

Helping Children Learn®

EARLY CHILDHOOD

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

Hamilton Wentworth Catholic District
School Board



December 2012

Help your child keep important skills fresh during winter break

You and your child certainly deserve a holiday break from your busy lives! But that doesn't mean learning has to—or should—stop. To have fun as you keep building important skills:

- **Play games** that include learning activities, such as playing store (math), acting out a story (reading) and Simon Says (listening and following directions).
- **Explore.** Visit a museum or bundle up and take a nature walk. Plan new and exciting adventures together.
- **Cook.** Use reading, math and science to follow a recipe. Practice using your senses, too. ("Hear it bubbling?" "It smells chocolaty!" "Is it too salty?"")
- **Talk and listen** to build vocabulary and communication skills. Discuss daily life and ask thought-provoking questions, such as, "What would your life be like if you were a grown-up?"
- **Visit the library.** Look for holiday activities to do. Check out books, magazines and audio books. Set aside time each day for reading.
- **Exercise.** Build your child's muscles by going for walks outside or building a safe, indoor obstacle course.
- **Limit screen time.** Instead of filling your holidays with movies, TV shows and computer games, set reasonable limits. Make a list of screen-free activities that you'd like to try together.



Source: T. Mauro, "Five Ways to Keep Learning Going During School Breaks" About.com, <http://specialchildren.about.com/od/learningissues/tp/learnvacation.htm>.



Include art in your holiday celebrations

Art provides an enjoyable way for young children to work on important creative and motor skills. Encourage your child to work on some of these projects during the winter holidays:

- **Homemade decorations.** Cover walls with paper snowflakes, snowmen, mittens and hats. To make a snowflake, have your child fold a circle in half three times. Help her cut shapes out of the sides to make patterns. Unfold and decorate!
- **Personalized wrapping paper.** Let your child turn plain

paper into gift wrap. Decorate it with crayons, glitter and stamps.

- **Handmade cards.** The most meaningful ones are handmade. Have your child draw a picture. Write a message and have your child fill in blanks. "Dear _____, I hope your holiday is _____! Love, _____." Repeat when it's time to write thank-you notes.

Routines reinforce habits even when school is out

Over winter break, many children get into habits that are difficult to change when school starts up again. Keep to the same rules you have when school is in session. For example, if you read together at bedtime, be sure to do that every night during break, too.



Manners begin with respect

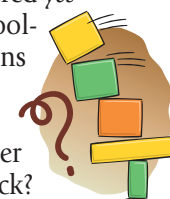
Teachers and classmates notice when children are polite and treat others well. As your child grows, try these hints for teaching manners:

- **Teach polite words early.** Two-year-olds can learn to say *please* and *thank you*.
- **Encourage your child** to use names. For example, "Mrs. Jones, may I ... ?" This politely gets someone's attention.
- **Don't overdo.** It's okay if your child forgets to say *please* or makes other mistakes once in a while.
- **Be polite** when you correct your child. This helps him learn from mistakes rather than be embarrassed by them.

It takes time for preschoolers to learn manners. And remember, you are your child's best example!

Ask open-ended questions to develop evaluation skills

When you ask open-ended questions—questions that can't be answered *yes* or *no*—you help your preschooler learn. Open-ended questions encourage your child to give his own explanation. Try, "What happened to your tower when you added another block? Why?" Then your child is evaluating, which is an important thinking skill.



Source: A.S. Epstein, "How planning and reflection develop children's thinking skills," National Association of the Education of Young Children, <http://journal.naeyc.org/bj/200309/Planning&Reflection.pdf>.

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How can children volunteer during the holiday season?

Q: This holiday season, my child will spend time with family, attend some events and open gifts. I want him to enjoy every moment, but I'd also like him to understand that giving back to our community is just as important. Do you have any suggestions for volunteering with a five-year-old child?

A: Your child is at a great age to begin building caring habits. There are many ways a family with a young child can get involved in helping others this holiday.

Here are some ideas:

- **Find out if a local food bank** needs help sorting donations. Spend an afternoon helping out as a family. Your child will also be working on his sorting skills!
- **Collect and donate clothing** that everyone in your family has outgrown. Ask your child to look through his closet, too.
- **Make holiday cards** with your child. Take them to a local nursing home. You can also bake some cookies to go with the cards.
- **Talk with your child** about the fact that some children won't get any gifts during the holidays. Think of a small gift that you can make together and take it to a donation site.

Don't forget to tell your child you are proud of him for helping someone else have a happy holiday!



Is reading a priority for your family?

Reading with your child is one of the best ways to prepare her for school. Answer *yes* or *no* to the following questions to see if you're encouraging reading as a priority for your child:

- ___ **1. Do you read** with your child every day?
- ___ **2. Do you visit** the library often? Attend children's activities in addition to checking out and returning books.
- ___ **3. Do you include** your child in the reading process? For example, she might choose books or turn pages.
- ___ **4. Do you talk** before, during and after reading time? Ask questions. "What do you think might happen in the story?"

- ___ **5. Do you read** your child's favorite books over and over? Repetition builds comfort with books and reading.

How well are you doing? *Each yes answer means you're emphasizing reading. For each no answer, try that idea from the quiz.*

"You have a lifetime to work, but children are only young once."
—Polish Proverb

Attendance is always key for your child's learning

Have you considered extending your child's holiday vacation? You're not alone. Many parents wonder, "Would it really hurt my kindergartner to skip a few days of school? It would make vacation so much easier!"

Studies show that:

- **Kids who are absent** in kindergarten tend to be absent a lot in first grade and are more likely to struggle later on in reading, math and in general knowledge.
- **Kindergarten is the foundation** of a child's school experience, and it should be as strong as possible. Missed school days are missed opportunities to learn, and that can affect future success.

Source: M. Romero and Y. Lee, "A National Portrait of Chronic Absenteeism in the Early Grades," National Center for Children in Poverty, www.nccp.org/publications/pub_771.html.

Boost critical math skills

Patterns are the basis of math functions your child will use for the rest of his life: odd and even numbers, addition, even multiplication! Encourage your child to find repeating patterns on wrapping paper and to listen for them in music. Challenge him to make patterns with pretzels or dried pasta shapes.



Source: C. Wright, *A Parent's Guide to Home and School Success: Kindergarten*, Brighter Vision Publications.

Traditions build stability

Simple holiday activities, such as baking the same cookies each year, remind your child, "We're a family. We enjoy spending time together." This winter break, continue old traditions or begin new ones, such as:

- **Reading** a favorite story.
- **Serving** a traditional meal.
- **Putting up** special decorations.
- **Singing** traditional songs.

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