

Helping Children Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

Willingboro School District



October 2019

Help your preschooler develop resilience after setbacks

Many of the things preschoolers are learning take practice to master. So it's natural that as your child tries new things, he will experience some failures. Resist the urge to protect him from these setbacks. Learning how to bounce back and keep trying after a failure will serve him well in school.

To encourage resilience in your child:

- **Acknowledge his feelings.** "I can see you're sad that you didn't make it across the monkey bars. It's disappointing when you try to do something and it doesn't work."
- **Offer encouragement.** "Sometimes kids must get stronger before they can make it across the bars. You're getting stronger all the time. Let's try it again the next time we are at the playground."
- **Set short-term goals** your child can reach along the way. "You can help your arms get stronger by practicing hanging from the bar. Let's see if you can hang while I count to three."
- **Be a role model.** Let your child see you handle your own setbacks with grace. For example, if you try a new recipe and it doesn't turn out well, say, "I tried something new—that's what counts. Next time I think I'll try grilling the meat instead of roasting it."

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



Veggies are brain food

A healthy diet—with lots of vegetables—has a positive effect on a child's memory, concentration, behavior and achievement in school. Your child is more likely to eat his vegetables when you:

- **Offer options.**
- **Make it fun.**
- **Let him help** prepare them.
- **Serve a vegetable** again and again.



Source: "Winning the war: How to persuade children to eat more veggies," *ScienceDaily*, nswc.com/ec_veggies.

Science is for everyone

In a recent study, preschool girls who were asked to "do science" showed more interest and persistence in science activities than girls who were asked to "be scientists." This suggests that focusing on the activity, rather than on a type of person who does it, can help your child see science as something everyone can do and enjoy.

Source: M. Rhodes and others, "Subtle Linguistic Cues Increase Girls' Engagement in Science," *Psychological Science*, Association for Psychological Science, nswc.com/cues.



Have fun together on learning walks

Taking a walk with your child helps keep her body healthy. It's also an ideal opportunity to boost her math, observation and language skills. Here's how:

- **Count things.** Cats, dogs, fire hydrants, red cars—anything that interests your child.
- **Search for five things** your child has never seen before.
- **Point out numbers** on signs and buildings.
- **Call out the first letters** of items you see. "M is for mailbox!"
- **Look for things** that make you and your child happy. Brightly colored leaves, a baby in a stroller, a smiling neighbor.
- **Play a game of I Spy.** Look ahead of you and say, "I spy something ... (smooth, red, etc.)." See if your child can locate it. Take turns spying and guessing.
- **Notice things** that have changed since your last walk.
- **Be silly.** Every 20 steps or so, do something for your child to imitate—spin, hop, skip or wave.

Teach your child to care

Children's social and emotional skills affect their performance in school. Many of these skills are grounded in caring. If a child doesn't care about doing the right thing, he won't see the point of being responsible or honest. To foster your child's sense of caring:

- **Care for him.** Sympathize with him. Express interest in things he likes.
- **Help him think of others.** "Jacob looks a little sad sitting by himself. Do you think he'd like to play with you?"
- **Point out examples** of caring and hurtful behaviors. Praise your child when he acts in a caring way.



How can I teach my child to think critically?

Q: I've heard about critical thinking, and I know that many kids lack this skill. I'd like to help my child develop it, but I'm not sure how to start, or if I'm even qualified.

A: Critical thinking may sound complex, but much of it has to do with what your child is probably already doing: imagining, figuring and questioning. And yes, you can help your child build these skills!

To encourage critical thinking:

- **Spend time talking** when you read together. Ask your child about the story and the characters. Questions that inspire critical thinking start with phrases like, "How can you tell ..." or "What might happen if ...?"
- **Let your child try** to solve problems. If her shirt is on backward, put her in front of a mirror and ask, "What happened to the unicorn on your shirt?" Give her a chance to realize what went wrong and take care of it.
- **Ask questions** about your child's work. "Why did you give the girl in your picture a dog instead of a cat?"
- **Give your child time** each day to play on her own with simple toys like blocks. This lets her be creative and experiment with new approaches when something doesn't work.



Are you setting the stage for learning?

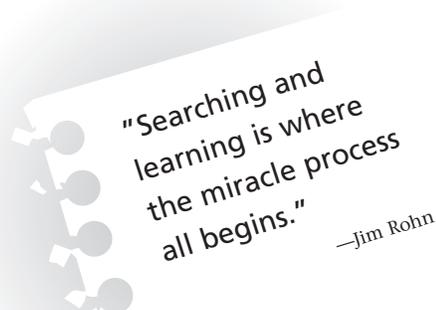
Preschoolers have a natural desire to learn. But how much they actually learn depends a lot on their parents. Are you providing conditions that stimulate learning? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

1. **Do you help** your child practice using all his senses: sight, hearing, taste, touch and smell?
2. **Do you make sure** your child has chances to play with and learn from other kids?
3. **Do you encourage** your child to sit at a table or desk when he is working on a task? This can help him focus.
4. **Do you ask** your child to help you solve problems? "What is the best way to get all the toys to fit in the basket?"

5. **Do you encourage** your child to ask questions?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are actively encouraging learning. For each no, try that idea from the quiz.



Reading aloud daily boosts school readiness

There are many reasons why reading aloud with your child every day is one of the best things you can do to prepare her to succeed in school. For a start, reading aloud:

- **Encourages** your child to imagine and think creatively.
- **Exposes** your child to thousands of new vocabulary words she might not hear in conversation.
- **Gives** you a chance to share affection. This reinforces her enjoyment of reading.
- **Improves** your child's chances of learning to read well in the early grades.

Source: "Reading With Children," North Carolina Early Childhood Foundation, niswc.com/readtogether.

Get fingers ready to write

To strengthen fine motor skills—muscle abilities that help kids with writing—encourage activities like shaping clay and coloring. String pasta necklaces and do puzzles with your child. The more he uses his finger muscles, the better!



Build positional vocabulary

Block play is a great way to help your child understand spatial relations, an important math and science concept. Use the blocks to demonstrate *positional words*, such as:

- **In, out and on.** Say, "The block is *on* the floor. Let's put it *in* the box."
- **Over and under.** "The red block is *under* the blue one." Point to the blocks as you name them.
- **Behind, in front of and next to.** "I am putting the green block *in front of* the blue one. Will you put the red block *next to* or *behind* the green one?"

Source: L.M. Platas, "The Why and What of Spatial Relations," DREME, Stanford University, niswc.com/spatialwords.

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

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