.
- **Communication.** Reading aloud enables you to talk with your child.
- **Language.** Reading aloud to a child helps build vocabulary.

Source: Reach Out and Read, "Importance of Reading Aloud," Reach Out and Read National Center, [www.reachoutandread.org/parents/readingaloud/](http://www.reachoutandread.org/parents/readingaloud/).

## Attendance really does matter in kindergarten!

The first day of kindergarten is exciting! But what about after that? How important is it not to miss any school? It's only kindergarten, after all. According to experts, it's essential. Important skills are taught every day, and those skills are the building blocks for all future learning.



## Make discipline positive

Research shows that focusing on what your child *should do* is more effective than teaching what *not to do*. Here are some reasons:

- **Your child wants** to accomplish things ("Put your clothes in the hamper.") rather than be told to stop ("Stop throwing clothes on the floor.").
- **Children often tune out** the word *don't*. "Don't touch" becomes "Touch!"
- **Your child responds** to praise ("I love how you shared with Amy."). Negative discipline ("Stop being selfish!") invites a negative reaction.

Source: K.T. Alvy, *The Positive Parent: Raising Healthy, Happy and Successful Children, Birth—Adolescence*, Teachers College Press.

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