

Helping Children Learn®

EARLY CHILDHOOD

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

Waunakee Public Schools



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Help your child practice skills that are linked to future math success

When preschool-aged children understand certain math concepts, they perform better in math when they get to elementary school. Three of the skills that predict future math success are counting, patterning and comparing quantities. Playing simple games together is a fun way to help your child practice using skills in these areas.



Here are three games you can play over and over in different variations:

- 1. Count the shapes.** Build your child's counting and shape recognition abilities at the same time! Choose a shape, such as a circle, and see how many examples of it your preschooler can find in one room of your home. On another day, pick a different shape and a different room.
- 2. What comes next?** Draw a row of seven circles. Color the first six in a basic pattern: red, yellow, blue, red, yellow, blue. Now, ask your child what color the seventh circle should be. Another blue one? Or does the pattern call for red? When this is easy, move on to more complex patterns.
- 3. Which has more?** Make two unequal piles of small objects, such as pieces of cereal. Ask your child to tell you which pile has *more* in it. What clues are there? (Is one pile taller or wider?) Count together to see if your preschooler is right. On another day, use different objects.

Source: B. Rittle-Johnson and others, "Early Math Trajectories," *Child Development*, The Society for Research in Child Development.



Preschoolers benefit from routines

Following routines at home helps young children feel secure and figure out their place in the world. And research shows that family routines can also boost your child's school readiness.

Routines don't need to be complicated, or involve costly supplies. Make these activities a routine part of your child's life at home:

- **Art making.** Old catalogs and magazines and household items like paper towel tubes, cardboard and bits of ribbon provide endless options for creativity.
- **Playing games together.** Help your child learn to take turns

and understand that enjoying the game—rather than winning—is the real reason to play.

- **Sharing stories.** Whether it's a fairy tale at bedtime or a picture book at breakfast, a daily reading routine supports emotional health and boosts word smarts, too.

Source: K.L.P. Turnbull and others, "Family routines and practices that support the school readiness of young children living in poverty," *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, Elsevier.

Review and discuss your student's work

Your active interest in preschool activities shows your child that education is important. It also makes it easier for you to know how your child is learning, and how to help. Be sure to:



- **Discuss your child's work.** Ask your preschooler, "How did you do this?"
- **Take note of areas** where your child seems to be struggling or excelling. Remember that all students have areas in which they can improve.
- **Contact the teacher** if you have concerns. Focus on finding solutions.

Ask questions to help your child focus on reading

Young children stay more engaged with reading activities when they can participate. If you notice that your child's attention is starting to wander when you are reading a story, try asking a question. You might ask, "What do you think this character's voice might sound like?" Then give your preschooler a short line from the book to repeat in the character's voice.

Observe while you walk

Double the benefits of taking a walk with your child by building observation skills while you exercise. Together:

- **Look for things** along familiar routes that you and your child have never seen before. Notice things that have changed.
- **See how many things** your child can spot of a certain color or category.
- **Point to things** that make each of you happy: colorful leaves, a smiling baby, a big truck, swings, an ice cream store.





How can I make learning letters interesting and fun?

Q: My preschooler has recently become interested in the alphabet. We both like singing the ABC song together. What are some other enjoyable ways I can encourage this interest?

A: Planning activities around your child's interests is a great way to build learning excitement. There are many ways to explore the alphabet that are more fun than work.

Here are some ideas:

- **Get a feel for letters.** Help your child use a finger to write letters in a flour when you are baking or in a plate of whipped cream after dinner.
- **Choose a letter of the day** or of the week. If today is *M* day, for example, you and your child could eat *melon* and *macaroni*, then hunt around your home for items beginning with *M*, such as a *mat* and a *map*. Pretend to *move* like a *mouse* on a *mission*.
- **Add rhythm and movement.** As you and your child say the alphabet, clap your hands or stomp your feet after every third letter: A, B, C, clap, D, E, F, clap, and so on. Or try to use your bodies to make the shapes of letters.
- **Read books that present** the alphabet in a fun or silly way. Try *Mrs. Peanuckle's Kitchen Alphabet*, by Mrs. Peanuckle, illustrated by Jessie Ford.



Parent Quiz

Are you encouraging creative play?

Nurturing your child's imagination and creativity helps strengthen critical thinking and problem-solving skills and encourage self-expression. Are you providing a creative spark? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

1. **Do you offer** your child supplies for making and drawing things, such as blocks, play dough and crayons?
2. **Do you protect** a work area so it's OK for your child to get messy when creating?
3. **Do you tell** made-up stories together? Do you ask your child to think of new endings for favorite stories?
4. **Do you share** examples of different types of art with your child, such as photography, sculpture and music?

5. **Do you provide** positive feedback about your child's creations?

How well are you doing?

More *yes* answers mean you are helping your child think creatively. For each *no*, try that idea.

"Creativity grows out of two things: curiosity and imagination."
—Benny Goodman

Discover with the senses

In addition to sight and hearing, touch, smell and taste are important ways people learn. To help your child explore what these senses can do:

- **Put small items** in a bag. Have your child reach in and try to guess what they are without looking.
- **Lead your preschooler** around the house blindfolded. See what smells your child can identify and name.
- **Pour some salt and sugar** in piles on a plate. They look the same. They feel the same. Do they taste the same?

Size is a comparative idea

To teach the concept of relative size, help your child compare different items. Use words like *bigger*, *smaller*, *shorter* and *longer*.

You can also give your child several different sizes of the same tasty treat, such as berries or pan-



cakes. Help your preschooler arrange them in order from *smallest* to *largest*. Which one does your child want to eat first? The smallest or the biggest one of all?

Promote perseverance

Not everything your preschooler tries will go well the first time. To teach your child to bounce back and try again:

- **Show empathy.** "It's disappointing when you try to do something and it doesn't work out."
- **Offer encouragement.** "You are growing and learning a lot and I think you'll be ready to try again soon!"
- **Set an example.** "I tried something new and that's what matters. I'll try again."

Source: J. Lahey, *The Gift of Failure: How the Best Parents Learn to Let Go So Their Children Can Succeed*, Harper.

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