

# Helping Children Learn®

EARLY CHILDHOOD

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School  
Onalaska ISD



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## Use movement to reinforce the letter-sound connection

The ability to connect letters with the sounds they make is vital for reading. Studies show that when kids move their bodies while they learn letter sounds, they remember them better than when they sit still.

To put your child's brain and body to work learning letters:

- **Assign movements** to letters. Together, think of movements to match letter sounds. Have your child say the letter, make its sound, and do the motion. For W, your preschooler might wiggle while saying "W-wuh-Wiggle." Your child might jump up and down for J, tiptoe around the room for T and spin for S.
- **Use a mirror.** Show how your child's mouth, tongue and lips move in different ways to make various letter sounds.
- **Draw letters in the air.** Move your whole arm to make the shape of a letter and say its sound. Can your child guess the letter? Now have your child draw a letter for you to guess.
- **Clap out rhymes.** When you read books or poems that rhyme, clap together when words use the same letter combinations to make the same sounds, such as *red* and *bed*.



Source: "The Connection Between Movement and Phonics Learning," Phonics.org.



## Enrich time together in enjoyable ways

Do you sometimes wonder how to fill the time your child spends at home on weekends and breaks from preschool? Here are some activities to enjoy together that will help your child keep building important skills:

- **Create art.** Dip winter-themed cookie cutters into washable paint and let your child stamp them on a piece of paper. Talk about the shapes and the colors.
- **Go for a nature walk.** Look for things like animal tracks, icy puddles and evergreen trees.
- **Explore new places.** Go on a field trip to the town hall or observe a construction site from a safe distance. Talk with your child about the things you see and the jobs people do.
- **Play games** with a learning element. Help your child count items while playing store, or follow directions in Simon Says.
- **Practice manners.** Talk with your child about polite things to say when meeting someone new or visiting someone's home.

## Mix reading into the fun

In a busy holiday season, the best way to find time for reading with your child may be to combine it with other activities. This month:

- **Cook up literacy skills** while you make festive treats. Read recipes aloud. Ask your child to fetch ingredients from the cupboard by looking for the first letter on the packaging.
- **Share a cozy moment** on a cold day. Snuggle up, drink hot chocolate and read wintry stories.
- **Listen to books.** When your eyes and hands are busy, listen to an audiobook together and discuss it.



## Model respect for property

In school, children are expected to treat items that belong to classmates and the school with respect. Show your preschooler how to take special care of things that belong to others.

If your child borrows a toy from a friend, for example, return it together promptly. If your child borrows books from the library, show how to turn pages carefully.



## Instill a sense of competence

Feeling capable of success makes children more willing to try their best and keep trying when faced with a challenge. To nurture this type of self-confidence:

- **Ask your child to help you** with small tasks.
- **Ask your child's opinion.** "Which kind of pasta should we eat tonight?"
- **Recognize your child's interests.** "You seem really happy when you play with toy animals."
- **Say how much you enjoy** your child's company.



## How can I teach the value of honesty to my preschooler?

**Q:** The things my child tells me aren't always true. Can four-year-olds understand the difference between honesty and lying? How should I react to something I know isn't true?

**A:** Your child isn't necessarily trying to fool you. Preschool-aged children are still learning the difference between fantasy and reality. When they tell adults things that they wish were true, they are practicing make-believe, a typical part of their development. Young children learn to tell the truth over several years.

To encourage a habit of honesty:

- **Name the truth** before your child speaks. You see cookie crumbs and sprinkles on the table and on your child. Instead of asking if your child ate cookies without permission, say, "I know you don't want to be in trouble. But there are sprinkles everywhere, including on your face. I think you ate cookies. It's OK to tell me."
- **Respond to honest admissions** with praise for telling the truth rather than punishment for misbehavior. Simply thank your child for being honest, and explain the behavior you want to see instead.
- **Display honesty.** Your preschooler may not always do as you ask. But your child will mimic you. Be truthful with your preschooler and others.



## Are you providing opportunities for your preschooler to learn?

Families have a big effect on how much their children learn. Are you encouraging curiosity, supporting discovery and helping your preschooler strengthen skills? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

1. **Do you ask** your child to think and help solve problems? "How could we fit all the toys in this basket?"
2. **Do you encourage** your child to ask questions? Then, take time to answer or look for the answers together.
3. **Do you give** your child opportunities to play with and learn from other kids?
4. **Do you help** your child use all five senses to learn about the world (while you supervise for safety)?

5. **Do you provide** your child with new experiences, such as listening to a concert?

### How well are you doing?

*More yes answers mean you are helping your child learn every day and everywhere. For each no, try that idea.*

"Learning is a process, not an event."  
—Elliott Masie

## Offer schoolwork practice

Encouraging interest in school and learning now sets your preschooler up for a success in kindergarten. Establish a workspace for your child. Then, offer some enjoyable "assignments" that won't take more than a minute or two. You might ask your child to:

- **Name three things** that begin with a certain letter of the alphabet.
- **Count the items** on the table.
- **Identify simple shapes** drawn on a sheet of paper (*circle, square, triangle, etc.*)
- **Draw a line** between matching items.

## Exercise is weather-proof

Children need lots of exercise to build the strong motor skills that support learning. To help your child get it, even indoors:

- **Play music** and dance.
- **Have a family** scavenger hunt. Race through your home to find items on personalized lists.
- **Hike "mountains** and valleys." Put on backpacks and go up and down stairs on a pretend trek. Discuss what you "see."



## Don't give up on naps yet

Studies show that young children who take regular naps have an easier time learning new things. They are also better able to retain and use what they've learned. If your child is a reluctant napper:

- **Explain that naptime** is for resting quietly, even if your child doesn't sleep.
- **Offer soothing surroundings.**
- **Limit caffeinated foods** and drinks, like chocolate and soda.

Source: H. Wang and others, "Nap effects on preschool children's learning of letter-sound mappings," *Child Development*, Society for Research in Child Development.

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