

Helping Children Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

Central Grade School



October 2011

Turn mealtime into math time

Your young child probably loves to “help” in the kitchen. While it can be messy and even time consuming, the time you spend with your child in the kitchen will teach her about much more than food. Here’s how you can turn meal preparation into a natural math lesson:

- **Find opportunities to count.** Ask your child: “Can you get *eight* crackers out of the package?” “Please pass me *two* tomatoes from the bowl.”
- **Talk about measurements.** Let your child help you measure a cup of flour or a teaspoon of salt. You can even alter a recipe together. “This recipe won’t make enough muffins for everyone. We need to *double* it. That means two of everything. It calls for one cup of flour. How much more do we need to add?”
- **Use math words.** Say things like, “Can you *divide* that in *half* for me?” “Does this need *more* or *less* salt?” “Let’s *add* some chocolate chips.” Or “If you don’t like the taste of cinnamon, we can *subtract* some from the recipe next time.”
- **Work with shapes.** Ask your child if she’d like her sandwich cut into four *squares*, two *rectangles* or two *triangles*. Have her make a pattern on her plate—a circle of a carrot slice, then a half-circle from a cucumber slice. Help your child fold her napkin into a rectangle or triangle.



Source: S. Perry, Ph.D., *Playing Smart*, Free Spirit Publishing.



Play helps your child build muscles

One of the best ways to build young motor skills is through play. Try these fun activities with your child:

- **Thumbs up.** What if people didn’t have thumbs? See if you can throw a ball or build a tower without using your thumbs.
- **Go chicken.** Tuck a sock or other small cloth into each player’s back pocket. When you call “Go,” players must act like chickens. One arm can be used for trying to grab another player’s “tail,” but the other must flap like a “wing.”
- **Clean-up challenge.** Before you put away summer toys, use them to make a safe and silly obstacle course. Kids might jump over a hose, draw a face inside a hula hoop with chalk and hop to a finish line.

Source: “Games for Ages 3-5,” DisneyFamily.com, <http://family.go.com/entertainment/pkg-games-3-5/>.

Bypass power struggles

It’s common for preschoolers to have power struggles with parents. To avoid them:

- **Give choices.** Offer two acceptable choices for meals, clothes or activities—“Would you like to wear the blue or yellow shirt today?” Let your child pick.
- **Tell, don’t ask.** Asking gives your child the chance to say *no*. Instead, say, “It’s time to pick up your toys. We can’t go to the park until all toys are put away.”

Fall leaves lead to learning

This October, take a walk with your child and collect fallen leaves. Sort leaves by their different sizes, colors and shapes. Then talk about how the leaves change color: The reds and golds of autumn leaves are always there, but hidden in spring and summer.



In spring and summer, leaves receive lots of sunlight and water. These produce a chemical that makes leaves green. In fall, leaves get less sun and water. The green fades. That lets the leaves show their “true colors.”

Is your child ready to learn?

A great day for your child begins the night before he goes to school. Your child needs about 11 hours of sleep. A child who goes to bed on time has a better chance of waking up rested and alert. Then a solid breakfast that includes whole grains, lean protein and fruit takes him even further along the path to a happy, productive day of learning.



Source: M. Wallace, *Keys to Parenting Your Four Year Old*, Barron’s Educational Books.



How can parents encourage good classroom behavior?

Q: My first child just entered school and I want him to know I expect good behavior in the classroom. Do you have any tips on how to reinforce this at home?

A: Many educators share your concerns about students who lack respect for rules and other people. But proper classroom behavior is not much different from the behavior you expect from your young child at home. Here are some behaviors to discuss and reinforce with your child:

- **Just be nice!** It sounds simple. But if your child speaks kindly to his teachers and classmates, waits his turn and shares, his behavior problems will be few.
- **How to handle frustrations.** At home, your child has a place to go if he is working through a “meltdown.” At school, he is expected to keep it together. Help him practice using words to express feelings. Calming techniques like deep breathing can help, too.
- **Behavior with family vs. behavior at school.** Parents and children may kiss each other at home, but there is no kissing others at school. At home, he might get a bite of what you’re eating, but taking someone else’s food is a no-no at school. When possible, try to enforce classroom rules at home to minimize confusion.



Are you building strong social skills?

Getting along with people helps kids succeed in school, work and life. Answer the following questions *yes* or *no* to see if you’re helping your child learn how to interact with others:

- ___ **1. Do you make** plans that involve other children, such as meeting at a playground?
- ___ **2. Do you practice** sharing, taking turns and other social skills at home?
- ___ **3. Do you talk** about others’ feelings to help your child build empathy? (“Joey lost his toy. He looks sad. How can we help?”)
- ___ **4. Do you give** specific compliments when your child is friendly? (“You gave Lucy one of your cookies. That was generous. It made her happy!”)

- ___ **5. Do you set** an example by being kind and patient with your child and others?

How did you do? *Each yes answer means you’re building friendship skills. For each no answer, try that idea from the quiz.*

“A friend is one of the nicest things you can have, and one of the best things you can be.”

—Douglas Pagels

Make the most of your time

Spending time with your child develops her sense of self-worth. And knowing she is important to you will help her do better in school. Here are a few ideas to help you spend more time with your child:

- **Watch as your child plays.** Notice what she enjoys. If she likes to draw, make pictures with her.
- **Invite your child** to do something with you—walk the dog, take out the trash or fold clothes.
- **Have conversations** with your child. Ask about her day, her friends and her toys. Tell her about your day, too. Share what you enjoyed doing.

Sharpen memory skills

Remembering things is a key step in the thinking process. To strengthen this skill, play the “What’s Missing?” game. Put five familiar objects on a tray. Have your child look at the objects for a full minute, then have him hide his eyes. Take one object away, and ask him to open his eyes. See if he can tell you which item you took away.

Word recognition inspires

Help your child fall in love with written words by making them part of your home. Put words:

- **In her room.** Hang alphabet posters or decorate with letter blocks.
- **In the kitchen.** Label your child’s drawings—“house,” “flower,” “Dad”—and put them on the refrigerator. Ask her to help you with the grocery list and print the words carefully while she watches.



Source: B. Cullinan & B. Bagert, “Helping Your Child Learn to Read—Write and Talk, Too,” U.S. Department of Education, www.ifg-inc.com/Consumer_Reports/LearnToRead.html.

Helping Children Learn®

Published in English and Spanish, September through May.

Publisher: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.

Editor: Jennifer McGovern.

Staff Editors: Rebecca Miyares & Erika Beasley.

Writer: Erika Beasley. Production Manager: Pat Carter.

Translations Editor: Victoria Gaviola.

Layout & Illustrations: Maher & Mignella, Cherry Hill, NJ.

Copyright © 2011, The Parent Institute®, a division of NIS, Inc.

P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474

1-800-756-5525 • www.parent-institute.com • ISSN 1527-1005