

Helping Children Learn®

EARLY CHILDHOOD

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

Hamilton Wentworth Catholic District
School Board



October 2012

Young children pay attention for several different reasons

Attention issues can be confusing. Why do children focus well on one thing, such as watching another child play, but then tune out something else, like a parent's or teacher's instructions? Experts explain that many factors affect attention spans, including:

- **Motivation.** The more interesting and exciting something is, the easier it is to pay attention.
- **Distractions.** It's tough for a young child to concentrate when people, noises or needs, such as hunger or thirst, and other stressors interfere.
- **Interests.** A child who loves trains, for example, might sit and listen to a long story about them, or enjoy counting the number of cars.
- **Complexity.** It takes less effort to focus on simple tasks than difficult ones. If a task is too demanding, a child will lose concentration quickly.
- **Comfort.** Young children may be more attentive to people they know. In a familiar setting they may do one activity for 15 minutes or longer.



When you want your child to pay attention, help by being positive and patient. Teach with activities your child loves, such as singing, reading and exploring. Keep expectations reasonable and take breaks when needed. Remember that at this age, learning should always be fun.

Source: "Understanding Attention Span in the Early Years," Children's Hospital, Richmond, Virginia, www.childrenshosp-richmond.org/CMS/index.php/library/articles/457/.



Add school conversations to your routine

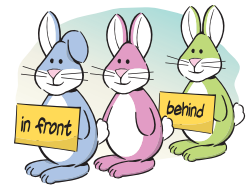
It's important to talk with your child about school every day. You need to know how things are going and your child needs to feel supported. To have good conversations with your child:

- **Ask open-ended questions.** These can't be answered with a simple *yes*, *no* or *fine*. "What art projects did you make today?" "What did the teacher read at story time?" "What games did you play at recess?"
- **Make suggestions.** Say things like, "You learned about trees at school. Let's go outside and you can teach me about them."
- **Show interest.** When your child describes school, listen without interrupting. Respond with interest. "That sounds like a fun game!" or "I'm sorry Josh pushed in front of you. What should he have done instead?"

Help your child understand words indicating space

A key part of learning is understanding spatial concepts. When a child is about:

- **Two years old,** teach simple concepts like *in* and *on*. "Let's put the blocks *in* the box."
- **Three years old,** add concepts such as *over* and *under*. "I see your shoes *under* the table."
- **Four and older,** continue with *behind*, *in front of* and *next to*. Demonstrate with toys. "Will you put the book *next to* the stuffed animal?"



Source: Mayo Clinic staff, "Child development chart: Preschool milestones," Mayo Clinic, www.mayoclinic.com/health/child-development/MY00136.

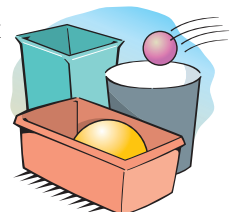
Good habits develop early

Kindergarten and homework. Do they really go together? They often do, and the benefits can be wonderful! Study time is educational, of course, but it also develops important homework habits that will serve your child well throughout her years in school.

Exercise large muscles by playing with balls

Playing with balls is a simple and fun way for your child to strengthen his large muscles. Playing with a friend also teaches social skills and sportsmanship. Here are some ideas:

- **Kick** a large ball back and forth.
- **Play** bounce and catch.
- **Bat** a ball off a tee or stacked boxes.
- **Throw** balls of various sizes into bins.



Source: B. Daniel, *The Playful Child*, School Specialty Publishing.



How can I help my child develop fine motor skills?

Q: I visited my child's preschool class yesterday. To my surprise, many of the children (especially the girls) were already writing their names. Meanwhile, my four-year-old son has not really mastered a stick figure yet. What can I do to help him get ready for kindergarten?

A: Children develop different skills at different rates. It is not unusual for a four-year-old boy to seem a little behind with his fine motor skills. And girls tend to develop fine motor skills a little sooner than many boys do.

Here are some fun activities that will help your child develop his fine motor skills:

- **Playing** with play dough or modeling clay.
- **Finger-painting** with real finger paints or "painting" in shaving cream.
- **Putting** together simple jigsaw puzzles.
- **Building** with blocks. Many boys enjoy this for long periods of time.
- **Experimenting** with different kinds of writing tools. Start with markers, and then try chalk, crayons and, finally, pencils.

Practical activities like dressing and undressing himself, combing his hair and brushing his teeth will also help your son develop his fine motor skills. If you still have concerns after a few months, speak with his teacher or doctor about how he is doing.



Are you taking steps to be involved in your child's early education?

Research shows parent involvement in education helps kids do better in school. Answer *yes* or *no* to the following questions to see if you're involved.

1. **Do you offer** to help with class activities, such as reading aloud or chaperoning?
2. **Do you talk** with your child about school every day?
3. **Do you review** information the school sends home? Check your child's bag every day.
4. **Do you keep in touch** with your child's teacher?
5. **Do you read** with your child every day? This is one of the best ways to help the school and your child.

How well are you doing?

Each yes answer means you're getting involved and helping your child learn. For each no answer, try that idea from the quiz.

"If a child is to keep his inborn sense of wonder, he needs the companionship of at least one adult who can share it, rediscovering with him the joy, excitement and mystery of the world we live in."

—Rachel Carson

Screen time can be positive

Is educational TV really helpful? Should TV be avoided altogether? According to the Annenberg School for Communication:

- **Educational**, high-quality shows should match your child's age and interests.
- **Early readers** benefit from programs that plan stories well, help kids recognize words, and teach sounds that make up words. Onscreen captions help, too.
- **Watching with your child** may make TV time more educational.
- **How a show is produced** affects its value. Kids often like and learn from humor. But special effects shouldn't distract from the lesson.
- **Limiting TV time** (fewer than 10 hours per week for preschoolers) is important.

Source: K. Boyse, "A Guide to Managing Television: Tips for your Family," University of Michigan Health System, www.med.umich.edu/yourchild/topics/managetv.htm.

Filling containers begins science observation skills

It may look like they are just making a mess, but filling and emptying teaches children about materials and the space they take up, important skills for math and science.



For a toddler, use some blocks and boxes. Try different materials and containers for older children, like sand, water or uncooked rice. Which container holds the most?

Lies may be make-believe

Remember, young children are still learning the difference between fantasy and reality. So if your child tells you something that she wishes were true, but couldn't be, it's not really a lie. It's practicing make-believe, an important part of her development.

Source: N. Samalin, *Loving Without Spoiling And 100 Other Timeless Tips for Raising Terrific Kids*, Contemporary Books, the McGraw-Hill Companies.

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