

# Helping Children Learn<sup>®</sup>

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School



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## Teach responsibility with pet care

Caring for a pet—yours or someone else's—is an excellent way to teach a young child responsibility, a key factor in academic success. Looking after a pet will help your child understand that another living creature is relying on him. If he forgets his responsibilities, the animal might suffer.

Here are some points to consider:

- **If your child is in preschool**, he is too young to assume full responsibility for a pet. But he can scoop out food and dish it up. He can put water in the pet's bowl. He can throw a ball for a dog.
- **If you have a dog**, invite your child along when you take your pet for a walk. This is a great chance to talk about how beneficial exercise is—both for our bodies and the bodies of our animals.
- **If you don't have a pet**, your child should still learn how to treat animals responsibly and respectfully. Instruct him to never go near an animal he doesn't know. If an animal is with its owner, teach your child to use slow, kind, gentle and quiet words.
- **If your neighbor or relative has a pet**, take responsibility for it while its owner is away. Volunteer at a local animal shelter. Involve your child in these activities. Check with the American Kennel Club ([www.akc.org](http://www.akc.org)) for tips on pet care.



## Patterns are everywhere!

The world is full of mathematical patterns—on fabrics, fences, dishes, etc. To teach about patterns:



- **Help your child recognize** a short pattern: green, red, green, red.
- **Create a pattern** by arranging items. Encourage your child to continue it.
- **Hide part of a pattern.** Can your child fill it in?
- **Act out patterns.** Step, step, hop, step, step, hop.

Source: "Teaching Patterns in Kindergarten," [kindergarten-lessons.com](http://kindergarten-lessons.com), [www.kindergarten-lessons.com/teaching-patterns-in-kindergarten.html](http://www.kindergarten-lessons.com/teaching-patterns-in-kindergarten.html).

## Make consistency a priority when it comes to discipline

Consistency is essential to good discipline. If you always ignore begging while shopping, your child learns not to beg. But if you give in once, she learns that begging works! Being consistent is tough, so post notes to yourself as reminders and motivators.

Source: S. Henry, "Seven tricks to staying consistent on discipline," [BabyCenter](http://BabyCenter.com), [www.babycenter.com/0\\_seven-tricks-to-staying-consistent-on-discipline\\_3657214.bc](http://www.babycenter.com/0_seven-tricks-to-staying-consistent-on-discipline_3657214.bc).



## Encourage activities that boost thinking

Your child's brain is expanding rapidly as she develops new abilities to analyze, understand and question. Boost those new skills with activities such as:

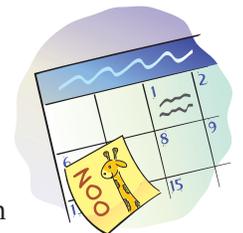
- **Classifying and sorting** things into groups. Take advantage of your child's natural desire to help you. You might ask, "Would you help me unpack the groceries? Please put all the boxes on the table. Put all the cans on the bottom shelf."
- **Understanding that parts make a whole.** Drawing pictures is a fun way to do this. If your child draws a person or animal, ask her to show you the head, the body and the legs. Then say, "It's great the way all these different parts make up the whole person!"
- **Questioning.** Your child probably asks questions all day long. Instead of supplying the answers right away, ask, "What do you think? How do you think that happens?"

Source: "The Whole Child: Thinking Skills," PBS, [www.pbs.org/wholechild/abc/cognitive.html](http://www.pbs.org/wholechild/abc/cognitive.html).

## Calendars teach about time

Your child is so excited about an event that he asks about it every day. "When are we going to the zoo?" Instead of telling him, show him! You can:

- **Let your child** mark special days on a calendar with stickers.
- **Count down** the days until a fun event. "We're going in three days!"



Source: T. Geiser, "Teaching Preschoolers about Time," [education.com](http://education.com), [tinyurl.com/kuol8cl](http://tinyurl.com/kuol8cl).



## When will my preschooler learn to settle down?

**Q: I call my four-year-old my “wild child.” My neighbor, who has several older children, advised me to “hang in there” and that she’ll be a different child at five. Is this really true?**

**A:** There’s no sure way to predict, but chances are good that your neighbor is correct. It’s not an accident that five is the traditional age for starting kindergarten. Most five-year-olds are ready for “school behavior”; most four-year-olds are not.

Although five-year-olds can still be very silly and out of control, it will become easier to help your child settle down. At five, your child will likely be more ready to listen to and accept direction from you or a teacher. She may also be less impulsive and remember to ask before doing something.

Here are some other traits of five-year-olds:

- **Friends are important** to them.
- **They like to play games** and do other group activities.
- **They know and use** thousands of words.
- **They are curious** and ask lots of questions.
- **They have stronger** motor skills.
- **They can pay attention** for longer periods.
- **They absolutely love** their parents and teachers and are eager to please!

Take your neighbor’s advice and “hang in there.” Enjoy your child now, but also look forward to what is to come.



## Are you expanding your child’s world?

Preschoolers are just beginning to explore the world, and they need parents’ help. Answer *yes* or *no* to the following questions to see if you’re helping your child learn and experience new things:

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you encourage** your child to try new foods?
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you take** your child to new places? Think of destinations that will fascinate him, such as an airport.
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you read** new books along with old favorites? Visit the library regularly to find fresh, exciting stories.
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you meet** new children, at playgrounds, for example? Make sure your child has plenty of time to socialize.
- \_\_\_ **5. Do you practice** new skills, such as playing catch, singing songs and recognizing letters?

### How well are you doing?

*Each yes answer means you’re exposing your child to the world around him. For each no, try that idea from the quiz.*

“It is one thing to show your child the way, and a harder thing to then stand out of it.”

—Robert Brault

## Build social skills at home

Social skills are learned through instruction and experience—both things you can provide at home! And when you let your child spend time with others, he can practice what he learns. For example:

- **Talk about how people feel.** “Marcus didn’t share his cookies with Allie. How does she feel?” Say the feeling out loud and draw a face to match it.
- **Role-play situations** with your child. What if he wants to ask another child to play? What if someone says something mean? What if someone won’t share?
- **Invite other kids over** or go to a busy playground. Help your child learn difficult skills like sharing and taking turns that will serve him well in school.

Source: J. Ireland, “Activities to Improve Children’s Social Skills,” *Livestrong*, [www.livestrong.com/article/230915-activities-to-improve-childrens-social-skills/](http://www.livestrong.com/article/230915-activities-to-improve-childrens-social-skills/).

## Celebrate ‘Go Green Week’

February 10–16 is “Go Green Week”! Teach your child about conservation and taking care of our planet. Talk about ways you can:

- **Recycle.** Separate glass, metal, paper and plastic.
- **Conserve.** Turn off lights when you leave a room.
- **Reuse.** Think of new uses for unwanted items. A plastic bag could hold dirty shoes.



Source: “Go Green Week,” *People and Planet*, [peopleandplanet.org/gogreenweek](http://peopleandplanet.org/gogreenweek).

## Structure helps build your child’s attention span

Young children need time to play, explore, dream, create and just be kids. But they benefit most from doing these things with some structure. The routines and limits you establish will help boost your child’s attention span and support school success.

### Helping Children Learn®

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