

Early Childhood Parents[®] *make the difference!*

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St. Helen Catholic School



Three strategies can help you create a learning-rich home

Your child's formal education will take place at school, but her most crucial learning happens at home. In fact, the things she learns at home now may have the biggest impact on how she does in school later.

According to research, kids who grow up in learning-rich homes have the best chance of thriving in school—and the benefits are long-lasting.

What do learning-rich homes have that others don't?

1. **Literacy activities.**
 2. **Educational materials.**
 3. **Quality interaction with parents.**
- Luckily, none of these is expensive, and none requires special expertise.

To create a learning environment for your child:

- **Read together.** Cuddle up and share stories. Point out new words.

Run your finger under each sentence to show your child that text goes left to right. Ask your child questions about what you read.

- **Offer educational toys.** Keep a few puzzles on hand to hone your child's problem-solving skills. Use dominoes to teach numbers. Play with blocks together. Grab a harmonica or tambourine and make music.
- **Talk.** Have conversations with your child every day. Show her you care about what she's thinking and feeling. It's not merely a nice thing to do—it also teaches her to interact, builds her vocabulary and stimulates learning.

Source: "Child's Home Learning Environment Predicts 5th Grade Academic Skills," New York University, nyswc.com/ec_environment.

Challenge your child to make predictions



Making predictions helps kids develop important thinking skills. Even a young child can learn to

make educated guesses based on what he knows.

To help your child predict, use:

- **Books.** Predicting what will happen next in the story requires your child to think and helps him comprehend what you're reading to him. Before turning the page, ask, "What will the bear eat?" or "After they get in the boat, where will they go?"
- **Experiences.** "What will we see in the grocery store?" "Will it be hot or cold when we go outside?"
- **Familiar routines.** "I have my briefcase and I'm getting ready to leave. Where am I going?" "What will we do when we finish eating dinner?" "What do you think you'll need for your bath?"

Be sure to discuss your child's prediction results, too. "You said we would see apples and grapes in the grocery store. You're right! There they are. Look, I also see bananas and strawberries."

Research shows authoritative parenting is most effective



Researchers describe a kind of discipline that has positive effects on kids. They call it *authoritative parenting*. Authoritative

parents are caring, yet firm. They:

- **Set limits that are appropriate.** For example, children are not allowed to hit. Instead, they're encouraged to say things like, "I'm angry because ..."
- **Are consistent.** They choose a few essential rules and stick to them.
- **Communicate effectively** with children. It's easier for young kids to follow calm, simple and brief instructions.
- **Have reasonable expectations.** When parents expect too much, kids are doomed to fail. Expecting too little, on the other hand, hurts kids' skills and confidence.
- **Give children opportunities** to be responsible and make choices. A young child might help set the table, or choose between two outfits.

- **Support children's independence.** It's challenging, but critical, to allow the right amount of freedom—enough for children to grow without risking their well-being.
- **Accept children for who they are.** Children need to feel good about themselves and their strengths. Disciplining in a loving, caring way isn't always easy—especially if it feels more natural to yell! But the results of authoritative parenting are clear: Kids are more accomplished and feel better about themselves. That's worth the effort!

Source: A. Fletcher, "Positive Discipline and Child Guidance," University of Missouri Extension, niswc.com/ec_authoritative.

"Each day of our lives we make deposits in the memory banks of our children."

—Charles R. Swindoll

Spring is the perfect time to teach your child about animals



Learning about animals is a great early science lesson for your young child. And spring is a natural time to focus on

this. Many kinds of animals are having new babies in the spring.

Here are some ways to help your preschooler learn more about baby animals:

- **Read a book about animals.** Check out a library book about your child's favorite animal and how it cares for its young. Choose one with lots of pictures. Ask the librarian or your child's teacher for suggestions.
- **Visit animals.** If you live near a farm or zoo, take your preschooler to see baby animals up close. If not, look for examples closer to home, such as baby birds that have hatched from eggs in a nest.
- **Teach new vocabulary.** Does your preschooler know that the name of a baby animal often differs from the name of its parent? Use pictures of adult and baby animals to teach your child *cow* and *calf*, *horse* and *foal*, and others. See if your child already knows some adult and baby animal names, such as *dog* and *puppy* and *cat* and *kitten*.

Are you building your preschooler's love of reading?



Helping preschoolers enjoy books prepares them to enjoy reading. Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to see

if you're making reading fun for your preschooler:

- ___ **1. Do you let your child** help pick which books to read, even if he requests certain favorites over and over?
- ___ **2. Do you take frequent trips** to the library and give your child plenty of time to browse and attend kids' activities there?
- ___ **3. Do you help your child** find books about his interests—whether it's dinosaurs, trucks or princesses?
- ___ **4. Do you create** pleasant reading routines, including relaxing with books before nap time or bedtime?
- ___ **5. Do you read with enthusiasm** to make books come alive for your child?

How well are you doing?

More *yes* answers mean you're helping your child develop a love of reading. For each *no* answer, try that idea from the quiz.

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The Parent Institute, 1-800-756-5525,
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Read books with human characters to teach your young child morals



Want to build your child's character? Fill his bookshelf with stories featuring ethical characters—the two-legged kind. Studies show that stories featuring humans are better at teaching good morals than books with “human-like” animals.

This doesn't mean young children don't love animal stories. They do! It simply means that when it comes to demonstrating values, kids learn best from fellow humans.

Why? Possibly because kids can “see themselves” in other people in a way they can't in animals. When an animal character behaves well, children might not grasp what that behavior has to do with them. But when a human character does the right thing, they relate.

Here are a few titles to share with your child. They all feature human characters doing the right thing.

- *The Quiltmaker's Gift* by Jeff Brumbeau. A seamstress agrees to stitch a fancy quilt for the selfish king on one condition: that he give away his other possessions. By the end, the ruler learns there's no need to be greedy.
- *A Chair for My Mother* by Vera B. Williams. After a fire destroys their belongings, a girl (along with her mom and grandma) collects coins to buy new furniture. Their slow labor of love demonstrates the power of caring and the strength of families.
- *The Empty Pot* by Demi. Ping has a gift for growing flowers. But when his seeds fail to blossom for the emperor, will the little boy tell the powerful man the truth? Yes, because honesty is always the best policy.

Source: N.E. Larsen and others, “Do storybooks with anthropomorphized animal characters promote prosocial behaviors in young children?” *Developmental Science*, Wiley-Blackwell.

Celebrate St. Patrick's Day with some creative learning activities



Most preschoolers enjoy fantasy and make-believe, which is why St. Patrick's Day can be so much fun for them. Here are a few activities to try with your preschooler:

- **Have a scavenger hunt for gold.** Place gold stickers on five of your child's toys and other items. Hide them (in fairly easy-to-find places) and encourage your child to find them. When she comes back with all her gold, celebrate with a healthy green treat, such as grapes.
- **Turn a green bell pepper into a green shamrock!** Cut off the top of a bell pepper. Press the larger piece of the pepper into green paint. Then, show your child how to stamp it onto white paper. Have her paint a stem and then use crayons, glitter or paint to decorate her shamrock.
- **Try a sensory hunt for gold.** Put beans, rice or sand in a large pan. Mix in some gold coins. (You can make your own gold coins out of yellow construction paper.) Let your child pick out the gold. Be sure to supervise to keep small items out of her mouth and off of the floor!
- **Read a book** about St. Patrick's Day with your child. Try *Jack and the Leprechaun* by Ivan Robertson, *How to Catch a Leprechaun* by Adam Wallace or *The Luckiest St. Patrick's Day Ever!* by Teddy Slater.

Q: My four-year-old daughter has a hard time telling the truth. How should I react when she tells me something that I know isn't true?

Questions & Answers

A: Young children are still learning the difference between fantasy and reality. So if your child tells you something that she wishes were true, but couldn't be, it's not *really* a lie. It's practicing make-believe, an important part of her development.

Telling the truth is a quality that a young child develops over several years. To encourage this trait:

- **Model honesty.** Your child may not always listen to you. But she will mimic you. So don't let her catch you in a lie.
- **Tell the truth for your child.** You walk into the kitchen and see cookie crumbs on the table. If you ask your child if she was in the cookie jar without permission, she will probably say *no* right away. Instead, supply the truth. “I know you don't want to be in trouble. But there are cookie crumbs everywhere, including on your face. I think you ate cookies. It's OK to tell me.”
- **Appreciate honesty.** Pushing your child to tell the truth will backfire if you punish her when she does. At this stage, your child should be praised for telling the truth. Then, calmly let her know what you expect her to do next time.
Staying calm about the truth will also pay off when your child is a teenager. At that age, your child's lies can put her in danger. Knowing she can always come to you with the truth ensures her safety.

The Kindergarten Experience

Confidence can boost your child's school success



One of the most effective ways to help kindergarten students succeed in school is to help them feel good about themselves.

When your child has healthy self-esteem, she sees herself as a capable person—ready to tackle challenges in and out of school.

To boost your child's confidence, teach her these three lessons:

1. **She is competent.** Too many parents say *yes* when a child wants a new toy, but *no* when she tries to help the family. If you are doing laundry, and your child asks, "Can I do that?" you can answer, "Sure, please start handing me everything that is white."
2. **She is secure enough to wait.** Your child deserves your attention—but not *all* of your attention. She should frequently hear things like, "I am helping your brother right now. Your turn will come later." Or, "I need to finish reading this article. You will be fine coloring your picture while I do this."
3. **She can entertain herself.** Spend time with your child, but don't feel the need to keep her constantly fascinated. Suggest activities that she can do—read a book, draw a picture, put together a puzzle—and encourage her to do them on her own. When she does, remember to compliment her creativity and her efforts.

Source: J.I. Clarke, Ph.D. and others, *How Much is Enough? Everything You Need to Know to Steer Clear of Overindulgence and Raise Likeable, Responsible and Respectful Children—From Toddlers to Teens*, Marlowe & Company.

Playing with blocks builds your kindergartner's math skills

You can help your kindergartner lay a strong foundation for math by encouraging him to play with blocks. Here are just some of the math skills he can learn:

- **Pattern recognition.** Many math concepts are based on patterns. Your child is practicing patterns as he stacks up a red block, then a yellow block and then another red block. Create a pattern and ask your child to copy it. Then let him create a pattern and you copy it.
- **Addition and subtraction.** When building a tower, your child may add a block, or decide it's too big and remove one. This also helps him learn about the concepts of *more* and *fewer*. Ask your child to add two blocks to his tower, or to take two blocks off. Does his tower have *more* or *fewer* blocks now?



- **Shape identification** and how shapes fit or stack together. Ask your child questions such as, "Is this block a square or a rectangle?" Recognizing shapes is the basis for geometry and other higher math.

A love of learning can lead to better school attendance



The early years are a critical time to build a love of learning. Is it a battle getting your kindergartner ready for school each morning, or does she practically bound out the door, eager to see what the day holds?

To help your child feel excited about going to school:

- **Talk about it every day.** Discuss what she likes best about school. It's OK if her answer is "recess" or "lunch." All that matters is that she's happy to be there. Say things

like, "It's fun to eat and talk with friends, isn't it?"

- **Encourage friendships** with her classmates. Create opportunities for your child to get comfortable with peers, either by inviting them over to play or by meeting somewhere, like a playground.
- **Talk positively** about your child's teacher. "Ms. Smith is excited about the field trip to the zoo! She wants the class to have fun and learn a lot about animals." Emphasize how much teachers care about students.