

# Helping Children Learn<sup>®</sup>

EARLY CHILDHOOD

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

Hamilton Wentworth Catholic District  
School Board



March 2012

## Spring into scientific thinking

You may not think of your child as a scientist. But he is observing and learning about the world around him every day. To reinforce scientific interest and learning, take advantage of the spring weather and take a walk. After all, preschoolers are natural explorers—and it's a great idea to encourage that curiosity. Here are some things you can do together:

- **Follow a bug.** Let your child pick an insect to follow. Notice how it moves, what obstacles it faces, what it eats and where it goes.
- **Be a bug.** Get on your hands and knees and pretend to be a spider, ant or other creepy crawler. What do you see, hear or smell?
- **Explore a habitat.** Explain that a *habitat* is a place where creatures live. Choose a small habitat to observe, such as a tree or stream. Talk about how it looks and sounds. Watch the animals that come and go. Why does your child think those animals choose to live there?
- **Pick a plant.** Have one of you choose a plant and describe it in detail. (Don't point it out.) Can the other person guess which one it is?
- **Take "notes."** Bring home a pretty rock or leaf. Or make drawings of things you saw.
- **Collect leaves.** Talk about how each leaf is unique. Notice each leaf's shape, texture and color.



Source: S.K. Perry, *Fun Time, Family Time*, Avon Books.



## March to the music with your child

March is "Music in Our Schools" month. It's a great time to enjoy music at home, too. Here are some activities to consider doing with your child:

- **Hum** a happy tune, such as "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star." Can your child guess which one it is? Then let her hum a song for you to identify.
- **Plan** a family talent show. Each person can play an instrument, sing a song or move to music.
- **Look** in magazines for pictures of singers, instruments, music notes and other musical things. Cut them out and make a collage.
- **Notice** how many places you hear music throughout the day. In an elevator? At the grocery store? During a gymnastics class? You may be surprised!
- **Draw** to the rhythm. Let music inspire your creativity. Does it change how you scribble, paint or color?

Source: The National Association for Music Education, "MIOSM - What is MIOSM?" and "MIOSM - Activity Ideas," [www.menc.org/events/view/miosm-what-is-miosm](http://www.menc.org/events/view/miosm-what-is-miosm).

## For good attendance later, set the groundwork now

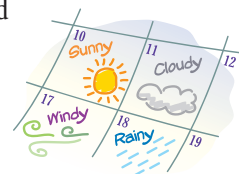
The early years are a critical time to build a love of learning. To help your child feel excited about attending school:

- **Ask** what she likes best about school. It's okay if the answer is "snack time." It's important that she's happy to be there. Say, "Isn't it fun to eat and talk with friends?"
- **Say** positive things about your child's teacher. "Mrs. Rogers is so excited about the trip to the zoo! She wants you to learn a lot about cool animals."
- **Encourage** friendships with classmates. Invite them over or meet at a park.

Source: J.L. Roehlkepartain and N. Leffert, *What Young Children Need to Succeed*, Free Spirit Publishing.

## Grow vocabulary in March

Discussing March's wild weather is a great way to expand your child's vocabulary. Think of weather words that suit the day—sunny, windy, warm or snowy. Consider choosing a word to describe each day, and write it on a calendar.



## Make your bad days better

You argued with another adult. You had a bad day at work. The car broke down. And you're afraid you'll take it out on your child. Instead of snapping, give yourself permission to pamper yourself and your child a bit. Order dinner, or eat leftovers. Curl up together with a good book or movie. Play some music you both enjoy. End the day with a bedtime story and a hug. It's a great way to turn the bad day into a good one.



Source: A. Eisenberg, H. Murkoff & S. Hathaway, *What to Expect: The Toddler Years*, Workman Publishing Company, Inc.



## How can parents choose good books for children?

**Q:** My daughter's fifth birthday is coming up and friends and family have asked me for gift ideas. I'd like to start building a library for her. Can you offer suggestions on choosing books for a young child?

**A:** Congratulations on your choice of gifts for your child. Research shows that encouraging a love of reading in a young child is one predictor for later success in school. Here are some ideas for books she can enjoy right now:

- **Age-appropriate poems or rhymes.** Children enjoy the sing-song nature of these books. Rhymes teach children to listen to letter sounds, one step toward reading.
- **Books featuring children** or friendly animals as the main characters.
- **Books that include emphasis** on shapes, colors, numbers and letters.
- **Books with lots** of age-appropriate action.

For books your budding reader can enjoy in the future, look for:

- **Text** geared to a beginning reader. Ask at the library or bookstore for books primary students can read.
- **Pictures** or illustrations that will grab her attention and make her want to read the book.
- **Favorite** or familiar characters.
- **Subjects** that interest your child.



## Do you minimize your child's stress?

Many behavior problems occur when children are stressed, fearful, anxious or tired. Stress also makes kids sick. Answer the following questions *yes* or *no* to see if you're reducing unnecessary stress as much as possible:

1. **Do you start** and end each day on a positive note with pleasant words and calm routines?
2. **Do you try** not to overschedule your child? Do you allow time for him to play?
3. **Do you make** time to be available and listen to your child's concerns every day?
4. **Do you warn** your child of upcoming changes, like divorce, a new sibling, a change in pre-school, etc.?
5. **Do you let** your child grow and develop at his own pace?

**How did you do?** Each yes answer means you're doing a good job of minimizing stressful feelings. For each no answer, try that idea from the quiz.

*"Take a rest; a field that has rested gives a bountiful crop."*

—Ovid

## Prevent bullying behaviors

Sadly, bullying is not just a problem for older children. It can begin early. Prepare your child now to protect him later. Teach your child that it is never okay to:

- **Cause physical harm** by hitting, kicking or pushing.
- **Harm a person's property.**
- **Call bad names**, especially about the way a person looks.

Source: KidsHealth, "Bullying and Your Child," Nemours Foundation, [www.kidshealth.org/parent/emotions/feelings/bullies.html](http://www.kidshealth.org/parent/emotions/feelings/bullies.html).

## Creative requests make children more responsive

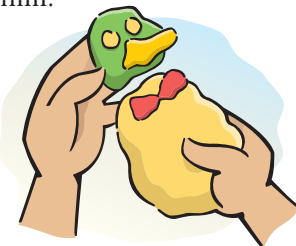
Next time you really need your child's attention, try talking differently. You might whisper, sing, rhyme or use a funny voice. ("Yo, ho, ho, it's time to go!") This will perk up her "listening ears."

Source: C.S. Kranowitz, *The Out of Sync Child*, The Berkeley Publishing Group.

## Choose activities that strengthen hand muscles

Strong hand muscles help your child draw, cut, paste and write. To help him strengthen those muscles, have him:

- **Play with play dough** for a few minutes every day.
- **Knead bread dough** and form it into shapes.
- **Cut with safety scissors** on card stock or cardboard.
- **Pick up small toys** with kitchen tongs.



Source: C. Macintyre and K. McVitty, *Movement and Learning in the Early Years*, Paul Chapman Publishing.

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