

# Helping Children Learn®

EARLY CHILDHOOD

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

Hamilton Wentworth Catholic District  
School Board



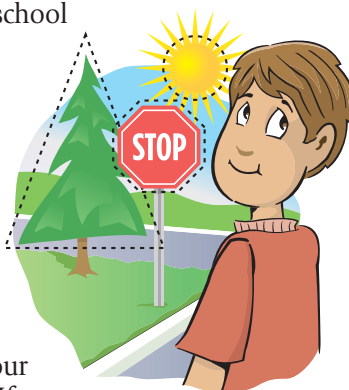
May 2012

## School may have a break, but learning happens all year long

You probably already know that continuing to read with your child is your first priority for summer learning. Try a few other simple activities, too, to keep him engaged and motivated. Then, when school begins, your child will be ready.

Here are a few learning ideas to consider:

- **Search for shapes.** Knowing shapes is a skill your child will need throughout his school career. Look for objects shaped like circles, squares and triangles. If these are easy, go on to octagons (stop signs) or pentagons (the black shapes on many soccer balls).
- **Practice personal information.** Does your child know his phone number and address? If not, come up with a rhyme or silly story to help him memorize them.
- **Get more from a trip to the store.** More knowledge, that is. Have your child help you look for the items you need. Read the word on the label and ask him to point to the word and repeat it back to you. Show him the price and explain that this tells us how much money we will need to buy the item.
- **Be scrappy.** Help your child put together a scrapbook of summer memories. He can paste in photos or draw pictures, and then "write" (according to his ability) about them underneath. You can write a caption underneath his "writing" to further explain the illustration.



Source: "Literacy Activities for Ages 4-8," ReadWriteThink.

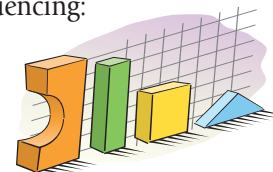
## Track summer screen time

Your child may have more free time when school's out for the summer, but that doesn't mean her good TV-watching habits should be "on vacation," too! Keep in mind the American Academy of Pediatrics guidelines: No more than one to two hours of quality programming per day, and no TV at all for children younger than two years.

## Arranging items in order builds math & science skills

Learning to put things in a certain order—or *sequencing*—is a necessary skill to learn before children can do math problems in school. To teach sequencing:

- **Sort blocks** by size. Pick blocks of varying sizes and show your child how to line them up from the smallest to the largest. Then mix them up and ask him to try.
- **Cook together.** Read the steps of a recipe out loud. Let your child help you in some way with each step of the recipe. Talk about why it's so important to complete the steps in order.



## ✓ Spark a love of reading this summer

In kindergarten, your child will begin to learn to read. You can help create a good foundation this summer by teaching your child to love books. You can:

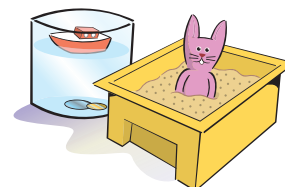
- **Play silly games** that reinforce what your child already knows about reading. Turn the book upside down and pretend to read, for example. Your child will have fun correcting you!
- **Promote word recognition.** Teach your child short, common words, such as *the*, *stop* and *dog*. Point out words that rhyme. "Look, Jenny. *Cat* and *hat*. That's a rhyme! Can you think of another rhyme?"
- **Expand her vocabulary.** Introduce new words and practice using familiar ones. Make a point of using new words when you talk together.

No matter what reading activities you do with your child, avoid making reading seem like work. The most important thing you can do is to make reading fun.

## Bring the beach home!

Playing with water and sand is a great source of pleasure for most children—and you don't have to trek all the way to the beach to try it out!

A small tub of water and another of sand make wonderful learning laboratories, too. Putting different objects in the water teaches about sinking and floating. Working with sand helps fine motor skills and sharpens your child's love of creating. Just be sure to watch your child closely at all times whenever she is near any amount of water.



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## How can parents lengthen children's attention spans?

**Q:** My daughter will be starting kindergarten in the fall. She did well in preschool, but most of the day was spent playing or doing hands-on activities. I know kindergarten will involve more seat work and I'm somewhat concerned about her ability to pay attention. How can I help her?

**A:** Kindergarten teachers are well aware that their young students have a strong need to move around. But you are correct. There is more seat work in kindergarten than there was in preschool. Your child will be expected to pay attention for at least 15 minutes at a time. That follows a general rule of thumb that a child should be able to sit quietly and pay attention for a period that equals three to five times her age.

To prepare your child:

- **Limit screen time.** Your child may appear to pay attention for long periods of time, but watching TV is a passive activity. It also promotes a desire to be entertained with constant changes of scenery.
- **Read together!** This is the best activity of all. Let your child engage with the story and use her imagination. Also encourage her to look at books on her own.
- **Practice following directions.** Start with one-step directions, such as "hang your hat on the hook." Move on to two-step directions, such as "bring me the bag and then hang your jacket on the hook." When she masters this, try three steps or more.



## Are you expanding your child's world?

It's wonderful for preschoolers to enjoy familiar places and activities. But they also need new experiences to teach them about the world. Answer these questions *yes* or *no* to see if your child has exciting learning adventures:

1. **Do you try** new things as a family, such as interesting foods and sports?
2. **Do you visit** new places with your child, such as museums and parks?
3. **Do you go** to the library often so your child can check out new books?
4. **Do you plan** opportunities for your child to meet and play with new friends?
5. **Do you ask** your child what he'd like to try, such as baking or finger painting?

**How did you do?** Each yes answer means you're teaching your child about the world. For each no answer, try that idea from the quiz.

*"You cannot help but learn more as you take the world into your hands. Take it up reverently, for it is an old piece of clay, with millions of thumbprints on it."*

—John Updike

## Conversations build respect

Kids become respectful over time as they start to realize that it feels good to be asked politely, thanked and treated nicely. A recent study shows that talking with your child about people's thoughts and feelings makes a difference. For example, "That little boy is crying. Why do you think he's upset?" Or "Joe is smiling. How do you think he feels?"

Discussions about feelings have long-term benefits. Talking with your preschooler now will benefit him in elementary school, when good social skills will help him get along with classmates and teachers.

Source: M. Rhodes, "oh, oh, oh f-e-e-l-i-n-g-s!" *Parenting Early Years*, Bonnier Corporation.

## Promote traffic awareness

Stop, look and listen. Reinforce this important rule each time your child will be near cars—at any street corner, in a parking lot or from the car to the pavement. **"Stop!** We have reached the curb. **Look!** Is a car coming? **Listen!** Do we hear a car?" When it's clear, say "all clear," and teach your child to grasp your hand while crossing the street.

## Don't forget to pack some learning into travel plans

If you're planning a trip this summer, plan to strengthen your child's literacy and thinking skills, too. When getting ready for the trip, you can:

- **Find** books in the library about your destination.
- **Make** up a story about the trip. Imagine what you will do and see.
- **Think** about what the weather requires you to pack. A bathing suit? A sweater?



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