

# Helping Children Learn<sup>®</sup>

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

Onalaska ISD



October 2024

## Strengthen problem-solving skills by asking your child questions

All children run into problems at home and in the classroom—with tasks, with toys, with friends or siblings. To be able to solve and move beyond them—without just yelling “Help!”—your child will have to learn to think problems through.

When it comes to helping young children think for themselves, the key may lie not in what you *tell* them, but in what you *ask* them. Asking the right questions encourages kids to come up with their own solutions.



To promote problem-solving:

- 1. Ask your child to state** the problem. Say, “What’s going on?”
- 2. Encourage your child to come up** with possible solutions. Ask, “What do you want to do about that?”
- 3. Help your child think** about consequences. “That could work. What do you think might happen if you did that?”
- 4. Ask about alternatives.** “Do you have any other ideas?”

It’s OK if your child doesn’t actually solve the problem. The idea is to promote independent thinking first, rather than simply supplying the answers.

Source: M.B. Shure, Ph.D., *Raising a Thinking Child: Help Your Young Child to Resolve Everyday Conflicts and Get Along with Others*, Gallery Books.



## It’s the season for learning with leaves

As the autumn leaves begin to fall, use them to help your child practice reasoning and build language, math, science and art skills. On a crisp fall day, help your preschooler:

- **Collect different kinds** of leaves. Count them together.
- **Sort the leaves** by size, color and shape.
- **Make matches.** Set out two or three of each kind of leaf. Have your child find pairs.
- **Take leaf rubbings.** Put a leaf under a sheet of paper. Your child can rub the paper with a crayon and watch the leaf appear!
- **Play Leaf Hide and Seek.** Hide a leaf in the room and ask your child to find it. Say *hot* as your child gets close, and *cold* when your child moves away.
- **Read books** about autumn, trees and leaves.
- **Create your own leaves.** Trace your child’s hands onto colored paper. Cut them out to make fall leaves.

## Expand word knowledge

Exposing your child to words and language in a variety of ways builds a foundation for learning to read. Here are three to start with:

- 1. Read together** every day. Read stories and poems. Ask your child to act them out.
- 2. Add captions to art.** When your child draws a picture, ask for a story about it. Write it down, then read it aloud.
- 3. Play word games.** Say a word and take turns listing rhyming words. Or, ask your child to name words that have similar or opposite meanings.



## Instill interest in school

Children naturally want to do more of things they enjoy. To make going to preschool one of those things:

- **Talk about exciting** new things your child is learning.
- **Ask your child,** “What do you like best about preschool?”
- **Tell your child** that teachers care about students and want to help them learn.

## Learning can be child’s play

Playing board games together is a fun, screen-free way to help your child learn about everything from concentration to counting to cooperation. To sustain interest:

- **Look for simple games** with themes your child likes, such as animals.
- **Encourage** your child to show off knowledge by counting or naming colors while moving around the board.
- **Praise your child** for playing fair, following directions and taking turns—not just for winning.





## How can I help my child feel confident about learning?

**Q:** My four-year-old would rather do the same things again than learn something new—especially if it's challenging. How can I help my child be a confident learner?

**A:** Confident students aren't afraid of obstacles and challenges. This is because they feel capable. They believe in their own ability to learn.

To nurture confidence to learn:

- **Develop your child's strengths.** Encourage your child to do mastered tasks independently, and to try related activities.
- **Praise willingness to try,** not just success. Teach your child that persistence and effort are admirable.
- **Treat mistakes as opportunities** to learn. Use a positive tone to talk about things your child could do differently next time.
- **Foster a sense of control.** Give your child lots of chances to make choices. Offer two options. "Which would you like to do first, read or play a counting game?"
- **Ask for your child's help** with household tasks.
- **Talk and play together often.** Ask for your child's opinions. Respond with interest to your child's ideas. Praise your child's careful thinking.



## Are you easing fears of separation?

Learning to handle brief separations from their families—to go to preschool, or play at a friend's house, etc.—isn't always easy for young children. Are you helping your child adjust to being apart from you? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you acknowledge** your child's worry and say that you understand?
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you let** your child bring along a small comfort item, such as a piece of a blanket?
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you discuss** the fun things your child will do while you are apart?
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you say** when you will be back—and then arrive on time?
- \_\_\_ **5. Do you follow** a short, cheerful goodbye routine—such as a hug, wave and smile—and avoid lingering?

### How well are you doing?

*More yes answers mean you are helping your child cope with short separations. For each no, try that idea.*

"When little people are overwhelmed by big emotions, it's our job to share our calm, not to join their chaos."

—L.R. Knost

## Guide hands-on math play

Seeing and touching items can help develop children's understanding of math concepts. To give your child a feel for math:

- **Put plastic cups** in the bathtub or sandbox. Help your child use them to grasp concepts of *more vs. less*, *all vs. none*, *part vs. whole*.
- **Write the numbers 0 to 10** on index cards (one number per card). Ask your child to place a matching number of small stickers on each card. Then, challenge your child to put the cards in numerical order.



## Offer character role models

Children develop character by watching their role models. You are your child's primary role model, but don't stop there. To fill your preschooler's life with positive examples:

- **Talk about relatives,** friends and celebrities who show responsibility, resilience or other desirable traits.
- **Point out characters** in books who show kindness, perseverance and honesty.
- **Discuss your own heroes** and why you admire them.
- **Have your child draw** pictures of role models. Caption them with the traits they demonstrate and create a wall of fame.

## Fitness improves learning

Research shows physical activity strengthens preschooler's minds as well as bodies. In one study, four-year-olds with higher cardio fitness scored higher on academic ability tasks.

To provide the three hours of daily movement experts recommend for preschoolers, get creative: fly a kite, play hopscotch, make up a dance or pretend to pick apples together.

Source: S.A. Key and others, "Six-Minute Walking Test Performance Relates to Neurocognitive Abilities in Preschoolers," *Journal of Clinical Medicine*, MDPI.

### Helping Children Learn®

Published in English and Spanish, September through May.

Publisher: Doris McLaughlin.

Publisher Emeritus: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.

Editor: Alison McLean.

Translations Editor: Victoria Gaviola.

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