

Helping Children Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

PAMPA ISD, ESL/Bilingual Department
806-669-4700



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Do five things now to help your child learn for years to come

Your child is growing fast. Not only physically, but also mentally and emotionally. Research shows that nurturing this development in her preschool years will help her start school ready to succeed.

Here are five easy ways to support your child's learning—now and in the future:

- 1. Have fun together.** Play games and do jigsaw puzzles. Play dress up and put on shows. Build with blocks. Sing silly songs.
- 2. Encourage creativity.** Squishing clay, coloring and finger-painting aren't just fun, they're educational. It's worth putting up with a little mess.
- 3. Show affection.** Hugs and snuggles make your child feel loved and safe. This feeling of security at home can bolster her confidence at school.
- 4. Get moving.** Healthy bodies support healthy minds. Go for walks together. Play catch. Climb at the park. While you're at it, talk about how much fun you are having.
- 5. Engage with education.** Introduce yourself to your child's preschool teacher. Ask your child questions about what she is learning every day. When you show that learning matters to you, it will matter to your child!



Source: K.L. Bierman and others, "Parent Engagement Practices Improve Outcomes for Preschool Children," PennState and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.



Practice key math concepts together

Experts point to three concepts that have a big impact on a preschooler's future success learning math: counting, patterning and comparing quantities.

Play some fun games to help your child grasp these skills:

- **Count the shapes.** See how many examples of a particular shape your child can find in one room in your home. Can he find five squares in the kitchen?
- **What comes next?** Draw a simple pattern of colored circles (red, blue, green, red, blue, green). Now ask your child what comes next. Is it another green circle? A
- **Which has more?** Make two unequal piles of small objects, such as cereal pieces. Ask your child to tell you which pile has more pieces. Then ask how he knows. (Is it taller? Is it wider?) Count together to see if he's right!

Source: B. Rittle-Johnson and others, "Early Math Trajectories: Low-Income Children's Mathematics Knowledge From Ages 4 to 11," *Child Development*, The Society for Research in Child Development, Inc.

Family meals offer tasty ways to promote learning

Eating meals together daily is a proven way to teach your child healthy habits, enlarge her vocabulary and strengthen family bonds. To make the most of mealtime:

- **Add interest.** Serve a "surprise" dinner in a box or bag. Or serve a theme meal.
- **Reinforce manners**—say *please* and *thank you*, chew with mouth closed, etc.
- **Be flexible.** If family dinners aren't possible, eat breakfast together.

Get ready for a great year

To set your child up for a productive year of learning:

- **Establish routines.** They help your child know what to do when.
- **Allow for downtime.** Activities are wonderful, but your child will learn better if he has time to relax, too.
- **Talk about rules** and how they keep kids safe, healthy and ready to learn.



Add variety to reading

Helping your child become familiar with different types of books is an important way to prepare her for reading. So branch out! Dive into:

- **Make-believe stories.** Purely imaginative and not based on real life, these stories encourage creative thinking.
- **Myths and fables.** These teach valuable life lessons, such as honesty.
- **Poetry.** Poems that rhyme encourage kids to listen for sounds that are different and alike, a key reading readiness skill.





How can I make goodbyes less painful for my child?

Q: My son started preschool recently. Dropping him off in the mornings has been horrible. He cries when I say goodbye. How can I make this easier on him—and me?

A: It's tough to leave your child when he seems miserable. But his feelings about separation from you are normal for a preschooler. Your child feels secure when he's with you. Being apart makes him feel unsure. He will feel better when you convince him that he'll be safe and cared for at preschool, and that you will always come back to get him.

To reassure your child:

- **Express trust in the teacher.** Tell your child, "If you need help, I want you to ask Ms. Thomas. She'll take wonderful care of you."
- **Discuss your return.** Draw a clock that shows the time you'll be back. Say, "When the clock on the wall looks like this, I'll be here."
- **Establish a short goodbye routine.** Walk your child to his cubby and help him store his belongings. Then give him a hug and kiss, remind him you'll see him soon, and go. It may take a few weeks, but your child will find comfort in doing the same things the same way every day.
- **Touch base with the teacher** about how your child does after you leave. Ask about activities your child enjoys, and talk about them at home.



Do you help your child practice listening?

Listening is an important part of learning. Building your child's listening skills can be a fun part of lots of different activities. Are you finding creative ways to help your child listen better? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

- ___ **1. Do you pause** on a walk and ask your child to close her eyes and name all the sounds she hears?
- ___ **2. Do you tell** stories *with* your child? You make up a sentence, then your child makes up the next one, and so on.
- ___ **3. Do you ask** your child to "help" by bringing you items you request?
- ___ **4. Do you play** rhythm games with your child? Clap your hands in a pattern and ask her to repeat it.

- ___ **5. Do you ask** your child to guess the sound you are making (jingling keys, for example) without looking?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are helping your child practice listening in enjoyable ways. For each no, try that idea.

"Listening is about being present, not just about being quiet."

—Krista Tippett

Set limits to teach behavior

Learning to respect limits at home makes following rules easier for kids when they get to school. To use limits to teach:

- **Make a few reasonable rules** and enforce them consistently.
- **Tell your child** what *to do* instead of what *not to do*.
- **Set an example.** Model the behaviors you expect.
- **Praise correct behavior**, and criticize bad behavior, not your child. Say "That comment was rude," not "You are rude."



Source: B. Martin, Psy.D., "The 5 C's of Effective Discipline: Setting Rules for Children," Psych Central, niswc.com/rules.

Establish a partnership that supports learning

Children benefit academically when their parents and teachers are active partners. This is true in preschool, too. To be an effective partner:

- **Tell your child's teachers** about his likes, dislikes, strengths and challenges.
- **Ask what your child** will be learning in preschool and how you can reinforce those skills at home.

Growing brains need sleep

Did you know that sleep helps your child's brain work? Research says that sleep helps children process their daily experiences and improves their memories. One recent study found that the benefit is even greater when preschoolers nap *and* sleep well at night. To help your child get enough sleep:

- **Develop a sleep schedule.** Preschoolers need at least 11 to 13 hours of sleep every 24 hours.
- **Enjoy outdoor exercise** together.
- **Follow soothing** sleep time routines.

Source: J.C. Fox, "Naps, bedtime sleep both necessary for preschoolers, study suggests," Boston Globe, niswc.com/napsleep.

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